

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
 It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
 This debt we pay to human guile;
 With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
 And mouth with myriad subtleties.
 Why should the world be overwise,
 In counting all our tears and sighs?
 Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.⁶

what were they describing but racial closeting? For those who refuse to see the parallels because they view Blackness as irreproachably normal, but persist in defining same-sex love relationships as unnatural, Black Lesbian feminist poet, Audre Lorde, reminds us: "'Oh,'" says a voice from the Black community, "but being Black is NORMAL!" Well, I and many Black people of my age can remember grimly the days when it didn't used to be!"⁷ Lorde is not implying that she believes that there was ever anything wrong with being Black, but points out how distorted 'majority' consciousness can cruelly affect an oppressed community's actual treatment and sense of self. The history of slavery, segregation, and racism was based upon the assumption by the powers-that-be that Blackness was decidedly neither acceptable nor normal. Unfortunately, despite legal and social change, large numbers of racist whites still believe the same thing to this day.

The existence of Lesbianism and male homosexuality is normal, too, traceable throughout history and across cultures. It is a society's *response* to the ongoing historical fact of homosexuality that determines whether it goes unremarked as nothing out of the ordinary, as it is in some cultures, or if it is instead greeted with violent repression, as it is in ours. At a time when Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), a disease associated with an already despised sexual minority, is occasioning mass hysteria among the heterosexual majority (including calls or firings, evictions, quarantining, imprisonment, and even execution), the way in which sexual orientation is viewed is not of mere academic concern. It is mass political organizing that has wrought the most significant changes in the status of Blacks and other people of color and that has altered society's perceptions about us and our images of ourselves. The Black Lesbian feminist movement simply continues that principled tradition of struggle.

[⁶'The Truth that Never Hurts: Black Lesbians in Fiction in the 1980s', in Joanne Braxton and Andree Nicola McLaughlin (eds.), *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 693-8.]

12 Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses

Any discussion of the intellectual and political construction of 'third world feminisms' must address itself to two simultaneous projects: the internal critique of hegemonic 'Western' feminisms, and the formulation of autonomous, geographically, historically, and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies. The first project is one of deconstructing and dismantling; the second, one of building and constructing. While these projects appear to be contradictory, the one working negatively and the other positively, unless these two tasks are addressed simultaneously, 'third world' feminisms run the risk of marginalization or ghettoization from both mainstream (right and left) and Western feminist discourses.

It is to the first project that I address myself. What I wish to analyze is specifically the production of the 'third world woman' as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist texts. The definition of colonization I wish to invoke here is a predominantly *discursive* one, focusing on a certain mode of appropriation and codification of 'scholarship' and 'knowledge' about women in the third world by particular analytic categories employed in specific writings on the subject which take as their referent feminist interests as they have been articulated in the U.S. and Western Europe. If one of the tasks of formulating and understanding the locus of 'third world feminisms' is delineating the way in which it resists and *works against* what I am referring to as 'Western feminist discourse', an analysis of the discursive construction of 'third world women' in Western feminism is an important first step.

Clearly Western feminist discourse and political practice is neither singular nor homogeneous in its goals, interests, or analyses. However, it is possible to trace a coherence of *effects* resulting from the implicit assumption of 'the West' (in all its complexities and contradictions) as the primary referent in theory and praxis. My reference to 'Western feminism' is by no means intended to imply that it is a monolith. Rather, I am attempting to draw attention to the similar effects of various textual strategies used by writers which codify Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western. It is in this sense that I use the term *Western feminist*. Similar arguments can be made in terms of middle-class urban African or Asian scholars producing scholarship on or about their rural or working-class sisters which assumes their own middle-class cultures as the norm, and codifies working-class histories and cultures as Other. Thus, while this essay focuses specifically on what I refer to as 'Western feminist' discourse on women in the third world, the critiques I offer also pertain to third world scholars writing about their own cultures, which employ identical analytic strategies.

It ought to be of some political significance, at least, that the term *colonization* has come to denote a variety of phenomena in recent feminist and left writings in general. From its analytic value as a category of exploitative economic exchange in both traditional and contemporary Marxisms (cf. particularly contemporary theorists such as Baran 1962, Amin 1977, and Gunder-Frank 1967) to its use by feminist women of color in the U.S. to describe the appropriation of their experiences and struggles by hegemonic white women's movements (cf. especially Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, Smith 1983, Joseph and Lewis 1981, and Moraga 1984),¹ colonization has been used to characterize everything from the most evident economic and political hierarchies to the production of a particular cultural discourse about what is called the 'third world'.² However sophisticated or problematical its use as an explanatory construct, colonization almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question.

My concern about such writings derives from my own implication and investment in contemporary debates in feminist theory, and the urgent political necessity (especially in the age of Reagan/Bush) of forming strategic coalitions across class, race, and national boundaries. The analytic principles discussed below serve to distort Western feminist political practices, and limit the possibility of coalitions among (usually white) Western feminists and working-class feminists and feminists of color around the world. These limitations are evident in the construction of the (implicitly consensual) priority of issues around which apparently *all* women are expected to organize. The necessary and integral connection between feminist scholarship and feminist political practice and organizing determines the significance and status of Western feminist writings on women in the third world, for feminist scholarship, like most other kinds of scholarship, is not the mere production of knowledge about a certain subject. It is a directly political and discursive *practice* in that it is purposeful and ideological. It is best seen as a mode of intervention into particular hegemonic discourses (for example, traditional anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, etc.); it is a political praxis which counters and resists the totalizing imperative of age-old 'legitimate' and 'scientific' bodies of knowledge. Thus, feminist scholarly practices (whether reading, writing, critical, or textual) are inscribed in relations of power—relations which they counter, resist, or even perhaps implicitly support. There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship.

The relationship between 'Woman'—a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourses (scientific, literary, juridical, linguistic, cinematic, etc.)—and 'women'—real, material subjects of their collective histories—is one of the central questions the practice of feminist scholarship seeks to address. This connection between women as historical subjects and the re-presentation of Woman produced by

hegemonic discourses is not a relation of direct identity, or a relation of correspondence or simple implication.³ It is an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultures. I would like to suggest that the feminist writings I analyze here discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular 'third world woman'—an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse.

I argue that assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality, on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the West, on the other, characterize a sizable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world. An analysis of 'sexual difference' in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogeneous notion of what I call the 'third world difference'—that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries. And it is in the production of this 'third world difference' that Western feminisms appropriate and 'colonize' the constitutive complexities which characterize the lives of women in these countries. It is in this process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse, and this power needs to be defined and named.

In the context of the West's hegemonic position today, of what Anouar Abdel-Malek (1981)⁴ calls a struggle for 'control over the orientation, regulation and decision of the process of world development on the basis of the advanced sector's monopoly of scientific knowledge and ideal creativity', Western feminist scholarship on the third world must be seen and examined precisely in terms of its inscription in these particular relations of power and struggle. There is, it should be evident, no universal patriarchal framework which this scholarship attempts to counter and resist—unless one posits an international male conspiracy or a monolithic, ahistorical power structure. There is, however, a particular world balance of power within which any analysis of culture, ideology, and socioeconomic conditions necessarily has to be situated. Abdel-Malek is useful here, again, in reminding us about the inherence of politics in the discourses of 'culture':

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—through fire and sword, but also through the attempt to control hearts and minds. For its content is defined by the combined action of the military-industrial complex and the hegemonic cultural centers of the West, all of them founded on the advanced levels of development attained by monopoly and finance capital, and supported by the

benefits of both the scientific and technological revolution and the second industrial revolution itself. (145-6)

Western feminist scholarship cannot avoid the challenge of situating itself and examining its role in such a global economic and political framework. To do any less would be to ignore the complex interconnections between first and third world economies and the profound effect of this on the lives of women in all countries. I do not question the descriptive and informative value of most Western feminist writings on women in the third world. I also do not question the existence of excellent work which does not fall into the analytic traps with which I am concerned. In fact I deal with an example of such work later on. In the context of an overwhelming silence about the experiences of women in these countries, as well as the need to forge international links between women's political struggles, such work is both pathbreaking and absolutely essential. However, it is both to the *explanatory potential* of particular analytic strategies employed by such writing, and to their *political effect* in the context of the hegemony of Western scholarship that I want to draw attention here. While feminist writing in the U.S. is still marginalized (except from the point of view of women of color addressing privileged white women), Western feminist writing on women in the third world must be considered in the context of the global hegemony of Western scholarship—i.e. the production, publication, distribution, and consumption of information and ideas. Marginal or not, this writing has political effects and implications beyond the immediate feminist or disciplinary audience. One such significant effect of the dominant 'representations' of Western feminism is its conflation with imperialism in the eyes of particular third world women.⁵ Hence the urgent need to examine the *political* implications of our *analytic* strategies and principles.

My critique is directed at three basic analytic principles which are present in (Western) feminist discourse on women in the third world. [. . .]

The first analytic presupposition I focus on is involved in the strategic location of the category 'women' vis-à-vis the context of analysis. The assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally. (The context of analysis can be anything from kinship structures and the organization of labor to media representations.) The second analytical presupposition is evident on the methodological level, in the uncritical way 'proof' of universality and cross-cultural validity are provided. The third is a more specifically political presupposition underlying the methodologies and the analytic strategies, i.e. the model of power and struggle they imply and suggest. I argue that as a result of the two modes—or, rather, frames—of analysis described

above, a homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an 'average third world woman'. This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.

The distinction between Western feminist re-presentation of women in the third world and Western feminist self-presentation is a distinction of the same order as that made by some Marxists between the 'maintenance' function of the housewife and the real 'productive' role of wage labor, or the characterization by developmentalists of the third world as being engaged in the lesser production of 'raw materials' in contrast to the 'real' productive activity of the first world. These distinctions are made on the basis of the privileging of a particular group as the norm or referent. Men involved in wage labor, first world producers, and, I suggest, Western feminists who sometimes cast third world women in terms of 'ourselves undressed' (Michelle Rosaldo's [1980] term), all construct themselves as the normative referent in such a binary analytic.⁶ [. . .]

[. . .] [A] comparison between Western feminist self-presentation and Western feminist re-presentation of women in the third world yields significant results. Universal images of 'the third world woman' (the veiled woman, chaste virgin, etc.), images constructed from adding the 'third world difference' to 'sexual difference', are predicated upon (and hence obviously bring into sharper focus) assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives. This is not to suggest that Western women *are* secular, liberated, and in control of their own lives. I am referring to a *discursive* self-presentation, not necessarily to material reality. If this were a material reality, there would be no need for political movements in the West. Similarly, only from the vantage point of the West is it possible to define the 'third world' as underdeveloped and economically dependent. Without the overdetermined discourse that creates the *third* world, there would be no (singular and privileged) first world. Without the 'third world woman', the particular self-presentation of Western women mentioned above would be problematical. I am suggesting, then, that the one enables and sustains the other. This is not to say that the signature of Western feminist writings on the third world has the same authority as the project of Western humanism. However, in the context of the hegemony of the Western scholarly establishment in the production and dissemination of texts, and in the context of the legitimating imperative of humanistic and scientific discourse, the definition of 'the third world woman' as a monolith might well

tie into the larger economic and ideological praxis of 'disinterested' scientific inquiry and pluralism which are the surface manifestations of a latent economic and cultural colonization of the 'non-Western' world. It is time to move beyond the Marx who found it possible to say: They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.

'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and colonial Discourses', in Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, Louris Torres (eds.), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 51-6, 74-5; this is an updated and modified version of an essay published in *Boundary*, 2 12, No. 3/13, No. 1 (Spring/Fall 1984), and repr. in *Feminist Review*, 30 (Autumn 1988).]

ANNE PHILLIPS

13 Paradoxes of Participation

The contemporary women's movement emerged in the 1960s in the context of a generalized radicalism in the liberal democracies, in which "'participatory democracies" . . . appeared everywhere like fragile bubbles.' [. . .]

In most of the newly formed women's groups, any kind of hierarchy was automatically suspect. Meetings were informal and only loosely structured; in a comparison that was to be frequently invoked in the early years, they were patterned on a gathering of friends. Women came together to share their experiences—the consciousness-raising that was such an important part of early involvement—and to work out actions and campaigns. In these meetings no one voice should ever claim to be more definitive than another. By the same token, no one woman should be able to assume responsibility for the more interesting or influential tasks. Expertise and authority should be divided and shared: democracy was conceived not as a matter of representation or accountability but as a genuine equalization of power.

In her introduction to the first anthology of writings from the US women's liberation movement, Robin Morgan illustrates some of this early vision with her account of the lot system and the disc system, both devised by women's groups in the United States. The first was a way of pre-empting the inequalities that come from the division of labour. All the tasks associated with the group were divided up according to whether they were creative or routine, and each member then drew lots for one of each kind. The second system tackled the inequalities that arise in group discussion. Every woman began the meeting with an identical number of discs. Each time she spoke she 'spent' one of these, and once she had run through her entire supply she was expected to keep herself quiet.

The first time this system was tried, the apocryphal story goes, no one in the room had any discs left after fifteen minutes. The second meeting was slow almost to silence

because everyone was hoarding her discs. Gradually, the device worked its way into everyone's consciousness as a symbol for the need to listen to each other, and not interrupt or monopolize the conversation.²

Overly mechanistic as these examples now sound, the ideals they reflect were widely shared. That each woman should be equally respected was almost a founding principle, and equal respect is hard to sustain where there are clearly leaders and led.

Most of the radicals of the period had an idea of sharing things around—tasks, expertise, influence, the length of time each member could speak—but this radical equality of participation assumed a particular significance for women. Every organization has its division of labour between 'mental' and 'manual', creative and routine tasks, but the long association of women with office work has usually guaranteed that they are the ones who type the leaflets, take the minutes and bring the tea. Every organization has its complement of good talkers and silent listeners, but the construction of male and female identities has usually meant that women are disproportionately represented in the listening camp. What could appear as a general problem to other radical movements became for women a matter of the power between women and men. The women's movement was thus acutely sensitive to the relations of dominance and subordination that emerge in the course of discussions or get reflected in the distribution of work. An unequal distribution of skills was thought to be inevitably correlated with an unequal distribution of power.

Especially in the first years of the movement, there was, then, an emphasis on either sharing or rotating responsibilities. The first national newsletter in the USA—*Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*—was edited by different women for each issue; the national newsletter of the UK movement—*WIRES*—was produced by different groups that volunteered for the job. Papers that circulated at conferences were commonly written by groups rather than individuals. The conferences themselves would be organized not by an elected co-ordinating committee, but simply by collectives that had proposed themselves for the task. The occasional disarray that went along with this was thought well worth it, for a range of skills and responsibilities was in principle being made accessible to every woman, and no one could use her superior knowledge to claim for herself superior power.

In the 1970s at least, this anti-authoritarianism infected even the more 'professional' women's organizations. In *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, Jo Freeman reports that by 1973-4 the 'younger wing' of the US movement had successfully carried its ideals of participatory democracy into the more orthodox arrangements of the National Organization of Women (NOW), and that the organization was under increasing pressure to change its overly hierarchical practices.³ The texture of their meetings then became an