

NOT ALL FEMINISTS ARE CREATED EQUAL:
THE COLORED WOMEN'S STRUGGLE

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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The disparities and lack of camaraderie there is among feminists is weakening the overall feministic mission instead of strengthening it. Feminism is a movement created by women for women with the objective to end gender discrimination. Feminists, now, are facing new opposition, alarmingly so, amongst their own—Western feminists vs. Third World feminism. This thesis will analyze through the works of Latina literary authors: Judith Ortiz Cofer, Sandra Cisneros and Julia Álvarez, along with articles written by women of color including, but not limited to Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Cherrie Moraga, why feminists are failing miserably on climbing the hierarchy ladder higher than the level they've already reached. Examining where many white feminists have gone wrong with a strong analysis on their colonial ideologies, reasons why they are facing enormous resistance by postcolonial feminists who resent them, and how this is leading to the movement's destruction. Their lack of focus on broader issues affecting all women, inability to coexist, and refusal to acknowledge each other as allies rather than nemeses serves as a barrier hindering them from winning the political, social, and economic battle for equality.

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To deserve a people's love, you must know them. You must learn to appreciate their history, their culture, their values, their aspirations for human advancement and freedom.

—Jesús Colón

From “How to Know the Puerto Ricans”

Introduction

Since the first wave of feminists in the 19th century, feminism has been composed of movements created by women for women with the objective to end gender discrimination. In a quest where men are typically seen as rivals, feminists have encountered a new contender—that of their gender. This thesis will analyze through the works of Latina authors such as Judith Ortiz Cofer’s *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* (1995); Sandra Cisneros’ *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991); and Julia Álvarez’s *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991), along with additional short stories, books, and articles written by radical feminists of color including, but not limited to Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Cherrie Moraga why feminists are failing miserably on climbing the ladder of social, political, and economic equality. Examining where white feminists have gone wrong in ignoring issues that affect many women from classism to racism and other factors that are interconnected preventing women of color from progressing. Showing how biculturalism and assimilation places minority women in a difficult position that can result in self-hatred, disownment of their culture, or animosity against feminists who disregard their struggle and societal pressures. It also will explicate why white feminists with colonial ideologies should not call themselves feminists, the importance of Third World Feminism, and how white supremacy is subconsciously influencing all women and slowly deteriorating the movement.

Western Feminists vs. Third World Feminism

Judith Ortiz Cofer's memoir, *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* (1995); Sandra Cisneros' book of short stories, *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991); and Julia Álvarez's novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) are three works with distinct writing styles, whether written in poetry, prose, or small vignettes, they still share one thing in common—the struggle women of color undergo for the sake of achieving the American dream. Their books portray the bicultural experience, acculturation, and coming of age stories via hard realism showing how Latina women are caught in between two worlds, are part of the two, yet feel foreign in both. In their bildungsroman literary pieces, the three authors exemplify how language barriers, cultural customs, and beliefs serve as a blockage obstructing bicultural women from succeeding in an all-American world that is not very accepting of them. They also demonstrate in specific situations through each chapter, obstacles women of color have to tussle with a lot harder than the average white woman who will never experience the negative occurrences their sisters of color must.

In *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, Cisneros creates characters that narrate the story, but at times remain unnamed. Cisneros does this purposely in “Mericans” where the narrator's voice is present, but since no name is given her presence is shadowed through her deliberate invisibility. The absence of a name symbolizes the women of color who are part of society, but remain invisible in civilization. Patricia Hill Collins says:

Are elite White men being joined by growing numbers of elite White women helpmates? What kinds of people are in your classrooms grooming the next generation who will occupy these and other decision-making positions? Who are the support staff that produce the mass mailings, order the supplies, fix the leaky

pipes? Do African-Americans, Hispanics or other people of color form the majority of the invisible workers who feed you, wash your dishes, and clean up your offices and libraries after everyone else has gone home? (239)

Collins illustrates that no matter how hard people of color work it goes unnoticed, underappreciated, and unrecognized. When people say the American dream is meant for those who come to this country to work for it, they fail to recognize the invisible people who service them. They do not realize that no matter how hard one works, before anything, America is *the land of opportunity*, and opportunity isn't always given to everyone.

White feminists are aware of the existent inequalities amongst their gender, but instead of rejecting bias behavior they are embracing it, capitalizing on this suppression by gladly stepping on their unjustly treated sisters in order to utilize them as boosters to climb on, until they reach the peak where the men of their culture await with an extended hand. In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) Anzaldúa mentions that women do have a lot in common, but colored women “don't have much to lose—we never had any privileges” (165). Cisneros details this partiality through her characters that share emotions all women can identify with and stereotypes most of them battle against, yet remain unseen. She writes, “Something wants to come out of the corner of my eyes, but I don't let it. Crying is what girls do” (19). The character wants to feel strong in her weakness, but she relates an emotional reaction to her gender. This is just one example of the labels *all* women have to contend with crying is seen as something women do. This highlights the emotional vs. rational/nature vs. nurture, making women viewable as incompetent unable to lead properly due to an inability to contain their feelings. However, there are many more stereotypes women

need to wrestle with that do not apply to all. For some feminists are most certainly less oppressed than others. White feminists concentrate on issues that affect them generally (i.e., gender oppression and sexualization), but pay no heed to other serious problems Third World women go through.

Patricia Hill Collins states in, “Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection” that the problem lies in women focusing on one type of oppression and ignoring all others. She says, “white feminists complain about their oppression as women, but refuse to mention the privileges their white skin gives them” (Kimmel and Ferber 233). In order for white feminists to properly represent all women they need to have an overall understanding of the subjugations women of color experience. Anzaldúa does not believe in the feminist establishment that boasts how “its followers are notorious for adopting women of color as *their* cause while still expecting us to adapt to *their* expectations and *their* language” (167). It is a ploy they use to advance themselves ahead of others, including the women they claim to represent.

In Julia Álvarez’s novel, Álvarez writes in reverse chronological order about the bicultural experience of the four Garcia sisters—Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofía. Álvarez utilizes the sisters’ successes and hardships in the United States to serve as a portrayal of the issues Latina women undergo as immigrants from language barriers to trying to find a sense of self when caught in between two cultures. The title of the novel is meant to inform the reader that by the sisters losing their accents they also lose in the process their innocence, and a part of who they are in exchange for who America expects them to be. She also stresses how difficult the immigrant experience is for those in search of the American dream, especially when they speak or look different making them easy

targets for discrimination. In the chapter Álvarez titles “Antojos” (meaning cravings) Yolanda decides to return to the Dominican Republic where she no longer feels as an outcast leaving a world behind her that did not notice she was gone. After dealing with personal problems, including suffering a breakdown, she tries to find herself by reconnecting with her roots. In America, assimilation did not render her well. Yolanda is a Latin American who realizes she is more Latina than she will ever be American, “Standing here in the quiet, she believes she has never felt at home in the States, never” (12). Although there is yearn for acceptance, her craving is never quite satiated in the States.

William Luis analyzes Álvarez’s novel in his article, “A Search For Identity In Julia Álvarez's ‘How The Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents,’” where he states that the story is more “North American than Hispanic Literature attempting to understand memory, the past, and a time before the sisters lost their innocence and accents” (840). Luis writes how the Garcia girls’ privileged lifestyle came to a halt in the United States when they arrived there and were treated like commoners, or just like any other Hispanic immigrants. He stresses that part of the struggle for the sisters is how they were not distinguishable, becoming victims of North American racism, still they dedicate themselves to losing their accents even if it means neglecting the Latin identity. This illustrates why many immigrants try to pass as white, in order to avoid confronting the hostility in their surroundings.

Acculturation is cultural pressure. Wanting to be a part of the American culture is obligatory for those who want the American dream. People of color must learn English, eat American food, and understand the American lifestyle if they want to achieve

success. Even if it means forgetting one's roots to plant another person that will blossom into the individual society will be more welcoming to. In *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* Cisneros elaborates on this when one of her characters whose name is Patricia Bernadette Benavídez prefers to be called "Tri-ish" which the narrator says, "Whoever heard of a Mexican with a British accent? Know what I mean? The girl had problems" the girl then runs away because she "got tired of coming home stinking of crispy tacos" (37). This serves as a reflection of how racism pushes women of color to try "passing" by repudiating who they are just to be in accordance with those who disagree of their presence.

In *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, Mrs. Garcia is confronted by her new neighbor who is not content with living in the same tenement as colors do, "Spics! Go back to where you came from!" (167). This is the same antagonism minority women put up with as they try to progress. In *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, Cisneros has her characters exclaiming in a broken English their American pride, "We're Mericans!" (20). But are they indeed American to others? We're Mericans expresses the joy those who do not pertain to the dominant culture or speak the language flawlessly can still feel American, but it also shows how they are perceived by others who view them as second-rate citizens.

Bicultural women, even if born in the United States, besides facing sexism, they also need to deal with different customs, confront racism, or being classified.

Kimberlé Crenshaw calls this *Intersectionality*¹ since gender, race, class, and sexual orientation are interrelated and one affects and impacts the other. When one is not liked for who they are by the majority, self-blame becomes inevitable. When brown and blacks through their surroundings are being told that anyone who is not white is not right there comes a need for assimilation, along with a feeling of self-hatred, an uneasiness and strong desire to blend in. When these issues are not addressed or recognized by feminists, when no action plan is taken to desist it, it leads to enmity amongst the gender.

In *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*, the narrator starts berating herself for the same reason everyone else around her does, for being who she is. She says, “My life is going to be different. I have an American boyfriend... If I marry him, even my name will be American. I hate rice and beans. It’s what makes these women fat” (96). When people who are different are not treated kindly, they can start depreciating themselves. Name-calling, bullying, labeling, bigotry, abuse, segregation, and poverty become part of the punishment. The American dream comes with a heavy price tag that people of color must pay and even when they do, they stay indebted for life. Despite that many people migrate to the United States, those who are not citizens are called “illegal aliens,” which is a term even the U.S. government supports. Sonia Saldivar-Hull quotes James Cockcroft in her article, “Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature,” who says:

They are the "illegal aliens," the racist label by which the U.S. government designates an exploited subculture it has created. As James Cockcroft asks, "If so many employers and all consumers depend so heavily on these people, then why

¹ Intersectionality is a feminist sociological theory founded by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 that defines how different types of oppression even if independent they are still interconnected socially, biologically and culturally increasing discrimination and affecting one another.

is it that they are viewed as a "problem" or as "illegals"? Human beings can do illegal things, but can a human being actually be illegal? Moreover, since when under capitalism is it an illegal act to sell one's labor power for a low wage to an employer engaged in a socially approved business?" (145)

Women of color whether referred to as an extraterrestrial being or immigrants, they are constantly being reminded that they do not belong in the United States, the American dream becomes the exception, seemingly, for those who are not from planet earth. The difference between white women and that of the Third World is the extra labels minority women need to contest with. First, women of color need to be viewed as women in order to be part of a movement that categorizes the gender, but excludes them due to their race. Before women of color fight for equalization in the social and economic worlds, they need to first combat sexualization (sexual objectification), racism, and classism.

Sexualization

Cisneros, Cofer, and Álvarez's published works deal with the bicultural experience. The women in their novels all encounter unique experiences as they learn a new culture, face prejudices, and never feel a sense of home in a country that they left it all behind for. In *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents*, Álvarez writes about four sisters trying to fit in the United States. Their parents, in fear that the Garcia girls will forget the core values of the Latino culture sends them away every summer to the Dominican Republic so they could stay connected to their roots. In their homeland, the sisters lead a very comfortable and privileged lifestyle, but when arriving to the United States, they have to deal with a different kind of reality: absorbing the language, culture clash, and learning that they would soon become symbols of already extant stereotypes making it all the more difficult for these women to move forward.

Sexual Objectification is another stereotype Latinas have to fight against. In

Álvarez's novel, the García girls' parents were Old World. In the Latino culture, despite that Latinas are viewed stereotypically as sex symbols, their sexiness has nothing to do with the traditions, cultural beliefs, and respect that these women must have, not only for their parents, but also for themselves. Virginity and marrying pure is a tradition that the New World generation refutes by challenging conservative thinking. Álvarez shows how these beliefs collide with liberal America where bicultural women are stuck in between both worlds that they belong to, but will never feel a sense of belonging to any of the two. Bridget Kevane takes a closer look at religion and culture focusing on the cultural elements of Álvarez's novel. She writes about Álvarez's character, Yolanda ending where she begun "the Garcia family's departure from the Dominican Republic in 1956 and ends with Yolanda's return to the homeland in 1989. Between these two points in time, the reader will discover a wealth of clashing cultural elements that emerge from the traditions left behind and the new culture found on the mainland" (21). Kevane admits that culture clash places bicultural women in an intricate predicament not knowing where they quite belong since they are unable to identify themselves with the customs of their homeland, and their beliefs contradict that of the United States' ideals.

In *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, Yolanda falls for a guy at the college she attends by the name of Rudolf Brodermann Elmenhurst whom she calls Rudy. They have an immediate attraction to each other and after dating for a month he becomes upset when Yolanda decides to remain abstinent. Yolanda is still a virgin and dreams of her first time being magical. But Rudy has a different perception of her. In an angry outburst he uncouthly says, "You know, I thought you'd be hot-blooded being Spanish and all...But Jesus, you're worse than a fucking Puritan" (98). This line coincides with Judith

Ortiz Cofer's short story, "The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named Maria," taking place at her first formal dance in school where a boy kisses her aggressively without notice or permission, when she does not reciprocate, he says, "I thought you Latin girls were supposed to mature early," Cofer reflects, "My first instance of being thought of as a fruit or vegetable—I was supposed to *ripen*, not just grow into womanhood like other girls" (105). The prejudice surrounding brown women shows that not only do they have to fight with men who see them as the weaker sex, but also with those who have the notion that just because of their race anything they do serves as a come-on or sexual invitation.

Chicana Feminist, Gloria Anzaldúa, is aware of how much harder life is for women of color. In her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), she writes:

Why are we dangerous beasts? Because we shake and often break the white's comfortable stereotypic images they have of us: the Black domestic, the lumbering nanny with twelve babies sucking her tits, the slant-eyed Chinese with her expert hand—"They know how to treat a man in bed," the flat-faced Chicana or Indian, passively lying on her back, being fucked by the Man *a la* La Chingada. The Third World woman revolts: *We revoke, we erase your white male imprint. When you come knocking on our doors with your rubber stamps to brand our faces with DUMB, HYSTERICAL, PASSIVE PUTA, PERVERT, when you come with your branding irons to burn MY PROPERTY on our buttocks, we will vomit the guilt, self-denial and race-hatred you have force-fed into us right back into your mouth. We are done being cushions for your projected fears. We are tired of being your sacrificial lambs and scapegoats.* (Anzaldúa 167)

In Álvarez's novel, Yolanda decides to give Rudy another chance five years later thinking he matured, they reconnect and she invites him over. On their date night as they converse, Rudy immediately begins signaling he was bored through his body language, he then abruptly cuts off the conversation and says, "Hey, Jesus Christ, I've waited five years, and you look like you've gotten past all your hang-ups. Let's just fuck" (101). She dismisses him. Without question, it is true that women have been taken advantage of for

centuries, regardless of their ethnicity or race. However, women of color fall under a much more vulnerable position since they have been enslaved, mistreated, sodomized and raped by white men who did not even see them as women, but rather as property. This typecast has cling on for far too long and still lingers. This subservient and submissive role they are supposed to play by plagues and victimize them.

When Latinas tend to be assertive, intelligent, or well prepared, their demeanor is criticized and any chance of them getting a position in corporate America gets sabotaged. Whereas, a white woman having such characteristics would be applauded and seen as professional, Latinas with such traits become accused of “coming on too strong... They were labeled “loud,” “troublemakers,” “arrogant,” and “controlling”” (Bonilla-Santiago 62). Many who are used to seeing women of color working in administrative or domestic roles may have a hard time seeing them in leadership roles. Not providing them the opportunity to excel puts them at a disadvantage where they are most likely than any other woman to suffer economic domestic violence.² Women who earn less, or live on or below the poverty level are more prone to suffer sexual and domestic abuse. However, it is easier for them to escape the abuse they are living at home than to free themselves from the oppression they are facing in society.

² According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the average annual female intimate partner victimization rate per 1,000 persons between 2001 and 2005 was 12.7 for women residing in households earning less the \$7,500 annually compared to 2.0 for women with annual household incomes over \$50,000. Zhang and Hetling found the relationship between poverty and domestic violence is complex. In some situations, poverty may exacerbate the likelihood of experiencing domestic violence. With fewer options for economic self-sufficiency and social support systems with little ability to offer financial help, poor women may feel more trapped in unhealthy relationships. (1144)

When women of color are featured in the media, often, they are only there to be made fun of or act in clichéd roles for the entertainment of others. With entertainers such as Jennifer López one can say she has helped place yet another crack on the prejudice glass ceiling introducing Latinas as strong and talented; nevertheless, it is not to be ignored that she is still being viewed as a sex symbol, just as is Colombian actress, Sofía Vergara (who represents a sexy, yet loud Latina with a rough accent). However, they both are what one may call an “improvement” in comparison to the 1940s Carmen Miranda (the Portuguese born Brazilian) wearing a Tutti Frutti hat as she danced with fruits on her head for the enjoyment of the dominant culture, trying to look sexy exposing her midriff, while also ridiculing herself.

In the 1950s, Puerto Rican actress, singer, and dancer, Rita Moreno, became a phenomenon in Hollywood. Moreno who has won many prestigious awards in the industry: Oscar, Emmy, Tony and Academy Award, tells the *Miami Herald* that all of her hard work and triumphs came with a price. She had to accept parts in movies that were demeaning. Being in a leading role playing a successful woman was not a reality, at the least not one the Anglo-Saxon culture would want to imagine or see a woman of color in. She was awarded for playing parts that were degrading to her and her people:

What is interesting to me is having the vision so early and yet feeling so inferior to everybody else in the business for years and years because I believed I had to be subservient to anybody who wasn't Latino. Before *West Side Story* I was always offered the stereotypical Latina roles. The Conchitas and Lolitas in whites. I was always barefoot. It was humiliating, embarrassing stuff. But I did it because there was nothing else. After *West Side Story*, it was pretty much the same thing. A lot of gang stories. (Martin)

She then says her heavy accent was part of her acting, the directors' ideas, in order to make her character more believable, "Hell, no. That wasn't my real accent. I learned to

speak English very early. That Latin accent was a put-on" (Martin). Miranda and Moreno did what was needed to get the job, and will be commemorated for paving the way for entertainers of today's generation of color even if it was at such cost. Their dancing skits and barely understandable English did make many people laugh, but one can reassure that seeing them embody ethnic stereotypes for the amusement of others was no laughing matter to the Hispanic/Latino audience.

Racism

In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, the eldest sister, Carla still has nightmares of the hate she tolerates for the sake of the *dream* "Go back! Go back!" (161). How can one feel at ease in a place where everything around them screams that who they are is wrong? In a general sense, minorities are seen as what the term in itself describes them as—a minority. They can be a billion strong,³ but the quantity is ignored, is human quality that matters. Whether portrayed in movies as gang members, as people with a mentality of criminality in the news, inferior subjects, and society's rejects, the highlights of the negatives in their women and their culture is what makes others frown and distant themselves from them. The way people of color are negatively depicted in the media, the lack of leading roles in corporations, and the treatment they receive as a whole only buries them deeper in the cemetery of the forgotten.

³ The 2010 Census reports that the Nation's Hispanic population grew four times faster than the total U.S. Population (Census.gov). Moreover, The *U.S. Census Bureau* released a 2010 Census brief on the nation's Hispanic population, which shows the Hispanic population accounted for more than half of the total U.S. population. To date, there are 50 million Hispanics in the United States.

Racism does not only occur in neighborhoods or occupations, but also in classrooms. One of the most racist institutions to work for is in academia itself. Anzaldúa mentions the racism she underwent in school,

Because white eyes do not want to know us...the schools we attend or didn't attend did not give us the skills for writing nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic languages. I, for one, became adept at, and majored in English to spite, to show up, the arrogant racist teachers who thought all Chicano children were dumb and dirty. (165-166)

Women of color, even if scholastic, have to prove they are capable of succeeding and work thrice as hard to prove others negative perception of them as wrong. In *Breaking Ground and Barriers: Hispanic Women Developing Effective Leadership* (1992), the successful women in the book who were interviewed, admitted that despite them obtaining their degrees, at times from Ivy League universities, found themselves working as secretaries or in a menial position. One of the successful Latinas Bonilla-Santiago interviews speaks about her experience when working in the registrar's office at a university. She says:

And I learned that if I was honest and had integrity, and said the right thing, I will be treated very fairly... I had people who supported me and, indeed, some people loved me and cared about me. But the reality was that it did make a difference how the high level executives saw me. They saw me as a peon and not as a good worker. They never promoted me no matter how hard I worked. I was viewed as a good person but not as having potential to be promoted. I was viewed as another Hispanic who should be grateful for having a job. (66)

The first Hispanic woman to serve in the State Senate of Colorado in the United States, Polly Baca, agrees, "Some of the greatest prejudice in the world is in the academic world, Academicians are historically elitist because they perceive themselves as being among the elite, able to attain degrees" (145). Education is the key to success, yet the leaders in

universities are the ones to decide who gets granted admission, employment, or considered for promotion in the colleges they oversee.

In This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, Latino

American and Jewish feminist, Judit Moschkovich says:

In Latin America, in addition to our own cultural expressions, we watch American T.V. shows, listen to American music on the radio, wear American jeans (if we can afford them); in other words, we do anything that is economically profitable to America. In comparison, how often do you hear songs in Spanish on the radio in the U.S. or see a Spanish show on T.V I'm not talking about radio or T.V. shows by and for the Latino community; I'm talking about mainstream American media. (81)

Latinos/as are only good enough to buy goods⁴ from the same markets that oppress, refuse to hire, or compensate them with higher wages. Latinos are known to be good consumers, but due to their ethnicity they are just not viewed as good employees, tenants, or people.

In *Privilege* (2010) "On White Pride, Reverse Racism, and other Delusions," anti-racist activist, essayist, and author, Tim Wise, mentions how badly these groups are being marginalized:

After all, groups representing persons of color were created to address the unique disempowerment experienced by those groups' members. Blacks, Latinos/Latinas, Asians, and Native Americans have been systematically denied opportunities in the United States solely because of their group membership... whites continue to dominate in every arena of American life. So, for instance, whites hold more than 90 percent of all the management level jobs in this country, receive about 94 percent of government contract dollars, and hold 90 percent of tenured faculty positions on college campuses. (134)

⁴ A recent study by the Terry College of Business found that "The buying power of Hispanics will rise from \$1 trillion in 2010 to \$1.5 trillion in 2015, accounting for nearly 11 percent of the nation's total buying power" (Fahmy).

Wise describes why it is necessary to have certain groups, organizations, and scholarships⁵ available for people of color, especially since the evolution of tolerance and diversity has not shown much acceptance, improvement, or advancement.

Ethnicity and Family Therapy (2005) summarizes what Álvarez, Cisneros, and Cofer are conveying through their novels:

For many Latinos the United States has represented a place in the sun, a place to be free, yet upon arrival they are dismayed by the attitude of non-Hispanics toward them. Their color, language, and culture, essentials to their being, become cause for oppression. A majority see themselves as victims of discrimination and at the bottom of the social ladder, below blacks. (156)

Bonilla-Santiago adds that after corporations hire a small percentage of Hispanics they limit their leadership roles. She states, “Corporations usually stop after they have hired one or two Hispanic women; they feel they have done their job” (8). They hire a handful of minorities to be branded as a business that promotes diversity while practicing racial favoritism and exclusion within the company.

In *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*, Cofer is constantly being reminded of how brown she is when she goes to school, the grocery store, or accompanies her parents apartment hunting. She recounts the time she went shopping with her mom at a major retailer in an area away from where browns and blacks reside in. She says:

We never ran into other Latinos at these stores or eating out, and it became clear

⁵ There is a misconception that minorities get most financial aid assistance, scholarships, and federal grants than any other group. In actuality, less than 4 percent of scholarship money in the United States is represented by awards that consider race as a factor at all, while only 0.25 percent of all undergrad scholarship dollars come from awards that are restricted to person of color alone. What’s more, only 3.5% of college students of color receive any scholarship even *partially* based on race, suggesting that such programs remain a pathetically small piece of the financial aid picture in this country. (Kimmel and Ferber 135)

to me only years later that the women from El Building shopped mainly at other places—stores owned either by Puerto Ricans, or by Jewish merchants who had philosophically accepted our presence in the city and decided to make us their good customers, if not neighbors and friends... La Tienda, El Bazar, La Bodega, La Botanica. Everyone knew what was meant. These were the stores where your face did not turn a clerk to stone where your money was as green as anyone else's. (93)

Brown and black people find themselves placed in a terrible spot where even groups who are discriminated against, also discriminate on them.

Acculturation is not an easy process—adapting to foods different from ones own, speaking a language that is not native to them, celebrating holidays and adopting a new national anthem as they slowly renounce their own. In “The Story of My Body,” Judith Ortiz Cofer says that although it is traditional for Latinos to celebrate January 6 as a holiday, “my parents had already told my brother and me that since we were in Los Estados now, we would get our presents on December 25 instead of Los Reyes, Three Kings Day, when gifts are exchanged in Puerto Rico” (1898). Yet, all this is never sufficient. It is a wasted effort. No matter how American a brown or black person may feel they will never be considered anything other than an illegal, immigrant, minority, or a Negro.

In “The Myth of the Latin Woman: I just Met a Girl Named María,” Cofer projects how all Latinas are viewed as a “María.” One summer, she took graduate credits at Oxford University and one stranger trying to get her attention serenaded her by singing a “rendition of María from West Side Story” she thought “You can leave the island, master the English language, and travel as far as you can but if you are a Latina, especially one like me who so obviously belongs to Rita Moreno’s gene pool, the island travels with you” (102). There are some Latinos who can get away with “passing” to

appease the dominant culture and face less racism, but for those who look like Cofer it becomes tougher to do so. Cofer may not have wanted to run away from being Latina, it was the stereotypes she wanted to avoid, but somehow, they seem to catch up with her.

In Judith Ortiz Cofer's memoir, *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*, Cofer's biculturalism, bilingualism, and personal rich experiences are what made her the genuine writer she is today. She concentrates on writing about the racism and prejudice her and her family experienced continually, whether it was being rushed to pay for something at a store, or rejection when looking to rent an apartment, they had to fight racism first, before anything,

Since our apartment was situated directly above where the Schultzes worked all day our father instructed us to remove our shoes at the door and walk in our socks. We were going to prove how respectable we were by being the opposite of what our ethnic group was known to be. (Cofer 64)

If Judith Ortiz Cofer's family wanted to live in a good neighborhood, they had to "act white" meaning, that anything that is non-white, it is bestial and uncivilized. They had to comport themselves in a manner that is conforming to white America.

In order for feminists to fight for all women they must first be conscious of the problems that afflict women altogether. White feminists need to grasp the concept that had they done their job to fight for all women, there would be no need for Third World feminists. Had all feminists felt comfortable with the movement, women of color would not have to branch out on their own. Black feminist, Patricia Hill Collins, admits in "What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond" that this partition was not easy on them, "The term *black feminism* also makes many African-American women uncomfortable because it challenges black women to confront their own views on sexism and women's oppression" coming to the realization that the movement is not changing

much for them (13). Collins mentions that black women reject the word “feminism because of what they perceive as its association with whiteness” (13). Therefore, they focus on the race instead of just the gender.

In “I Was [So] Busy Fighting Racism that I Didn’t Even Know I Was Being Oppressed as a Woman!” Lili M. Kim shares her experiences in the classroom as a professor with her students who were mostly first-generation college students. In the courses she teaches, the students and Kim, “Sought to find ways in which women of color and white women could be allies in our united fight against sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and our quest for effective social change” (101). However, the students were discouraged when looking at the situation from a positive standpoint when in many instances in their life they dealt with discrimination and racial slurs being thrown at them making it apparent that racism was far from over (103). The message Kim is sending is that a tired woman cannot begin fighting sexism, until she takes a rest from battling racism. Racism and gender are so well weaved together that when a woman of color is facing oppression, the majority of the time it would be due to her race instead of her gender.

Sonia Saldivar-Hull feels that achieving equality is a fantasy. She questions why do “immigrants of different skin color believe the melting-pot myth, it is harder for them to be accepted in the same way that European emigrants have been accepted in the history of U.S. colonization” (20). White feminists goal is to stop gender oppression and sexualization for advancement, yet disregard more pertinent issues women of color combat with. In *Privilege*, Patricia Hill Collins says this sort of behavior tears feminists apart for certainly “being viewed as a sex object is less harmful than being lynched”

(236). While white feminists may view sexiness as debasing, what is even more insulting is stumbling upon people who do not understand ethnic culture or its women yet claim they fight for them. Third World feminism evolved for the same reason that the feminist movement did, to bring awareness to those who do not see when they are partaking in oppressive acts. Third World feminists are the voice of conscience for those who say they fight for all utilizing this excuse as a pretext to get themselves ahead of the line.

The goal of Third World feminists is not to disparage their female counterparts pertaining to other races. In this sisterhood clan, if feminists don't recognize their sisters' struggles they can be of no assistance to each other. In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Cherrie Moraga states there is a sense of denial from white feminists who just refuse to listen. She writes,

Time and time again, I have observed that the usual response among white women's groups when the racism issue comes up is to deny the difference. I have heard comments like, "Well, we're open to all women; why don't they (women of color) come? You can only do so much..." But there is seldom any analysis of how the very nature and structure of the group itself may be founded on racist or classist assumptions. More importantly, so often the women seem to feel no loss, no lack, no absence when women of color are not involved; therefore, there is little desire to change the situation... We have failed to demand that white women, particularly those who claim to be speaking for all women, be accountable for their racism. (33)

In *Privilege*, Peggy McIntosh says she understands that when women of color lecture white feminists, they are doing so not to bring conflict, but rather consciousness. She says, "I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to see and understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. At the very least, obliviousness of one's privileged state can make a person or group irritating to be with" (15). McIntosh says that her white skin gives her the privilege others don't have. She explains:

- If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
- I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
- I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- I can turn on the television or open the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely presented.
- When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
- I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods, which fit with my cultural tradition, into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group. (16-17)

These are some of the advantages white women possess that women of color do not. For white feminists to fight for the equality of all women they need to take a closer look at the battles minorities have to scuffle with in their daily lives.

Bonilla-Santiago stresses that most of the disagreements between feminists stem from “the fact that Anglo women patronized the Black members of their movement, while neglecting other ethnic minorities such as Chicanas, Puerto Ricans, Asians, and Native Americans” (40). She adds:

I argue that the feminist movement, to an extent, has failed women of color, particularly Hispanic/Latina women, first because of the way in which Hispanic women’s experiences and their diversity has been brought into the movement; that is, one of token treatment and marginality. They bring one successful Hispanic/Latina woman and ask her to be part of their board and expect her to be the representative of all Hispanic women. That is a result of the racial and class bias in the white women’s movement as a whole. (30)

Whether intentional or not, white feminists are colonizing other women, and not pausing to see or understand how. This is a matter, not of ignorance, but of apathy.

Classism

In *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories*’ chapter “Little Miracles, Kept Promises” Cisneros writes about the women praying for things the average middle to

upper class women would never pray for, she does this to show how classism affects women. The Latina women in her novel are pleading to the *Virgencita de Guadalupe* (a saint respected by Mexicans in the Roman Catholic community) for their child to at the least get to graduate from high school, for the income tax check to come sooner so they could pay any backed up bills, for their children to not fall prey of their poor neighborhood surroundings and become drug addicts,

I promise to walk to your shrine on my knees the very first day I get back, I swear, if you would only get the Tortilleria La Casa de La Masa to pay me \$253.72 they owe me for two weeks' work. I put in 67 ½ hours the first week and 79 hours the second, and I don't have anything to show for it yet. (120)

Classism prevents women from triumphing educationally and economically. This does not only affects them, but also their offspring, creating a cyclic chain that the dominant culture makes it difficult to break.

In "Feminism On the Border: From Gender Politics to Geopolitics" Sonia Saldivar-Hull articulates why there is so much friction between feminists. She writes about "Virginia Woolf's desire for financial independence" and compares them to the aspirations of that of women of color, who other than having the same female organs have nothing in common with white women, they both want different things and live in two separate worlds even if under the same one. She sees the "vast difference between the concerns of bourgeois feminists and border feminists" (13). How can women from different backgrounds, suffering dissimilar things, see eye to eye? How can they be empathetic towards each other when racial oppression's intensity sits heavier on a scale than gender oppression has? White feminists had a head start in the educational, social and economic system, would they take a few steps back to catch up with the sisters they've left behind? The answer is *No*.

Minorities are still living in slavery and segregation, although thought of, as being subtle racism, is still very blatant to them. In *The House on Mango Street*, young Esperanza Cordero is told by her friend that “the neighborhood is getting bad” (13) because people of color like Esperanza are moving in (56). When a minority moves into a predominantly white neighborhood, it is as if they came with a viral plague. Neighbors begin to move out in order to remain in their racially protected areas, leaving minorities in quarantine ghettos. In “Class and Race: The New Black Elite,” feminist bell hooks, argues that minorities are still being enslaved, she asserts, “The Nazi holocaust did not begin with gas chambers but rather began their genocidal agenda by herding people and depriving them of basic necessities of life—adequate food, shelter, health care... gas chambers are unnecessary in these modern times” (Kimmel and Ferber 173). When white feminists refuse to grasp the idea that many women are being repressed and not only due to their sex, resentment grows between the two groups.

In *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, Cisneros stresses how living in poverty exposes women and children to extreme dangers. When Cisneros character becomes a victim of teenage rape by a pedophile living in the area, the young girl had to suffer the consequences, “Abuelita took me out of school when my uniform got tight around the belly and said it was a shame I wouldn’t be able to graduate with other eighth graders” (33). Cisneros demonstrates the troubles minority youths encounter. It becomes a vicious cycle sinking generation after generation deeper in the pool for the underprivileged.

Latinos who cross the border to arrive in the United States, will soon realize that in their path there will be additional borders placed for them that will either make them

stumble or fall completely down. Anzaldúa defines the term “border” in a cultural context, she says:

The U.S. Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe to distinguish *us* from them. (25).

No matter how much Latinos prevail they are still viewed as uncivil, resulting in rejection, suffering further suppression and feeling unsafe in America where another frontier is placed for them making it tougher for them to cross that line of success.

One can say that most women want what is best for them and their families, but not all will get the opportunity to obtain the lifestyle they so much desire. Cofer writes in *Silent Dancing* how even she was a child that had “suburban fantasies” she says, “The children we knew who lived in single houses with backyard equipment were on television or in Puerto Rico. Paterson to us meant indoor activities” (117). The damage is done. Even if they were going to be successful adults, suffering from a damaged childhood, not getting to experience their most innocent years with the fun and enthusiasm other kids her age did, she has been socially paralyzed. Living a life of entrapment. With crime so high in poor urban areas, Cofer lived her childhood years indoors. And while she was safe from the crime, prejudice, and racism in the small protective box her parents placed her in, she still could not run from the truth many people deny is there. Her childhood activities were limited, predominantly, to prove her white landlord that she wasn’t a loud, irritable, and undisciplined Latina.

When Julia Álvarez was asked to write about a Latina’s Quinceañera she was appalled. Out of all the obstacles young Latina women face, she was asked to entertain

the Anglo market with an illusion that Latinos live content in poor neighborhoods marked on the map with a red line. Culturally, a Sweet 15 is an immense fiesta that traditional Latinos follow to welcome a teenage girl into womanhood. In an “Interview with Julia Álvarez,” the author admits this is what motivated her to write her novels to inform others about more important things affecting the Latino culture instead of focusing on a fifteen year old girl’s princess-like birthday party that is a fallacy and in no way symbolizes the reality many Latinas are living. She says:

All the complexity of coming to the United States...and all the pressures. How consumer culture takes over our traditions and sells them back to us at a high price tag. All the statistics about Latina youth, one of the most at risk groups of the population for teen pregnancy, highest rate of suicide attempts, high school dropouts, and yet we have this fantasy celebration in which they’re princesses and they have a kingdom and a court, and they are ending up, the majority of them, at the bottom of the heap” (Treviño).

It is an illusion, a masquerade failing to unveil what lies beneath the façade; this ideal is a fantasy concealing a reality.

Kevane feels Álvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is symbolic since it shows “the larger cultural losses suffered by immigrants as they struggle to survive in the United States. The loss of a homeland, relatives, family, house, food, music, clothing—in essence, the loss of a way of life—can rarely, if ever, be reclaimed or replaced (17). Yet, minority women risk and sacrifice all of this for a more severe and transparent oppression. Kevane adds that “Latina women of color in the workforce has been that of factory or garment worker, nanny or other jobs that are not part of the capitalistic society that represents the American dream” (53). This dream will never become a reality for some women of color. Not when the majority of them still subtly yet boldly live in segregation thanks to redlining, are less educated due to poor education in

urban areas, work hard labor for minimal pay, and continue being suppressed by their female counterparts who claim they are fighting for all, yet are the ones enjoying the benefits for themselves.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is worse from women to women than it is from women to men. Despite any successes, women of color remain the denominator of the equation. If white feminists are fighting for all women why is it that Third World feminists remain oppressed? If feminists fight for the gender, why are women of color disregarded, are they not women too? In "Sandra Cisneros: Border Crossings and Beyond," Robin Ganz sees the struggle that Cisneros is battling with, "While she revels in her biculturalism, enjoys her life in two worlds, and as a writer she's grateful to have twice as many words to pick from...two ways of looking at the world her wide range of experience is a double-edged sword" (27). She enjoys the life she's accomplished, but realizes how hard it is to get out of the pit when one is in too deep. Cisneros does mention her parents' support system, "Because of my mother, I spent my childhood afternoons in my room reading instead of in the kitchen...I never had to change my little brothers' diapers, I never had to cook a meal alone, nor was I ever sent to do the laundry" (22), knowing not many people of her culture are afforded that break. While white feminists are fighting for equality they overlook women of color that are not viewed as equal, even by them.

What women of color are demanding is not to take the place of white women, preferential treatment, or to be better than anyone else. What they are asking is that even if one will never be viewed as an equal they should have the inalienable right to be treated as such. Gloria Anzuldúa sees no difference in the things women want and feel,

but she sees the partiality in the way they treat each other. She questions which gender or race is better than the other, but still does not see anyone as infallible:

And until I meet someone with green blood who eats food and has no wastes coming out of him, who never cries, who never has to sleep—when I meet somebody like that, I may consider them superior. At first I'll consider them different. I'll have to test it to see if they are in fact superior. That's all I'm after—is *everybody's right to express the spirit that lives in them*. (Anzaldúa and Moraga 228)

Latina and Jewish American feminist and scholar, Judit Moschkovich concurs:

I'm sick and tired of continually hearing about the destructive aspects of Latin American culture, especially from women who don't know the culture and can only repeat well-known and worn-out myths. Let Latina women tell you what's going on, the good and the bad. I've lived there and I damn well know what it's like. Listen to what I have to say about my culture, rather than believe hearsay, myths or racist stereotypes. No one ever talks about "terminally depressed Scandinavians," or the cutthroat competition instilled by American culture, or the lack of warmth and physical contact in Anglo culture. These are all destructive aspects of Anglo culture, and they cannot be ignored...When Anglo-American Women speak of developing a new feminist or women's culture, they are still working and thinking with an Anglo-American cultural framework. This new culture would still be just as racist and ethnocentric as patriarchal American culture. (Anzaldúa and Moraga 82-83).

Third World feminists do not want to steal the limelight, but rather share the spotlight with white feminists instead of remaining in the shadows. The United States of America is not composed of only whites, but everyone else as well, *E pluribus unum*, out of many, one. The problem with the United States is that the word "united" in itself is questionable.

White feminists must realize this goes far beyond the economic standpoint. They need to try and walk in a colored woman's shoes before complaining about sexism and supposed inequalities they suffer. People of color are not expecting free handouts. In fact, most minorities leave their homeland due to the lack of jobs hoping to arrive in the

United States with a desire to join the labor workforce before even considering relying on public assistance.⁶

Men are not the enemies to women of color. Despite their differences, men will continue to have an advantage over women and that is their ability to bond with each other. In fact, women of color are more reluctant to trust a white woman before distrusting their men. Bonilla-Santiago quotes Velia Garcia,

Chicanas have no more faith in white women than in white men... We aren't oppressed by Chicanos, we're oppressed by a system that serves white power and depends upon a white majority for its survival and perpetuation. In our struggle, we identify with our men, not white women, as our natural allies. (35).

Women of color are more likely to stand by brown and black men, who are also the victims of oppression and who will be more empathetic about the injustices they suffer before a white woman with jaundiced eyes would.

When comparing salaries for all women in the United States, Black and Latina women are not fairing well:

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports "Growth in real earnings for White women outpaced that of their Black and Hispanic counterparts. Between 1979 and 2009, inflation-adjusted earnings for White women rose by 32 percent, while earnings growth among Black and Hispanic women was 25 percent and 18 percent, respectively. In contrast, real earnings for White men edged up by just 3 percent over the 30-year span, those for Black men showed no growth, and Hispanic men's earnings fell by 6 percent" (1).

However, this is not the case for Asian women and men. What is frightening about feminism is that there is no sense of unity or harmony mutilating any prospective accomplishments that women can obtain if only they were to work as one. White supremacy and colonial ideologies are causing more division amongst feminists who are

⁶ The 2010 Census reports that minorities receiving food stamps were "26% black or African American and 20% Hispanic in comparison to 49% whites (non-Hispanic)" (Census.gov).

looking after their groups' security instead of the entire well-being for womankind. When it comes to earnings, "(White) Women earn only 77 cents for every dollar men earn, with women of color at an even greater disadvantage with 64 cents on the dollar for African American women and 56 cents for Hispanic women" (Kessler). It is startling how one group unapologetically steps over the other to show the superiority one has above the other. Their quarrel is not only destroying the feminist movement, it is also helping to intensify gender oppression.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2009, Asian women managed to earn more than their White, Black, and Hispanic counterparts. While this is positive, it does not serve as an accomplishment all women can share. Asian women are adopting some of the white feminists ways, and pulling them down in a form of retaliation, while white feminists step on other women of color, and blacks are mimicking this imperialistic style leaving Latinas at the bottom of the totem pole who surely will follow the pattern and do the same—every woman for herself. The sad thing is none of the women are looking after each other rendering the feminist movement useless. They are cutting each other's throats in the lake of survival. These women who abhor men's sexist ways are emulating them and becoming just as repulsive. Feminists are becoming subordinates to one another; there is no sisterhood. Due to this separation, backbiting, betrayal, and greed is what is causing feminism to tear apart slowly debilitating the group's mission. Not all women who fight for equality are feminists, and feminists who fight for women more often than not do not always fight for all. Therefore, they should not call themselves feminists. And if they do, not all feminists are created equal, at the least not until they harmoniously come into accord and try to understand each other's struggles. No matter

what color, race or creed if a woman is not fighting or advocating for the rights of all women it is disgraceful and shameful for them to even identify themselves as feminists instead of what they truly are—self-seeking opportunists.

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