

# Ethnicity and Feminism: Two Solitudes?

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## ABSTRACT

A synthesis of race, class, and gender perspectives into a holistic and inclusive theory and practice is essential not only to advance scholarship, but also to begin to deal practically with issues of subordination. The women's movement must understand the nature of racism and class exploitation and its interdependencies with sexism. Similarly, groups committed to the liberation of ethnic/racial minorities must understand sexism and class exploitation and its relationship to racism. These groups, however, seem to have somewhat limited understanding of each other's priorities and, therefore, are often antagonistic of each other. Capitalist society and the racism and sexism it institutionalizes are strengthened by these antagonisms. The systemic nature of women's oppression and the institutional racism against minority groups must be understood within the context of the state. Sexism, racism and class exploitation constitute interlocking systems of domination, all of which share an ideological foundation.

## RÉSUMÉ

La synthèse des perspectives de race, de classe et de sexe dans une théorie et une pratique holistiques et inclusives est essentielle non seulement pour faire avancer l'érudition, mais aussi pour commencer à trouver des solutions pratiques aux questions de subordination. Dans le mouvement féministe, il faut comprendre la nature du racisme et de l'exploitation des classes et les facteurs de dépendance entre ces derniers et le sexisme. De même, les groupes luttant pour la libération des minorités ethniques/raciales doivent comprendre le sexisme et l'exploitation des classes ainsi que leur apport avec le racisme. Cependant, chacun de ces groupes semble ne comprendre que d'une façon limitée les priorités des autres, et ils sont donc souvent antagonistes les uns envers les autres. Par ailleurs, la société capitaliste ainsi que le racisme et le sexisme qu'elle institutionnalise, sont renforcés par ces antagonismes. C'est donc dans le contexte de l'État qu'il faut comprendre la nature systématique de l'oppression de la femme et le racisme institutionnel envers les groupes minoritaires. Le sexisme, le racisme et l'exploitation des classes constituent des systèmes de domination imbriqués, lesquels partagent tous une fondation idéologique.

## The tension

The principal question that we ask in this paper is why the women's movement has failed to attract minority women<sup>1</sup> and, conversely, why groups committed to the liberation of minority groups fail to understand sexism. While many feminists have recognized that the struggle for women's liberation has focused primarily on white middle-class women with only passing attention paid to the struggles of minority women, those concerned with ethnic struggles have been even slower to take the issue of gender into account. In response to the recognition that the women's movement is largely white, feminists have begun to undergo a process of consciousness raising within the feminist movement to help understand their racism and ethnocentrism.

While consciousness-raising techniques might help individual white feminists come to grips with their ethnocentrism, they are not nearly enough. It is not enough to acknowledge these attitudes or to recognize that they are shared by others. Racism is not simply a personal problem but a political problem in the same way that sexism is both personal and political. While it may be seen as "politically correct" to admit that we are racist or sexist, unfortunately this level of individual awareness does little to change the nature of racism or sexism in our society and tends to make us feel that we are exonerated from having to take further action. While this issue is far from being resolved within the women's movement, more and more we are coming to recognize the need to go beyond our ethnocentrism. Unfortunately, there seems to be little evidence that those fighting for the liberation of ethnic and minority groups have moved very far in any kind of parallel

understanding of sexism. The fact that so many ethnic organizations have little or no understanding of the nature of sexism, whether within their own communities or within the larger community, means that ethnic women continue to live under a system of dual or triple oppression.

There needs to be a clearly articulated position that racism and ethnocentrism and sexism are not simply individualistic problems, but share common experiences with the state. The systemic nature of women's oppression and the institutional racism against minority groups are similar. It seems that both those interested in the elimination of sexism and those interested in the elimination of racism fail to see the similarity in the roots of their oppression.

Similarly, academics concerned with ethnicity have, by and large, failed to recognize that the experiences of ethnic women differ from those of men. Only limited progress has been made in the last few years. Although the gender literature has recently tried to incorporate issues of ethnicity and race, the ethnic/race literature seems less willing to deal with issues of gender. In neither case have the gatekeepers of knowledge included minority women. For example, in a study done on two leading interdisciplinary journals in the field of women's studies, *Signs* and *Feminist Studies*, the editors, associate editors and consultants were not representative of women of colour. (In 1983-84, the eleven editors of *Feminist Studies* and the editor and eight associate editors of *Signs*, groups that make policy decisions, included no Black women, no Hispanic women, no Native women, no Chinese women, and only one Japanese-American woman, the only woman of colour [Baca Zinn et al, 1986:293]). We can assume that, at least for the academic community, these individuals make crucial decisions defining and sanctioning important concerns and critical scholarship in the field. Thus, it appears that, although white feminists have begun to articulate expressions of concern over minority women, this is not being translated into any change in those holding the gatekeeping positions. Those holding the gatekeeping positions at these journals, at least, are as white as are those at any mainstream social science or humanities publication.

It is erroneous to universalize the middle-class white women's experience as the experience of women's oppression without recognition of the different

oppressions of women according to race, ethnicity, or class. While the concept of sisterhood is useful politically, it should not distort the reality of women's differing experiences and the salience of race and ethnicity for many women's lives. Dill suggests the abandonment of the concept of sisterhood as a global construct based on unexamined assumptions about our similarities and argues for a more pluralistic approach that recognizes differences among women (1983:184). In fact, many of the earlier feminists used the concept of sisterhood to obscure the differences between women. Thus, for example, Shulamith Firestone, one of the most influential radical feminist theorists, is totally ethnocentric in her analysis. Espousing the notion of absolute patriarchy, she claims that "throughout history, in all stages and types of culture, women have been oppressed due to their biological function." She is contemptuous of anthropologists' attempts to explore women's roles in other cultures when she suggests that, "These biological contingencies in the human family cannot be covered over with anthropological sophistries" (1974:74). Mary Daly, another very influential radical feminist, also stresses that sexism is the primary form of oppression and espouses the belief in an absolute patriarchy. According to Daly, there is a "basic sameness of our situation as women.... The bonding is born out of shared recognition that there exists a worldwide phenomenon of sexual caste, basically the same whether one lives in Saudi Arabia or in Sweden" (1973:2-3). This assumption obliterates any differences in women's experience.

It is important to acknowledge that it is not divisive to recognize material and historically specific differences between women. The political usefulness of slogans like "sisterhood is powerful" should not obscure the limitations of the concept in understanding all women's experiences. Sisterhood can be misleading unless contextualized. Indeed, attempts to negate dissimilarities may lead to racism. Letty Pogrin, for example, in speaking about Jewish women, states her concern that "we are cheered when we criticize the Bible for its anti-woman bias but not when we criticize feminists for their anti-Jewish jokes" (1982:46). Judith Antonelli echoes this sentiment when she argues that anti-Italian prejudice was not taken seriously in the women's community, and that the negative stereotypes about Italians were not apparent to other women (1979:8). If there is recognition of other forms of oppression, then often this is seen as somehow less

salient or less oppressive. As Dill has argued with respect to Black women in the United States,

[Black women] have felt called upon to choose between their commitments to feminism and to the struggle against racial injustice. Clearly they are victims of both forms of oppression and are most in need of encouragement and support in waging battles on both fronts. However, insistence on such a choice continues largely as a result of the tendency of groups of Blacks and groups of white women to battle over the dubious distinction of being the 'most' oppressed. (1983:131-150)

Members of ethnic/racial communities have similar problems in understanding the importance of this dual oppression. Black groups are often very suspicious of the feminist movement and dismiss it as a white, middle-class bourgeois movement. Even among ethnic groups whose membership is white and largely middle-class, there seems to be a fear that feminism might serve to divide the ethnic community. For example, feminism has been viewed suspiciously by many Jews because it has wrongly been perceived as an opponent of the family, of population growth and of volunteerism, all of which are regarded as important for Jewish survival (Schneider, 1984:6). Thus feminism is often perceived as a threat to Jewish survival, a danger to be opposed rather than an important cause to be supported.

Reaction to this threat comes not only from religious leaders, but from the larger, secular community as well. Jewish leaders oppose feminism by popularizing the false notion that the family and particularly the self-sacrificing mother, were predominantly responsible for preserving the Jewish people throughout the centuries. (Heschel, 1983:5)

A similar argument is made by Winnie Ng when she explores why feminism has not attracted more immigrant women. Feminism, Ng notes, may be perceived as threatening the traditional values of their culture. The fear of being labelled as "radical" or "crazy," of being socially sanctioned by their own community, may prevent them from seeking alliances with the feminist community (1982:87). In speaking of Native Indian women, LaChapelle notes that Native women often perceive that their participation in the women's movement would be divisive of their Indian community. They are concerned that it would alienate Native men, weaken the Native family, dissipate the

energies of the Native struggle and thus fragment the community (1982:263).

It is a false choice for minority women to be forced to "choose" between their commitment to feminism and to the struggles against ethnic/racial injustices, and it is part of the patriarchal strategy of divide and conquer. The segmentation of oppression into categories such as "racial issues," or "feminist issues" or "class issues" is politically detrimental to any struggle against oppression. While we must recognize the structures that differentiate us, we must not allow these to divide us. Racial and ethnic oppression grows out of the same thirst for power as the oppression of women. Too often, participants in the struggles of parallel liberation movements are blinded to each other and have only a limited understanding of each other's priorities. Capitalist society and the racism and sexism it institutionalizes are strengthened by antagonisms (Joseph and Lewis, 1986:5).

It is perhaps ironic that the tension between the women's movement and minority women is often expressed in terms of the primacy of racism over sexism, when the women's movement as we know it today in North America is indebted to the Black civil rights movement. Indeed, in the early 1960s, this debt was acknowledged without apology as Black civil rights slogans became adapted to new feminist slogans. In a collection of personal narratives of individuals involved in the struggles around the Vietnam war, civil rights, and women's liberation in the United States in the 1960s, American feminists articulated this inspiration. Ann Popkin argues that the women's movement's understanding of cultural domination borrows from the Black movement's understanding of the impact of white man's ideology on Black self-perception (1979). Similarly, Leslie Cagan suggests that the civil rights movement allowed women to begin to question the reality of freedom as women as it had questioned the reality of freedom as Blacks (1979). As Catharine Stimpson argues, the women's movement emerged, in part, to acquire for women the same access to resources and authority that the civil rights movement was fighting to obtain for Blacks. However, as Jenny Bourne notes, "since then the bonds have become frayed, the roots discarded, the lessons unlearned, not least because of the changes in political direction of the women's movement itself" (1983:1). Somewhere the recognition — that the social structure which has been "male" towards women's struggles is

also "white" towards racial/ethnic struggles — has been lost.

The experiences of the British women's movement serve to illustrate further the tension between ethnicity and gender issues. The British women's movement did have a short-lived campaign against racism. For example, an organization called Women Against Racism and Fascism (WARF) arose as a response to fascism in Britain and, in particular, to a fascist march through the streets of North London in April 1977 (Bourne, 1983). Unfortunately, WARF seems to have disappeared from the women's movement after only two years. Understanding the failure of WARF to sustain itself for more than two years, despite the racism and fascism blatant in British society at the time, can perhaps provide some insights into the problems of the tensions also evident in the women's movement in North America. Bourne (1983:9) argues that WARF raised the issues of racism and fascism in terms of speaking and writing within the already existing women's movement community, that is, by addressing largely middle-class white women with leftist inclinations. WARF did not speak to working-class women nor to minority women. Since the majority of WARF was without a community base, inevitably, its work became abstract and theoretical.

This problem in the women's movement parallels the tunnel vision of universalizing the oppression based on ethnicity or race without any consideration of the gender dimension. For example, as Elizabeth Higginbotham has suggested, Blacks are inclined to view discrimination as racist and, therefore, see sexism only within the bounds of the Black community rather than as a systemic pattern (1980:226). Attempting to determine which issues are most important is a useless strategy. They are all salient in the lives of minority women. We must simultaneously recognize the importance of race, class, and gender in order to address satisfactorily the lives of minority women and to develop strategies for the elimination of their oppression. For the women's movement, this recognition is imperative if we do not want to see the women's movement divided into two groups: one of white middle-class women addressing their own limited issues, and one of minority women trying to answer questions that are fundamental to their survival (see especially Jorge, 1983:220). For those battling racism, it is no longer possible to assume that the generalizations made about men speak to the realities

of women's lives. While recognizing that this has been a major obstacle for many groups, nowhere is it more crucial for understanding the dual and often triple burden of minority women.

One of the most serious problems in this tension is that of competing oppression, for example, "My oppression is worse than yours because..." The prime beneficiaries of such an approach are those who have vested interests in keeping oppressed groups separated and competing for the same piece of the pie (Phillip:5). This emphasis on a hierarchy of oppressions is destructive, divisive and immobilizing (Parmer, 1989:58). No one has a corner on misery and this competition for victim status wastes considerable amounts of our energies.

Another important factor which we are coming to recognize as problematic to our understanding of minority women's dual subordination is the equation of minority/ethnic women with immigrant women. While it is obvious that immigrant women have unique problems related to issues of language and culture, the equation of minority women and immigrant women obscures the more deep-seated problems facing these women. For example, it is often assumed that the problems of immigrant women are only temporary and will, in fact, disappear once they become acculturated. Such a view is erroneous but allows us to concentrate our efforts on language training and outings to the supermarket. In the first place, immigrant women's oppression will not be overcome simply by greater facility with English or French or knowing the different brand of cereals available at the supermarket. More critically, however, immigrant does not equal minority or ethnic women. It often does not matter how long one may have lived in this country or, in fact, if one belongs to the aboriginal peoples of this country. The problem is not temporary and will not go away simply by providing more training programs for minority women.

While immigrant women may have the additional burden of language problems or cultural differences, their problems will not disappear over time. Immigrant women must deal with the consequences of a society which is sexist, of an immigration policy which is sexist, of a labour market which is sexually segregated. They must also live in a society in which systemic discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity is widespread (Estable, 1986:2). Like other minority

women they are also doubly disadvantaged. They are slotted to fill the gaps in the labour market, to take up jobs that Canadians refuse (Ng, 1982:250). They are discriminated against in the paid labour force, not only as women, but as members of a minority group. Their labour at home is undervalued. Their encounters in the larger society are often marred by sexism and racism (Djao and Ng, 1987:141). This suggests that no matter how long they may live in Canada, no matter how fluent they become in English or French, no matter how acculturated they become, they will still face this systemic discrimination. While clearly we must understand the unique experiences of immigrant women and appreciate that they occupy a unique position, we must be careful not to see their problem as short-term or temporary. Immigrant women, like other minority women, remain the "muted shadows," the silent partners in our society and the women's movement (Ng, 1982:250).

### Resolution

Some feminists have begun to recognize the necessity of acknowledging these differences. As Audre Lorde concludes, "the strength of women lies in recognizing differences between us as creative, and in standing to those distortions which we inherited without blame but which are now ours to alter. The angers of women can transform differences through insight into power" (1981:7). Similarly, Bourne suggests that, "In its eagerness to promote the idea of sisterhood, it (women's movement) has ignored the complexities of experience" (1983:19). Esmeralda Thornhill also notes that real sisterhood means the willingness, both collectively and individually, to assume the responsibility for the elimination of racism (January/February 1987:7). Increasingly, much feminist writing recognizes the need to incorporate into its understanding of oppression more than just exploitative capitalist relations of production to a model which sees exploitation as greater than the economic sphere. For example, Eisenstein (1979) argues that exploitation speaks to the economic reality of capitalist class relations for men and women, whereas oppression refers to women and minorities defined within patriarchal, racist and capitalist relations. Power, according to this argument, is distributed through three structures: the capitalist class structure, the patriarchal sex hierarchy, and the racial division of labour. While women share an oppression with each other, what they share as sexual oppression is differentiated along class

and racial lines. These three structures are, on the one hand, independent and, on the other, integrally related. Angela Davis (1981) has made the similar argument that sexism must be informed by racism and by class exploitation.

While this discussion has centered around the issues of gender and ethnicity and race, clearly class is a differentiating feature as well. We must begin to examine the ways in which class, race and gender intersect. While it is necessary, on the one hand, to examine analytically the differentiation in terms of ethnicity/race, gender and class, such an examination should not, on the other hand, be construed as divisive. As Dill argues, "Politically we must fight the segmentation of oppression into categories such as 'racial issues', 'feminist issues', and 'class issues'... When we have reached the point where the differences between us *enrich* our political and social action rather than divide it, we will have gone beyond the personal and will, in fact, be 'political enough'" (Dill:186). The fear that the differences are divisive and therefore undesirable is the baggage of patriarchy (McKenzie, 1987:9).

This same theme was echoed more recently in a statement read by Black women at the plenary session of the Third International Feminist Bookfair held in Montreal, June 14-19, 1988.

How can we forge political practice whose foundation is not simply assumed on the basis of gender and sexuality but comes with active engagement in political struggle? Why is it necessary to establish a hierarchy of oppression? Your oppression is more significant than mine; your nationality or language is more important than mine; sexism is more pervasive than racism...

As women of colour, we recognize that the major systems of oppression all emerge from the same source and mutually reinforce each other. For us, experiencing the ways in which racism, sexism, heterosexism and class affect us separately and together help us to understand and structure our politics. For us, race, class, sex, and sexuality are intertwined. (as reported in *Pandora*, March 1989:12)

It should also be stressed that it is not enough simply to tag race, class and gender onto each other mechanically, for they are intertwined and enmeshed in each other and the particular intersections produce specific effects. They are not simply additive and it is

not possible to prioritize them. Each presents ideological and organizational principles within which the others operate. As Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1983) illustrate, within the household, gender divisions differ according to ethnicity. For example, a critique of the family may take different forms dependent on the ethnic context. "The white western critique of the housewife's isolation in a nuclear-family box living on a diet of tranquilizers is completely inappropriate in other contexts" (Barrett and McIntosh, 1985:43). Similarly, when analyzing the labour market, we know that whenever cheap labour outside the home is most required, Black women, women of colour, ethnic women and poor white women are used, regardless of family structure. The reality is different from the notion that women do not participate in the labour force. The internal gender divisions of an ethnic group will also affect the participation of men and women of the group in the labour market. Thus, for example, a sexually differentiated labour market will structure the placement of individuals according to their gender, but ethnic divisions will determine their subordination within them — so that while Black and white women may both be subordinate within a sexually differentiated labour market, Black women will be subordinate to white women within it (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983:62-63). Ethnic women's political and economic status may provide them with a distinctive set of experiences that offer a different view of material reality. The paid or unpaid work they perform, the communities in which they live, and their relations with others may provide them with a different reality than those who do not hold minority status.

Minority women belong to two and often three subordinate groups based on race, class and gender. They, therefore, lack access to authority and resources because of several structural factors. However, it is also true, that as members of a subordinate ethnic/racial group, they share common interests with men of the same group. Similarly as women they share interests with white women. As Diane Lewis has pointed out ironically, each is also a member of the dominant group: ethnic men as men, white women as whites. "Thus, the interests which bind Black women together with and pull them into opposition against co-members crosscut one another in a manner which often obscures one set of interests over another" (Lewis, 1977:343). Thus, for example, women of colour perceive that white women do have access to power and authority that they lack. While white women may lack authority

in the dominant society, they have some access to power through their kinship and marital ties to men — fathers, sons and husbands who do have authority and access to resources in the public sphere. As Audre Lorde has stated, "White women face the pitfall of being seduced into joining the oppressor under the pretense of sharing power. This possibility does not exist in the same way for women of color.... For white women there is a wide range of pretended choices and rewards for identifying with patriarchal power and its tools" (1984:118-119). Because of racism, ethnic women occupy a structural position subordinate to white women in our society. This has served to divide women. Similarly, ethnic women have recognized that their interests as women differ from that of men. On the one hand, the experience of racism makes them critical of white feminist groups; on the other hand, the experiences of sexism often puts them in conflict with minority men. Gender and ethnicity are hence intermeshed, both uniting and separating minority women from other groups.

While there is still a tendency to prioritize this dual oppression, more women in recent years are coming to the recognition that the struggle against both oppressions must occur concomitantly. For example, in an anthology written in 1970, Black women argue that their aim is to "demand rights of Blacks first, women second" (Cade, 1970:10). Mae King argued that racism was the primary cause of the Black women's lack of status, and that sexism merely intensified problems for Black women (1975). In 1970, Linda LaRue argued that any attempt to draw an analogy between racism and sexism was like "comparing the neck of a hanging man with the hands of an amateur mountain climber with rope burns" (1970:36). This duality, however, seems to have begun to disappear from many of the struggles of women of colour and ethnic women. For example, in the United States, Black women in the early 1970s began to formulate their interests both as women and as Blacks. In Canada, although the move has been slower, there has been increasing recognition on the part of minority women that they must formulate their interests in terms of both gender and ethnicity. For example, the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada (NOIVMWC) has as its mandate to achieve social, political and economic equality for immigrant and visible minority women and to fight sexism, racism, poverty, isolation and violence. A strong feminist movement has begun to emerge among ethnic women to deal with the special problems

of race and gender inequality. This transition has not been easy and is still fraught with difficulties. As noted above, minority members are often forced into situations where they feel a conflict over their commitment to fighting for their ethnic rights and fighting for their rights as women. Schetlin notes that "minority women who raise issues of women's rights are accused of disloyalty to a particular ethnic group as well as disloyalty to particular men" (1978:49).

This recognition on the part of minority women has led them to serious criticism of the women's movement generally. While some recognition of the problem of racism within the women's movement has begun, it is not nearly enough. At a series of workshops on Women of Colour in October and November of 1986 sponsored by the Status of Women Committee in Calgary, Esmeralda Thornhill was sharply critical of the Canadian women's movement in her remarks.

As women, it is true, we live in a sexist world order. However, we black women and other women of colour in addition live in a racist world which so far has denied us entry into the mainstream of the women's movement...

Despite our unique experience of triple oppression on the counts of race, sex, and class, and our special survival skills which are indispensable cornerstones to this evolving graphic documentary of the female experience, yet the women's movement has failed to generate any in-depth critical analysis of the black female experience." (as reported in *The Newsmagazine*, January-February 1987:6)

Dionne Brand makes a similar accusation in her attempt to explain the reluctance of Black women to participate in the International Women's Day events in terms of the marginalisation of Black women's issues within the feminist movement in Canada (Brand, 1984:26-27).

Although it has been slow in coming, feminists are beginning to realize the thrust of these criticisms in terms of their understanding of their own ethnocentrism. The women's movement has moved considerably from its earlier emphasis on the universality of women's experience (and, in fact, celebration of that universality) to a recognition of the differences in women's experiences and an understanding of the political factors that can help explicate these differences. This refocussing is not always an easy process. Analyzing oppression within a

group marked by sex, race, class, or ethnicity can be divisive of group solidarity. While recognition of this oppression is an integral part of reconstructing all women's history, there is a need to ensure that it does not lead to a "conflict about giving priority to one social critique over another in strategies for political action... [which] can itself divide progressive groups and impede social change" (Mann, 1989:776). It also means that a rejection of the binary categorization of "man" and "woman" or of "White" and "Black" must occur and a new conceptualization of gender, race and ethnicity that incorporates diversity must be developed. As well, it means that feminists will have to recognize that minority women face oppression as women but also as members of racial/ethnic groups and that oppression is by whites of both genders (Hurtado, 1989:839). Similarly, minority men will have to realize that minority women are oppressed not only by the majority group, but also by men of both groups.

In the academic sphere, feminist scholarship has increasingly come to acknowledge that, in the effort to recognize the shared experience of sexism, there has been a tendency to gloss over differences. What are the implications of these differences? Of course, the degree and extent of this recognition is fiercely debated. Are white feminists simply trying very hard to prove that they are simply not racists or have they made serious breakthroughs? There is empirical evidence to suggest that there now exists in the area of women's studies increasing recognition of the saliency of differences in experience. A perusal of women's studies journals and texts will more than likely show that some of the material considers minority women. Similarly, I would argue that ethnic scholarship has begun to recognize, albeit at a much slower pace, that the experiences of minority women are different from those of men's.

Still, much of this work often seems to be tacked on, as though it has been a simple oversight, without any analysis of its importance for changing our understandings and without any discussion of its significance for our scholarship. Baca Zinn (1986:296-297) identifies three common approaches of feminist social science in dealing with issues of race and class. Her model can easily be extended to include the ways in which ethnic research typically approaches gender and class. First, there is the approach that assumes that the other two facets are secondary, and that there is a primacy of one type of subordination. Thus, feminist research might argue that race and class are secondary

features in social organization while ethnic scholars might argue that gender and class can be seen as secondary to race. Phyllis Palmer has referred to this approach as a "diversionary special interest" (1983:152). A second approach acknowledges the importance of race, class, and gender in terms of generating different experiences; however, after making this acknowledgement, there seems to be a notion that one is now exonerated from any kind of analysis of its importance. Inequalities based on race and gender and class are simply not explicated into a coherent analysis. The third approach, which seems to have gained wide popularity, focuses on descriptive aspects of the ways of life, values, customs and problems of minority women. These differences are detailed but without any attempt to explain their source or their broader meaning. It is not enough simply to document visible empirical differences (although this may be a necessary first step) but we need to develop a theoretical framework that would enable us to understand these differences. As it is now, many of these discussions seem to be "confined to a pre-theoretical presentation of concrete problems" (Kilson, 1977: 38). The inclusion of minority women in feminist work and in the social science (and ethnic) literature is still largely confined to the level of the pre-theoretical (Simons, 1979).

## Conclusions

The recognition of racism/ethnocentrism by feminists and of sexism by those concerned with ethnic/racial liberation is unfortunately not enough. There is a danger, especially among liberal thinkers, that a public breast-beating admitting to our racism and/or sexism will absolve us and allow us to carry on with the added reassurance that we have articulated some fashionable guilt. This recognition and the will to fight racism and sexism does not exempt us from:

[The] Blindness, the harshness, and the passivities of racism [and sexism] which their cultures, their daily realities, and their political vision contain. The liberal conscience, the clever self-censorship of the more obvious forms of racist [and sexist] response, the internalized guilt-syndromes only deal with the tip of the iceberg. (Joseph and Lewis, 1986:281)

We would like to argue that a synthesis of race and gender perspectives, as well as the issue of class into a holistic and inclusive theory and practice, is essential not only to advance scholarship but also to begin to deal practically with issues of subordination. An

alternative epistemology that differs from the way knowledge is produced and validated by the dominant culture may serve to challenge the "content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the processes of arriving at that truth" (Collins, 1989:773). By examining the diversity of experiences and incorporating them into a system of analysis, we can begin to reveal the magnitude, complexity and interdependence of systems of oppression. Whether we speak of patriarchal domination, racial domination or other forms of group oppression, we must recognize that these systems share an ideological foundation. The recognition that sexism, racism and class exploitation constitute interlocking systems of domination is a necessary first step in this process. "Recognition of the inter-connectedness of sex, race, and class highlights the diversity of experience, compelling redefinition of the terms of unity (Bell Hooks, 1988:22). We need to develop more adequate ways of conceptualizing gender, ethnicity and class in its material, socio-economic, and cultural contexts. Significant loss of understanding occurs when we "view our oppression through parallel, monolithic, yet disconnected lenses" and fail to develop an "understanding of the political totality that thrives on these oppressions" (Joseph and Lewis, 1986:14).

## NOTE

1. Throughout this paper, we consider ethnic/minority women and women of colour together. While, obviously, we appreciate that the lived experiences of women from different racial or ethnic groups is important to an understanding of their social relations, nevertheless, at a general level, these women share the experience of oppression. Their differences are socially constructed to have negative consequences in terms of their social relations. Racism is applicable not only to Black women or women of colour. Racism refers to the structural location of ethnic groups as determinants of their social relations (see especially Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983:62-63). Similarly, we have used the term "white" to refer to those dominant groups in our society whose social positions allow them the power and authority to exploit members of minority groups.

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## O Canada

(a feminist version)

OK, Ann;  
 Nada.  
 Hours at home,  
 Nativity,  
 Dirt.  
 Troops, riots.  
 Love-in  
 All over —  
 Daughters command.  
 Withdraw our hearts.  
 We seethe.  
 Arise!  
 The tune  
 Forth, strong and free!  
 From far and wide.  
 OK Ann,  
 Nada  
 We stand  
 hungered  
  
 for thee.

## O Canada

(sung in two colour harmony)

WHITE: O Canada!  
 WHITE  
 AND RED: Our home  
 RED: And native land.  
 WHITE: True, [but]  
 Patriot love and all,  
 Our sons command.  
 RED: With glowing hearts, we see thee rise,  
 The true north strong.  
 And free  
 [the native land?]  
  
 WHITE: Stand on guard! O Canada,  
 We stand on guard.  
 For thee, God [the white one]  
 Keep us strong, glorious, and ...  
 RED: Free Ocanadawe!  
 WHITE: Stand on guard,  
 Fort He.

Margaret Rodgers  
 Oshawa, Ontario