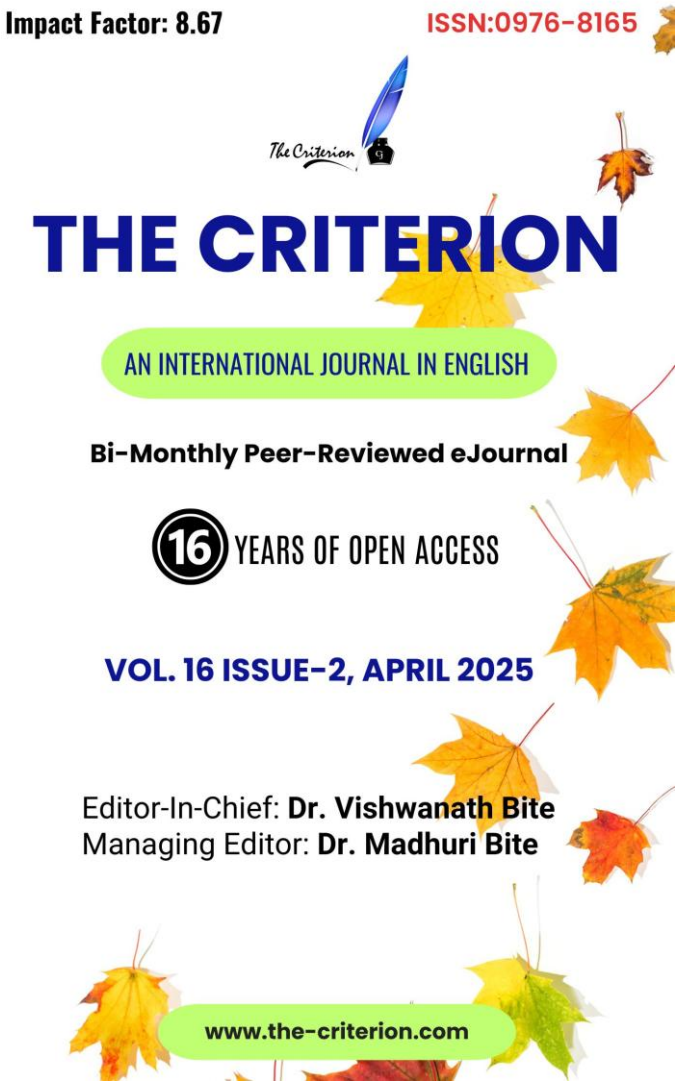

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Countering Fragmentation in Feminism: Proposition of Solidarity Model Based on Gendered Violence

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15320937

Article History: Submitted-31/03/2025, Revised-12/04/2025, Accepted-19/04/2025, Published-30/04/2025.

Abstract:

On the one hand, where 'women' as a category provides a shared identity to almost half of the human population over the world, it is significant to acknowledge that this identity is far from being monolithic in its approach to the world and in the world's approach towards it. The paper traces the trajectory of Gender Studies and Feminism in the theoretical and sociological domain, laying out the various discourses that have branched out through time.

This paper will propose that a solidarity model emanating from violence perpetuated on all women might become a uniting factor for bringing all women together. It explores the various ways in which solidarity can be achieved in a fragmented world.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender Studies, Postcolonial Feminism.

The discourse on Feminism originated in the nineteenth century, instated in the belief that "…modern societies are patriarchal—they prioritize the male point of view—and that women are treated unjustly in these societies" (Gamble 2001). Patriarchy is often assumed to

be a homogenous category that becomes problematic with Kumkum Sangari's ideation of 'multiple patriarchies' (1995). Sangri craftily proposes to rethink patriarchy not as one homogenous passive category but as an active multi-operational entity that works through politics of diversity. Thus, "different patriarchal arrangements distribute protection, entitlements, and oppressions differently in terms of class, caste, region, and religion. Some of these freedoms may be more apparent than real, while some may be accompanied by other patriarchal controls" (Sangri 1995).

It is to counter 'multiple patriarchies' that multiple waves of Feminism came to be seen over time, where the first wave of Feminism focused on the need to provide political rights of Suffrage to women. The second wave began in the 1960s and delved into the socio-cultural rights of women with a pronounced focus on family structures, corporeality, sexuality, and reproductive rights, to name a few. The third wave of Feminism began in the 1990s, which acknowledged the diverse nature of women. The intersectionality and differences in the social, cultural, political, ecological, behavioural, and environmental ways of women begin to be explored with the advent of the twenty-first century. The different identities of race, class, sex, ethnicity, and culture shape one's behaviour and projection in the world. The discourse reached a more nuanced understanding of how "one is not born a woman but becomes one" (Beauvoir 1949) through socio-cultural positioning and experiences of a woman. Gender is seen as an acquired identity, hence connected to the conception of performance or performativity. "Identity is performatively constituted" (Butler 1990). Thereby, the proposition of inherent differences in the binary of a man and a woman became extraneous. Subsequently, the theorisation aided in the process of structuring gender issues and demands related to gender equality and equity, thereby paving the way for viewing gender as an acquired entity that can be fluid or malleable. The fourth wave gained precedence with the onset of social media, thereby transforming processes of ideation and communication.

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10448030

Gradually, Feminism branched to incorporate various forms of interdisciplinary juxtapositions within itself. This has resulted in discourses such as Postcolonial Feminism, Black Feminism, White Feminism, Ecofeminism, Postmodern Feminism and Postcolonial Feminism amongst many. There have been innumerable theorists in each of these fields, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Frantz Fanon, Bell Hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Ana Isla, Radha Kumar, Kumkum Sangari, V. Geetha, and Tanika Sarkar, to name a few. These theorists come from diverse sociopolitical and cultural backgrounds, providing a more holistic understanding of the discourse of Feminism and its intersectionality with different disciplines. However, this branching of Feminism has problematised the idea of 'solidarity' amongst women and further removed the idea of a revolution against oppressive regimes for establishing a society with equal rights, status, and opportunity for all.

Where there are theorists who believe that "…any universalism is discursive violence that writes out histories and mutes voices" (Parashar), this paper examines how when women "actively struggle in a truly supportive way to understand…differences, to change misguided, distorted perspectives, [they]… lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity" (Hooks 138). According to Steiner Stjerno, "Solidarity implies a readiness for collective action and a will to institutionalise that collective action through the establishment of rights and citizenship" (2). This 'utopian' conception is problematised through the intersections of race, class, caste, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation. What does 'equal rights' mean for a Ukrainian woman fighting for her life amidst war? Can a Dalit lower-class woman have equal status and opportunity as an upper-class upper-caste woman in India? Can men also unite with women in the journey towards attaining equality for the two genders? Is not the idea of equality between men and women limited when viewed through the LGBTQIA+ lens? How does a woman in a developed nation such as the UK establish commonality with a Tamil woman living

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in a nation like Sri Lanka to even think about solidarity? How can solidarity be created amongst such diverse women? How can women unite with so many differences that have been heightened by colonial legacy? Does Postcolonial Feminism claim colonialism to be an entity of the past with no living remnants in today's life?

Historically, the 1970s-80s were the first time that saw women's movements in various parts of the world. The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of various works from different disciplines pertaining to Feminism. America saw the emergence of Black Feminism and LGBTQ Feminism while *India witnessed Dalit* Feminism emerging in the 1990s. The *Shah Bano case*, 1985, in India was revolutionary as it aided in rooting out patriarchal violence from the cultural and religious marital institution. "The costs of a system which is socially liberal and welcoming of 'feminism' only in so far as it can be rendered compatible with capitalism…have become all too visible and well understood as inequality deepens" (Fraser, *The Old is Dying*; Fraser et.al, *Roundtable*). Thus, *theorisation of women's oppression at the hands of capitalist forces eg. Vandana Shiva's Staying Alive (1989) and* of *histor*ical inequalities *through Radha Kumar's A History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1900 (1993)* brought the ill-functioning of societies to the fore. *The recent movements across geographical boundaries such as* the *#MeToo*, women reclaiming public spaces by marching on roads especially in response to rising rape culture, *and the Global Women's Strike* in 2024 *in various geographical locations, seeking economic parity, are a few instances that provide glimmer of hope for 'solidarity',* unfortunately have the underpinnings of *violence.*

It becomes "…an understanding of a set of unequal relationships among and between peoples; and taking critical…positions that would make feminist solidarity work possible" (Alexander and Mohanty*). However,* "at times there appears to be a constitutive tension within the theory and praxis of feminist solidarity: it promises to transcend difference while, to be

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politically operative, it reinforces difference by solidifying already existing categories of identity" (Littler and Rottenberg 865). Thus, t*he theorists from the Global North have tended to create the 'Other' in the women of the Global South to establish their own identities.* In "French Feminism in an International Frame" (1987), "…Spivak's deconstructive reading… [of Julia Kristeva, questions] the 'epistemological violence' of… [the] first-world feminists, which makes them the authoritative subject of knowledge, while Chinese women become passive and deprived of the right to speech" (qtd. in Riyal 84). The descriptive generalizations on clothing, especially 'veil' that has a rich and diverse cultural connotation (Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" 347), "…fascination with the… [colourful] exoticism of native women, [satisfies]… the voyeuristic desire of western women" (Riyal 83), and the portrayal of the women of the Global South as ignorant, primitive, poor, lacking agency, and as mere 'objects' of oppression has created deep fractures in the 'solidarity' of women.

Nevertheless, it would be problematic not to engage with how the projected 'Other' perceived its own 'Other'. The Indian nationalist movement brought women to the forefront and established them as active agents who fought against Imperial forces. According to Partha Chatterjee, in *The Nation and Its Fragments 1993*, it consequently formed the category of 'Memsahib' who were "…demonized to establish the difference between Indian women and western women" (qtd. in Riyal 86). This differentiation became problematic as it caused fissures in the concept of the collective, thereby increasing the possibilities of colonial patriarchal dominance that often translated into different forms of violence.

According to Abdel-Malek, "Contemporary imperialism is, in a real sense, a hegemonic imperialism, exercising to a maximum degree a rationalized violence taken to a higher level than ever before…" (qtd in Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" 335). *Thus, t*he concept of solidarity can be negotiated with the provision of the goal-based model of solidarity against violence that is perpetrated through implicit and explicit means against women.

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Though, Maria Lugones, in her essay, "Towards a Decolonial Feminism" writes that only certain sections of women are assumed to be oppressed by violence perpetrated by men, the paper argues that all women, irrespective of their spatial-temporal positioning, have been at the receiving end of implicit or explicit violence perpetrated by not necessarily men, but by legal, political, capitalist, social, and cultural institutions.

The economic and social violence ensued on the lace makers of Narsapur, India (qtd. in Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" 345) operates through their interpellation of the 'housewife ideology' and the self-perception of being petty commodity producers instead of active contributors into the national economy is propagated by capitalist and patriarchal entities. Similarly, 64.4% of women constitute the agricultural workforce in India (Business Standard 2025); however, they view it as an act of aiding in the family occupation. "…[In] India and Nepal, 84% of family caregivers are female", mostly working in informal sectors, thereby unacknowledged by society as work worthy of appreciation or economic benefits. "According to the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], these stereotypes are present today in reality, with women across the world spending up to ten times more time on unpaid care work than men" (Patil 2018) however, they are deliberately made to feel as if their work is not significant or contributing to world economy in any way. Contrastingly, the World Economic Forum report states that "Empowering women to participate equally in the global economy could add $28 trillion in GDP growth by 2025" (Abney 2018). There has been the invisiblisation of labour and systematic denigration of their work through economic disparity and social confinements of women in private spaces. Although women belonging to lower income households have more mobility owing to their necessity of working, women overall have access to and freedom to lesser mobility than men, as mobility is often linked to safety, which becomes a real concern for many.

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Physical corporeal violence and the fear emanating from the threat of violence for women is an extremely valid concern even in the twenty-first century. "More than 600 million women and girls lived in conflict-affected countries in 2022, a 50 per cent increase since 2017" (UN Women 2023). India records eighty-six rapes daily (Stjerno 2023) while one in every five American women has been a victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime (Smith et al). "As of May 2023, one in five women in surveyed areas of Port-au-Prince had been raped, and 80 percent of women in Cite Soleil had experienced gender-based violence" in Haiti, "Women and girls continue to be subjected to brutal sexual and gender-based violence" in Sudan due to the ongoing civil war, and similar is the case in a lot of conflict-ridden countries such as Afghanistan, Colombia and Iran to name a few (Anania 2024). According to the *Women for Women International* report, "1 in 5 women refugees experience sexual violence" (2024). Areas of conflict heighten the safety concerns of women, exposing them to extreme forms of violence that sometimes push them to migrate to unknown territories in search of safety. "Through conflicts and the aftermaths of natural disasters we know that displacement leads to increased human trafficking. The UN Environment Programme has noted as much as a 20-30% increase in trafficking after natural disasters and INTERPOL also warns of women's increased exposure to trafficking following disasters" (Tower 2020), thereby bringing climate refugees and the climate crisis to the fore.

In the twenty-first century, the climate crisis looms large and global temperature has already breached the limit set in the Paris Agreement by UNFCCC in 2015. "The period from February 2023 to January 2024 reached 1.52 °C of warming, according to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service" (Poynting 2024). There needs to be a movement towards planetarity (Spivak), working in solidarity against the 'Slow Violence' (Nixon) that is being perpetrated by patriarchal capitalistic endeavours on most humans. The concept is defined as:

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> … violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all…. [It is] not just attritional but also exponential, operating as a major threat multiplier; it can fuel long-term, proliferating conflicts in situations where the conditions for sustaining life become increasingly but gradually degraded (2-3)

Although in varying degrees, all women are at a greater risk of climate change and post calamitic effects that can be studied through the field of Ecofeminism and Postcolonial Ecofeminism. The solidarity model provides a collective platform for women to engage with, and thus might be successful in moving beyond self/other binaries and various other fragmentations proposed in these discourses to resist the climate crisis and demand an anthropoharmonic planetary existence.

The paper acknowledges the colonial underpinnings of the Global North and Global South that put a certain section of women at an advantage over others. Thus, recognising women as a plural, heterogeneous entity with varied forms of agency and economic might becomes imperative. However, the constant experiential reality of women, across spatial-temporal and varied intersectional experiences, is the perpetuation of violence at the hands of capitalist patriarchal institutions. The "…lives of women are connected and interdependent, albeit not the same, no matter which geographical area we happen to live in" (Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Revisited" 521). Literature from across the world, in recent times, follows the said trope. African-American narratives, *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison and *Zami* (1982) by Audre Lorde present women with grit when faced with explicit forms of physical corporeal violence with women being raped and assaulted and commodified. In Postmodern narratives, *The Passion* (1987) by Jeanette Winterson and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) by John Fowles portray women with agency when faced with implicit forms of patriarchal domination

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that try to restrict them by inducing fear of abandonment from the protecting 'patriarchal authority'. Similarly, in Indian narratives, *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (2008), women have agency and speak their tales even when confronted with a patriarchal and casteist society that wants them to conform. However, there is a constant struggle and intergenerational differences amongst women who work together, but are bound by patriarchal structures, thereby lacking unity.

Although every woman is different, these differences create solitary figures, unable to fight the socio-economic-political structures that oppress them. The need for solidarity is pronounced as the 'atomisation of identity politics,' 'auto-identification,' and 'splinterisation of women's movement' has enabled patriarchy to multiply and perpetuate subjugation through multiple and invisible sources. Lack of solidarity allows power structures to 'represent' and speak for the oppressed. Audre Lorde in "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" (1978) writes that "…the words of women are crying to be heard, [so] we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out….and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separation that have been imposed on us…" (43) and break silences that stifle women through the impending fear.

It is by following a balanced approach, a middle path where socio-politico-economic context is acknowledged along with heightening of self-reflexivity for a nuanced yet collective understanding of Postcolonial Feminism (Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Revisited"). This can also be achieved by moving towards 'Decolonial Feminism', i.e.,

> …to learn about each other as resisters to the coloniality of gender at the colonial difference, without necessarily being an insider to the worlds of meaning from which resistance to the coloniality arises. That is, the decolonial

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> feminist's task begins by her seeing the colonial difference, emphatically resisting her epistemological habit of erasing it (Lugones 753)

Thus, learning from each other while being conscious of the colonial difference can build empathetic relations.

The future studies of Postcolonial Feminism and Decolonial Feminism can be studied through Derrida's 'living together', where one needs to avow the past, its 'unjust' moments that might have benefitted a select few. It is only by avowing and the subsequent forgiveness of it that newer forms of coexistence through solidarity can be negotiated. *Thus, "[one]* can view solidarity as the collective power that grows out of action in concert, binds members of the feminist movement together, and enables feminists to build coalitions with other oppositional social movements" (Allen 109). The fractures in Postcolonial Feminism complicates the 'representation' of the women of the Global South by the ones in the Global North and vice versa.

Thus, solidarity becomes an ongoing process that can be initiated through self-reflexivity, avowing of the past, communicating to do away with silences, moving away from auto-identification, and harping on 'Decolonial Feminism'. Solidarity must be worked towards, as a constant process, by forming connections with women with different experiences and socio-political and economic positioning. There is a need to be empathetic and deliberate conversations to lessen the power that oppressive entities hold over women through the impending fear and both implicit and explicit forms of violence.

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