



# Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism

*Uma Narayan*

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## **Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism** Uma Narayan

*Dislocating Cultures* takes aim at the related notions of nation, identity, and tradition to show how Western and Third World scholars have misrepresented Third World cultures and feminist agendas. Drawing attention to the political forces that have spawned, shaped, and perpetuated these misrepresentations since colonial times, Uma Narayan inspects the underlying problems which "culture" poses for the respect of difference and cross-cultural understanding.

Questioning the problematic roles assigned to Third World subjects within multiculturalism, Narayan examines ways in which the flow of information across national contexts affects our understanding of issues. *Dislocating Cultures* contributes a philosophical perspective on areas of ongoing interest such as nationalism, post-colonial studies, and the cultural politics of debates over tradition and "westernization" in Third World contexts.

## **Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism Details**

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Author : Uma Narayan

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# **From Reader Review Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism for online ebook**

**Stephanie says**

Eye-opening, but incredibly verbose.

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**April says**

A philosophical, feminist analysis of global politics

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**Mathu Subramanian says**

Some good ideas in here, but it's a little bit dry.

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**Emily says**

One of the best professors Vassar has, and one of these days I'll have time to read the full books rather than just chapters.

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**L says**

Because it's all I have at the moment, I've only read Chapter 3, "Cross-Cultural Connections, Border Crossings, and 'Death by Culture'" and was floored by its intelligence and wit. It's a straightforward look at feminism as it relates to the specific issue of domestic violence in India and America. Already it's clear that she embodies Mohanty's call to feminists to engage in feminism without borders, to provide sensitive, ethical and contextualized analyses of issues as they relate to women in all parts of the globe. Would love to read the rest of this book at some point...

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**Ariel Littlemermaid says**

A little repetitive at times, but deliciously personal and insightful at other times as well! Really interesting insights on how Westerners think about, approach and present Indian women.

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**Arda says**

Some notes for critical perspectives on gender class:

The pursuit of knowledge, Narayan points out, is not by chance: It is socially constituted.

Post-colonial literature provides the space to re-consider the patronizing tendency of the West to consider itself superior to other cultures, and Narayan theorizes that there may indeed be discrepancy in the ways of feminism when considered from different contexts. In western mediums, issues related to women have a more “urgent” tone to them than in nonwestern contexts to begin with. The mainstream is more traditional in the nonwestern context and might numb down and disregard the voices of women that may be taking on western ideals.

Narayan questions the double-take that women from nonwestern countries face: having to deal with male oppression, but also with appreciating the traditions within those cultures, religious values and historical setting that had been colonized and seen another, seemingly broader, type of oppression.

Narayan points out the lack of understanding of the situation and complexity of the oppressed. And this does not only apply on west/east relations but also between educated/working class or other categories wherein the more ‘empowered’ may seem to be more ‘aware’ of women’s rights and hence afford them.

“[Nonwestern feminists are especially aware of this] because they have a double struggle in trying to find their own voice: they have to learn to articulate their differences, not only from their own traditional contexts but also from western feminism” (Narayan, p. 219).

There is doubt, therefore, of the ideas that come from the “West,” and yet as women, the individual rights that are sought-after are seemingly the most important:

“Living in a state of siege also necessarily makes us suspicious of expressions of concern and support from those who do not live these oppressions. We are suspicious of the motives of our sympathizers or the extent of their sincerity, and we worry, often with good reason, that they may claim that their interest provides a warrant for them to speak for us, as dominant groups throughout history have spoken for the dominated” (Narayan, p. 219).

There is an approach to think of “epistemic advantage” of those who can shift back and forth between two worlds, but Narayan points to the confusion that derives from being unable to simultaneously inhabit different worlds. This creates much confusion in those of who who are rightfully not able to simultaneously inhabit different worlds, and who are exploring the space that would enable them to develop their own sense of self without having to pick one or pretend to be one while essentially being another (Narayan, 1997). Rather than picking one or pretending to be one while essentially being another, it may be worth considering how to critically take on the different ways of understanding, for one is an outsider to both.

Valid points that are helpful for the thesis.

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## **1. says**

All five essays are necessary reading.

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## **Fin says**

Really interesting, Narayan does a great job of both complicating commonly held tenants in feminism and western scholarship while also explaining what she means.

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## **arrachecoeur says**

Brilliant!

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## **Mimi Rowntree says**

Narayan does a good job of helping the reader strip stereotypical perceptions of Third-World feminists. The language can be difficult to muddle through sometimes but on the whole it is a well-thought and well-argued text.

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## **Lauren says**

There's a lot of good stuff in here, but I didn't find the text all that accessible. Also, I think each chapter/essay could have been better organized.

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## **M Mills says**

I love this book. I'm currently reading Chapter Five: Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity, and Indian Food. Narayan discusses how re-colonizing practices such as eating are. She talks about the inconsistencies of incorporation, how certain parts of what is India/n gets celebrated, while other parts of India, the "untouchables" for instance, are just so (dirty, by implication). Her discussion fits so nicely with experiences of being a culinary (spicy/exotica)metapor. A must read...

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## **ONTD Feminism says**

LJ user rhapsodeeinblue :

Intersectionality ahoy! Fundamental read to understand our privilege as First World feminists. Narayan explicates that those in First World countries often fail to see the problems of Third World countries outside of a First World lens, which is problematic since information is thus decontextualized. She writes that a "shared and collaborative political understanding [...] between Western and Third-World nations and communities [...] requires, of course, willingness on the part of Western feminist to struggle for 'horizontal comradeship' and to let the 'Oppressed Third World Woman as Object of Rescue' yield to the Third World feminist as intellectual collaborator and political ally on a wide range of issues that mark our common and

fractured world." A necessary piece that illuminates how First World feminists must recognize the effects of colonialism and imperialism, contextualize Third World problems, and work with Third World feminists as allies and equals rather than saviors.

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