Third World Women: Recontextualizing the Feminist Movement

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In 1972, a coalition of Black, Raza, Indian, and Asian women created a collection of poems, essays, and artwork called Third World Women. This anthology, along with several others published by the same company, highlights the voices of women of color in the feminist movement. The editors of the San Francisco-based publishing company, Third World Communications, noted that they wanted to "reflect the struggles of Third World women" and the "outcomes of [their] comin'/workin'/learnin'/growin' together" (n.p.). While the anthology includes an even distribution of literary and artistic content throughout its 185 pages, I explore two poems: First, in her poem "The Black Latin & the Mexican Indian," Avotcja explores her personal struggles as a minority living in America. Second, "My Son, My Daughters," by Dorinda Moreno G., illustrates the shame instilled in people of color, describing how their native religion, language, and tradition no longer uniquely or singularly belonged to them. The assemblage accomplishes the ultimate goal of the anthology: reclaiming the term "Third World Woman." Its content guides readers toward recontextualizing life for women of color by creating spaces for critical thought and emotional expression. This combination of art and analysis ultimately supports the expansion of the feminist agenda and reclamation of power for women of color to encourage a globalized consciousness-raising culture.

The editors of Third World Women use the term "Third World" strategically to reclaim this derogatory term as a phrase of solidarity. As a Cold War term, "third world" refers to "underdeveloped or poorer countries of the world, usually those of Africa, Asia, and Latin America" (OED). In her book Remaking Black Power, Ashley Farmer explains that in the eyes of the "First World," the places where "Third World majorities" come from are desolate places devoid of quality of life or culture (Farmer 161). By placing the phrase on the cover of the anthology in large, bold text, the editors claim ownership of it and propel the multidimensionality of women of color. Erica E. Townsend-Bell acknowledges in her article "Writing the Way to Feminism" that "Third World (colonized) women [were] becoming more aware of their oppression in the past" (Townsend-Bell 138). During their writing process, the editors practiced open and empathetic dialogue, thus exemplifying their goal of helping women find solidarity in the anthology.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminists sought to link the social injustices against women of color to anti-imperialism through artistic expression and poetic lyrics. Avotcja's poem "The Black Latin & The Mexican Indian" depicts the loneliness of living in America as a minority at the beginning of her poem. Her loneliness comes from an imposed and imperialistic obligation to serve white people, as she narrates that she "[works] for pennies — so that white ladies could / wear silk stockings" (133). Her profound isolation is alleviated when she introduces another person into the narrative. She seeks solidarity in her struggle when she asks her new friend, "[w]ere you lonely too? (133)." The narrator goes on to describe an almost cathartic friendship that develops between her and her new companion, evoked by their shared experience as survivors and victims of necessity: "While you picked tomatoes / I picked pockets

And we both learned how to lie and steal and fight / Some call it survival / I call it loneliness" (133). She marks the end of her solitude when she transitions from the usage of "I" to "we" with the introduction of another person with similar oppression. The physical presence of another helps her realize her strength and sense of community: "But, one day the smog lifted / The city and the country smiled at each other / And so did we" (133). By relating the experience of a Mexican person to an Indian person, Avotcja emphasizes the unity and strength that comes from realizing a shared oppression. Third World Communications uses the message in Avotja's work to encourage women of all demographics to converge and fight their common struggles.

The poems, art, political commentary, and stories shared in Third World Women reflect the "commonalities of oppression among women of color" and encourage the collaboration of women and people of color within the Liberation Movement (Farmer 160). "My Son, My Daughters" by Dorinda Moreno G. illustrates traits of a driving force within the movement. First, she sets the scene in which "power relationships are as palpable as tangible locale," and establishes her heritage and location in "las montañas de Nuevo Méjico" (Voyce 188). Setting the scene outside of the U.S. and recounting atrocities that white people have committed highlights an imperialist pattern in America's behavior. Moreno hints at the past richness of her community stripped away by "a people whose military strength overpowered [theirs]," emphasizing white imperialists' continued tendency to spread rigid ideals to communities that do not welcome them (70). Moreno states in the first stanza that she is Chicana and the "daughter of many farmers before [her]," which contributes to awareness of a stereotypical role among Chicano people living in America (70). This advances the power dynamic between the more powerful white America and the Chicano people through an emphasis on the systematically unjust pattern of low-income work prevalent in communities of color. Moreno's usage of "we" implies a transition in her poem's message; she strives to address a common opposition by building community and raising consciousness about the history of her people. Furthermore, the narrator implies the passage of struggle to future generations, her son and daughters, emphasizing the imminent recurrence of such oppression. Moreno globalizes the movement by expanding the conversation across borders, recounting the stories of Chicano people and emphasizing the connection between Mexican people living in America versus those living in Mexico: "I am Chicana / My thoughts are still that of my ancestors" (70). Despite her oppression, she denotes her confidence in the future generations to open a path and be "rich in reverence and respect" (70).

Photography, illustrations, etchings, and more are paired with literature throughout the anthology to refute the villainization that people of color face. Additionally, the vulnerability, rawness, and expression within the compilation of art directs the readers toward recognizing the diverse nature of the movement. For example, "Tristeza, laberinto y sueno" (Sadness, Laberynth, and Dream), an etching by Consuelo Mendez, illustrates the isolation and dehumanization that ensues from being a woman of color in a patriarchal society (24). The etching, accompanied by a series of two poems by Ena Hernandez, features a naked woman standing in a dark void, gazing at the ground on which her straight hair slithers. Her limbs are cartoonishly long, her head is too small, and her stomach is bloated, implying a pregnancy. This caricaturing of the woman is representative of social bias toward white beauty standards and a dehumanizing view of women of color who cannot fulfill them. The poems beside it detail a court case in which Child Protective Services takes away a Black mother's children. She is "accused of being an unfit mother," but she fights back, explaining "the energy / it takes, the energy that love provides," but the jury does not listen and takes her children away (25). The dark void surrounding the woman in the etching represents the shrowding grief and loneliness the mother feels. Despite her efforts to become accustomed to the "assimilation!" and "[d]ehumanization!" she is left alone in a country where political and social power is given to white people (25). Her grotesque depiction in the illustration displays how Black women are viewed in America. Black women tried to assimilate into white culture, using skin-bleaching products and hot combs: "Kinky hair Is ugly straight hair is beautiful" (25). However, no matter how compliant they are to the jurisdiction of white America, Black women are seen as inferior; the pairing of art and poetry combat the falsity of this notion.

Anthologies drove the intersectional context of the Liberation Movement of the 1970s. Because of the overwhelming whiteness of the period, the feminist movement often excluded the voices of women of color. The anthology Third World Women broke the barrier between a race-centered human rights movement and the feminist liberation movement by implementing an intersectional consciousness-raising approach to feminism. By using the idea of the "common woman," the editors of Third World Women utilize the artistic and scholarly talents of women across the nation to provide an anti-imperialist framework for feminist liberation. The anthology's beauty comes from the many ways that poetry is presented; the editors inserted poems in their original languages and included a translation into English beside them. This preserved the raw expression and original message within the poetry, which stresses that art is language-less and does not require a deep structural understanding of grammar and syntax. The editors agreed

that "works should reflect Third World consciousness, that it should relate to the realities of what is happening in our respective communities," opting to "redefine the criterion of art, literature, poetry, and political analysis" (n.p.). This recontextualization of the art created by women of color resulted in a collective shift in how women in the liberation movement collaborated. The editors of Third World Women used the power of artistic expression to their advantage to raise public awareness of the daily and lifelong injustices and atrocities committed against women of color.

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