El Mundo Zurdo

The Vision
“Coming into spirituality the way I did changed the christian myth that there is nothing we can do – we are totally powerless. I found out that when there was trouble, my people did not say ‘o.k., we can't fight, we just have to let god handle it.’ They went and made sacrifices, they evoked their gods and goddesses, they became possessed, and they went out there and they fought. You learn to take power when there is a presence behind you.” – Luisah Teish

We, the women here, take a trip back into the self, travel to the deep core of our roots to discover and reclaim our colored souls, our rituals, our religion. We reach a spirituality that has been hidden in the hearts of oppressed people under layers of centuries of traditional god-worship. It emerges from under the veils of La Virgen de Guadalupe and unrolls from Yemaya’s ocean waves whenever we need to be uplifted from or need the courage to face the tribulations of a racist patriarchal world where there is no relief. Our spirituality does not come from outside ourselves. It emerges when we listen to the “small still voice” [Teish] within us which can empower us to create actual change in the world.

The vision of our spirituality provides us with no trap door solution, no escape hatch tempting us to “transcend” our struggle. We must act in the everyday world. Words are not enough. We must perform visible and public acts that may make us more vulnerable to the very oppressions we are fighting against. But, our vulnerability can be the source of our power – if we use it.

As Third World women, we are especially vulnerable to the many-headed demon of oppression. We are the women on the bottom. Few oppressions pass over us. To work towards the freedom of our own skin and souls would, as Combahee states, “...mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all systems of oppression." The love we have for our common maligned bodies and souls must burgeon out in lucha, in struggle. As Teish points out, we must work toward diminishing the possibility of being locked up in a padded cell, of being battered or raped. Our feelings of craziness and powerlessness that Combahee speaks of are induced by the shit society dumps on us rather than stemming from being born ugly or evil as the patriarchal shrinks
would have us believe. We must not believe the story they tell about us. We must recognize the effects that our external circumstances of sex, class, race and sexuality have on our perception of ourselves—even in our most private unspoken moments.

The vision of radical Third World Feminism necessitates our willingness to work with those people who would feel at home in *El Mundo Zurdo, the left-handed world*: the colored, the queer, the poor, the female, the physically challenged. From our blood and spirit connections with these groups, we women on the bottom throughout the world can form an international feminism. For separatism by race, nation, or gender will not do the trick of revolution. *Autonomy*, however, is not separatism. We recognize the right and necessity of colonized peoples throughout the world, including Third World women in the U.S., forming independent movements toward self-government. But ultimately, we must struggle together. *Together* we form a vision which spans from the self-love of our colored skins, to the respect of our foremothers who kept the embers of revolution burning, to our reverence for the trees—the final reminder of our rightful place on this planet.

The change evoked on these pages is material as well as psychic. Change requires a lot of heat. It requires both the alchemist and the welder, the magician and the laborer, the witch and the warrior, the myth-smasher and the myth-maker.

Hand in Hand, we brew and forge a revolution.
Give Me Back

Chrystos

that anger bone mal mama
that rattle painted red, painted fresh blood, slaughtered enemy
hung with strong feathers, guts of vipers
I'll knock down this old long house this weary war horse
these dry rituals called
how are you
I want that brown thigh bone
carved with eagle beak
that club  dig it out of the dirt
mal mama spirit stole my bones  put them in her burying jug
sealed me up in wax & ashes
I crack out
arrange my bones in their naming places
I take what I want
shaking my sacred hair.  dancing out taboo
I mark out the space I am
with knives
La Prieta (the dark one)

Gloria Anzaldúa

When I was born, Mamá grande Locha inspected my buttocks looking for the dark blotch, the sign of indio, or worse, of mulatto blood. My grandmother (Spanish, part German, the hint of royalty lying just beneath the surface of her fair skin, blue eyes and the coils of her once blond hair) would brag that her family was one of the first to settle in the range country of south Texas.

Too bad mihijita was morena, muy prieta, so dark and different from her own fair-skinned children. But she loved mihijita anyway. What I lacked in whiteness, I had in smartness. But it was too bad I was dark like an Indian.

"Don't go out in the sun," my mother would tell me when I wanted to play outside. "If you get any darker, they'll mistake you for an Indian. And don't get dirt on your clothes. You don't want people to say you're a dirty Mexican." It never dawned on her that, though sixth-generation American, we were still Mexican and that all Mexicans are part Indian. I passed my adolescence combatting her incessant orders to bathe my body, scrub the floors and cupboards, clean the windows and the walls.

And as we'd get into the back of the "patron's" truck that would take us to the fields, she'd ask, "Where's your gorra (sunbonnet)?" La gorra – rim held firm by slats of cardboard, neck flounce flowing over my shoulders – made me feel like a horse with blinders, a member of the French Foreign Legion, or a nun bowed down by her wimple.

One day in the middle of the cotton field, I threw the gorra away and donned a sombrero. Though it didn't keep out the Texas 110° sun as well as the bonnet, I could now see in all directions, feel the breeze, dry the sweat on my neck.

When I began writing this essay, nearly two years ago, the wind I was accustomed to suddenly turned into a hurricane. It opened the door to the old images that haunt me, the old ghosts and all the old wounds. Each image a sword that cuts through me, each word a test. Terrified, I shelved the rough draft of this essay for a year.

I was terrified because in this writing I must be hard on people of color who are the oppressed victims. I am still afraid because I will have to call us on a lot of shit like our own racism, our fear of women and sexuality. One of my biggest fears is that of betraying myself, of consuming myself with self-castigation, of not being able to unseat the guilt that has ridden on my back for years.
These my two hands
quick to slap my face
before others could slap it*

But above all, I am terrified of making my mother the villain in my
life rather than showing how she has been a victim. Will I be betraying
her in this essay for her early disloyalty to me?

With terror as my companion, I dip into my life and begin work on
myself. Where did it begin, the pain, the images that haunt me?

Images That Haunt Me

When I was three months old tiny pink spots began appearing on
my diaper. “She’s a throwback to the Eskimo,” the doctor told my
mother. “Eskimo girl children get their periods early.” At seven I had
budding breasts. My mother would wrap them in tight cotton girdles
so the kids at school would not think them strange beside their own
flat brown mole nipples. My mother would pin onto my panties a
folded piece of rag. "Keep your legs shut, Prieta." This, the deep dark
secret between us, her punishment for having fucked before the wed-
ing ceremony, my punishment for being born. And when she got
mad at me she would yell, "He vatallado mas contigo que con todos los
demas y no lo agradeces!" (I’ve taken more care with you than I have
with all the others and you're not even grateful.) My sister started
suspecting our secret – that there was something “wrong” with me.
How much can you hide from a sister you’ve slept with in the same
bed since infancy?

What my mother wanted in return for having birthed me and for
nurturing me was that I submit to her without rebellion. Was this a sur-
vival skill she was trying to teach me? She objected not so much to my
disobedience but to my questioning her right to demand obedience
from me. Mixed with this power struggle was her guilt at having borne
a child who was marked “con la sena,” thinking she had made me a vic-
tim of her sin. In her eyes and in the eyes of others I saw myself
reflected as “strange,” “abnormal,” “QUEER.” I saw no other reflection.
Helpless to change that image, I retreated into books and solitude and
kept away from others.

The whole time growing up I felt that I was not of this earth. An alien
from another planet – I’d been dropped on my mother's lap. But for
what purpose?

One day when I was about seven or eight, my father dropped on my
lap a 25¢ pocket western, the only type of book he could pick up at a

*From my poem, “The Woman Who Lived Forever.” All subsequent unacknowledged
poems will be from my own writings.
drugstore. The act of reading forever changed me. In the westerns I read, the house servants, the villains and the cantineras (prostitutes) were all Mexicans. But I knew that the first cowboys (vaqueros) were Mexicans, that in Texas we outnumbered the Anglos, that my grandmother's ranch lands had been ripped off by the greedy Anglo. Yet in the pages of these books, the Mexican and Indian were vermin. The racism I would later recognize in my school teachers and never be able to ignore again I found in that first western I read.

My father dying, his aorta bursting while he was driving, the truck turning over, his body thrown out, the truck falling on his face. Blood on the pavement. His death occurred just as I entered puberty. It irrevocably shattered the myth that there existed a male figure to look after me. How could my strong, good, beautiful god-like father be killed? How stupid and careless of god. What if chance and circumstance and accident ruled? I lost my father, god, and my innocence all in one bloody blow.

Every 24 days, raging fevers cooked my brain. Full flowing periods accompanied cramps, tonsillitis and 105° fevers. Every month a trip to the doctors. "It's all in your head," they would say. "When you get older and get married and have children the pain will stop." A monotonous litany from the men in white all through my teens.

The bloodshed on the highway had robbed my adolescence from me like the blood on my diaper had robbed childhood from me. And into my hands unknowingly I took the transformation of my own being.

Nobody's going to save you.
No one's going to cut you down
cut the thorns around you.
No one's going to storm
the castle walls nor
kiss awake your birth,
climb down your hair,
nor mount you
onto the white steed.

There is no one who
will feed the yearning.
Face it. You will have
to do, do it yourself.*

My father dead, my mother and I turned to each other. Hadn't we grown together? We were like sisters – she was 16 when she gave birth to me.

* From "Letting Go."
Though she loved me she would only show it covertly – in the tone of her voice, in a look. Not so with my brothers – there it was visible for all the world to see. They were male and surrogate husbands, legitimate receivers of her power. Her allegiance was and is to her male children, not to the female.

Seeing my mother turn to my brothers for protection, for guidance – a mock act. She and I both knew she wouldn’t be getting any from them. Like most men they didn’t have it to give, instead needed to get it from women. I resented the fact that it was OK for my brothers to touch and kiss and flirt with her, but not for my sister and me. Resenting the fact that physical intimacy between women was taboo, dirty.

Yet she could not discount me. “Machona – india ladina” (masculine – wild Indian), she would call me because I did not act like a nice little Chicanita is supposed to act: later, in the same breath she would praise and blame me, often for the same thing – being a tomboy and wearing boots, being unafraid of snakes or knives, showing my contempt for women’s roles, leaving home to go to college, not settling down and getting married, being a politica, siding with the Farmworkers. Yet, while she would try to correct my more aggressive moods, my mother was secretly proud of my “waywardness.” (Something she will never admit.) Proud that I’d worked myself through school. Secretly proud of my paintings, of my writing, though all the while complaining because I made no money out of it.

**Verguenza (Shame)**

. . . being afraid that my friends would see my momma, would know that she was loud – her voice penetrated every corner. Always when we came into a room everyone looked up. I didn’t want my friends to hear her brag about her children. I was afraid she would blurt out some secret, would criticize me in public. She always embarrassed me by telling everyone that I liked to lie in bed reading and wouldn’t help her with the housework.

. . . eating at school out of sacks, hiding our “lonches” papas con chorizo behind cupped hands and bowed heads, gobbling them up before the other kids could see. Guilt lay folded in the tortilla. The Anglo kids laughing – calling us “tortilleros,” the Mexican kids using it as a club with which to hit each other. My brothers, sister and I started bringing white bread sandwiches to school. After a while we stopped taking our lunch altogether.

There is no beauty in poverty, in my mother being able to give only one of her children lunch money. (We all agreed it should go to Nune, he was growing fast and was always hungry.) It was not very romantic
for my sister and me to wear the dresses and panties my mother made us out of flour sacks because she couldn't afford store-bought ones like the other mothers.

Well, I'm not ashamed of you anymore, Momma.

My heart, once bent and cracked, once ashamed of your China ways.
Ma, hear me now, tell me your story again and again.

[Nellie Wong, "From a Heart of Rice Straw,"
_Dreams of Harrison Railroad Park_]

It was not my mother's fault that we were poor and yet so much of my pain and shame has been with our both betraying each other. But my mother has always been there for me in spite of our differences and emotional gulfs. She has never stopped fighting; she is a survivor. Even now I can hear her arguing with my father over how to raise us, insisting that all decisions be made by both of them. I can hear her crying over the body of my dead father. She was 28, had had little schooling, was unskilled, yet her strength was greater than most men's, raising us single-handed.

After my father died, I worked in the fields every weekend and every summer, even when I was a student in college. (We only migrated once when I was seven, journeyed in the back of my father's red truck with two other families to the cotton fields of west Texas. When I missed a few weeks of school, my father decided this should not happen again.)

... the planes swooping down on us, the fifty or a hundred of us falling onto the ground, the cloud of insecticide lacerating our eyes, clogging our nostrils. Nor did the corporate farm owners care that there were no toilets in the wide open fields, no bushes to hide behind.

Over the years, the confines of farm and ranch life began to chafe. The traditional role of la mujer was a saddle I did not want to wear. The concepts "passive" and "dutiful" raked my skin like spurs and "marriage" and "children" set me to bucking faster than rattlesnakes or coyotes. I took to wearing boots and men's jeans and walking about with my head full of visions, hungry for more words and more words. Slowly I unbowed my head, refused my estate and began to challenge the way things were. But it's taken over thirty years to unlearn the belief instilled in me that white is better than brown — something that some people of color _never_ will unlearn. And it is only now that the hatred of myself, which I spent the greater part of my adolescence cultivating, is turning to love.
La Muerte, the Frozen Snow Queen

I dig a grave, bury my first love, a German Shepherd. Bury the second, third, and fourth dog. The last one retching in the backyard, going into convulsions from insecticide poisoning. I buried him beside the others, five mounds in a row crowned with crosses I'd fashioned from twigs.

No more pets, no more loves — I court death now.

. . . Two years ago on a fine November day in Yosemite Park, I fall on the floor with cramps, severe chills and shaking that go into spasms and near convulsions, then fevers so high my eyes feel like eggs frying. Twelve hours of this. I tell everyone "It's nothing, don't worry, I'm alright." The first four gynecologists advise a hysterectomy. The fifth, a woman, says wait.

. . . Last March my fibroids conspired with an intestinal tract infection and spawned watermelons in my uterus. The doctor played with his knife, La Chingada ripped open, raped with the white man's wand. My soul in one corner of the hospital ceiling, getting thinner and thinner telling me to clean up my shit, to release the fears and garbage from the past that are hanging me up. So I take La Muerte's scythe and cut away my arrogance and pride, the emotional depressions I indulge in, the head trips I do on myself and other people. With her scythe I cut the umbilical cord shackling me to the past and to friends and attitudes that drag me down. Strip away — all the way to the bone. Make myself utterly vulnerable.

. . . I can't sleep nights. The mugger said he would come and get me. There was a break in the county jail and I just know he is broken out and is coming to get me because I picked up a big rock and chased him, because I got help and caught him. How dare he drag me over rocks and twigs, the skin on my knees peeling, how dare he lay his hands on my throat, how dare he try to choke me to death, how dare he try to push me off the bridge to splatter my blood and bones on the rocks 20 feet below. His breath on my face, our eyes only inches apart, our bodies rolling on the ground in an embrace so intimate we could have been mistaken for lovers.

That night terror found me curled up in my bed. I couldn't stop trembling. For months terror came to me at night and never left me. And even now, seven years later, when I'm out in the street after dark and I hear running footsteps behind me, terror finds me again and again.

No more pets, no more loves.

. . . one of my lovers saying I was frigid when he couldn't bring me to orgasm.

. . . bringing home my Peruvian boyfriend and my mother saying she did not want her "Prieta" to have a "mojado" (wetback) for a lover.
my mother and brothers calling me puta when I told them I had lost my virginity and that I'd done it on purpose. My mother and brothers calling me jota (queer) when I told them my friends were gay men and lesbians.

...Randy saying, It's time you stopped being a nun, an ice queen afraid of living." But I did not want to be a snow queen regal with icy smiles and fingernails that ripped her prey ruthlessly. And yet, I knew my being distant, remote, a mountain sleeping under the snow, is what attracted him.

A woman lies buried under me,
interred for centuries, presumed dead.

A woman lies buried under me.
I hear her soft whisper
the rasp of her parchment skin
fighting the folds of her shroud.
Her eyes are pierced by needles
her eyelids, two fluttering moths.*

I am always surprised by the image that my white and non-Chicano friends have of me, surprised at how much they do not know me, at how I do not allow them to know me. They have substituted the negative picture the white culture has painted of my race with a highly romanticized, idealized image. "You're strong," my friends said, "a mountain of strength."

Though the power may be real, the mythic qualities attached to it keep others from dealing with me as a person and rob me of my being able to act out my other selves. Having this “power” doesn't exempt me from being prey in the streets nor does it make my scrambling to survive, to feed myself, easier. To cope with hurt and control my fears, I grew a thick skin. Oh, the many names of power – pride, arrogance, control. I am not the frozen snow queen but a flesh and blood woman with perhaps too loving a heart, one easily hurt.

I'm not invincible, I tell you. My skin's as fragile as a baby's I'm brittle bones and human, I tell you. I'm a broken arm.

You're a razor's edge, you tell me. Shock them shitless. Be the holocaust. Be the black Kali. Spit in their eye and never cry. Oh broken angel, throw away your cast, mend your wing. Be not a rock but a razor's edge and burn with falling. – Journal Entry, Summer Solstice, 1978.

*From “A Woman Lies Buried Under Me’’
Who Are My People

I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria, the facilitator, Gloria the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses. "Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement," say the members of my race. "Your allegiance is to the Third World," say my Black and Asian friends. "Your allegiance is to your gender, to women," say the feminists. Then there's my allegiance to the Gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there's my affinity to literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label.

You say my name is ambivalence? Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man's world, the women's, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web.

Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me. Years ago, a roommate of mine fighting for gay rights told MAYO, a Chicano organization, that she and the president were gay. They were ostracized. When they left, MAYO fell apart. They too, being forced to choose between the priorities of race, sexual preference, or gender.

In the streets of this gay mecca, San Francisco, a Black man at a bus stop yells "Hey Faggots, come suck my cock." Randy yells back "You goddamn nigger, I worked in the Civil Rights movement ten years so you could call me names." Guilt gagging in his throat with the word, nigger... a white woman waiting for the J-Church streetcar sees Randy and David kissing and says "You should be ashamed of yourselves. Two grown men—disgusting."

... Randy and David running into the house. The hair on the back of my neck rises, something in their voices triggers fear in me. Three Latino men in a car had chased them as they were walking home from work. "Gay boys, faggots," they yelled throwing a beer bottle. Getting out of their car, knife blades reflect the full moon... Randy and David hitting each other in the hall. Thuds on the wall—the heavy animal sounds.

... Randy pounding on my door one corner of his mouth bleeding, his glasses broken, blind without them, he crying "I'm going to kill him, I'm going to kill the son of a bitch."

The violence against us, the violence within us, aroused like a rabid dog. Adrenaline-filled bodies, we bring home the anger and the violence
we meet on the street and turn it against each other. We sic the rabid dog on each other and on ourselves. The black moods of alienation descend, the bridges we've extended out to each other crumble. We put the walls back up between us.

Once again it's faggot-hunting and queer-baiting time in the city. "And on your first anniversary of loving each other," I say to Randy, "and they had to be Latinos," feeling guilt when I look at David. Who is my brother's keeper, I wonder – knowing I have to be, we all have to be. We are all responsible. But who exactly are my people?

I identify as a woman. Whatever insults women insults me.
I identify as gay. Whoever insults gays insults me.
I identify as feminist. Whoever slurs feminism slurs me.

That which is insulted I take as part of me, but there is something too simple about this kind of thinking. Part of the dialectic is missing. What about what I do not identify as?

I have been terrified of writing this essay because I will have to own up to the fact that I do not exclude whites from the list of people I love, two of them happen to be gay males. For the politically correct stance we let color, class, and gender separate us from those who would be kindred spirits. So the walls grow higher, the gulfs between us wider, the silences more profound. There is an enormous contradiction in being a bridge.

**Dance To the Beat of Radical Colored Chic**

This task – to be a bridge, to be a fucking crossroads for goddess' sake.

During my stint in the Feminist Writers' Guild many white members would ask me why Third World women do not come to FWG meetings and readings. I should have answered, "Because their skins are not as thick as mine, because their fear of encountering racism is greater than mine. They don't enjoy being put down, ignored, not engaged in equal dialogue, being tokens. And, neither do I." Oh, I know, women of color are hot right now and hip. Our afro-rhythms and latin salsas, the beat of our drums is in. White women flock to our parties, dance to the beat of radical colored chic. They come to our readings, take up our cause. I have no objections to this. What I mind is the pseudo-liberal ones who suffer from the white women's burden. Like the monkey in the Sufi story, who upon seeing a fish in the water rushes to rescue it from drowning by carrying it up into the branches of a tree. She takes a missionary role. She attempts to talk for us – what a presumption! This act is a rape of our tongue and our acquiescence is a complicity to that rape. We women of color have to stop being modern medusas – throats cut, silenced into a mere hissing.
Where Do We Hang The Blame

The pull between what is and what should be.

Does the root of the sickness lie within ourselves or within our patriarchal institutions? Did our institutions birth and propagate themselves and are we merely their pawns? Do ideas originate in human minds or do they exist in a "no-osphere," a limbo space where ideas originate without our help? Where do we hang the blame for the sickness we see around us – around our own heads or around the throat of "capitalism," "socialism," "men," "white culture"?

If we do not create these institutions, we certainly perpetuate them through our inadvertent support. What lessons do we learn from the mugger?

Certainly racism is not just a white phenomenon. Whites are the top dogs and they shit on the rest of us every day of our lives. But casting stones is not the solution. Do we hand the oppressor/thug the rocks he throws at us? How often do we people of color place our necks on the chopping block? What are the ways we hold out our wrists to be shackled? Do we gag our own mouths with our "dios lo manda" resignation? How many times before the cock crows do we deny ourselves, shake off our dreams, and trample them into the sand? How many times do we fail to help one another up from the bottom of the stairs? How many times have we let someone else carry our crosses? How still do we stand to be crucified?

It is difficult for me to break free of the Chicano cultural bias into which I was born and raised, and the cultural bias of the Anglo culture that I was brainwashed into adopting. It is easier to repeat the racial patterns and attitudes, especially those of fear and prejudice, that we have inherited than to resist them.

Like a favorite old shoe that no longer fits we do not let go of our comfortable old selves so that the new self can be worn. We fear our power, fear our feminine selves, fear the strong woman within, especially the black Kali aspect, dark and awesome. Thus we pay homage not to the power inside us but to the power outside us, masculine power, external power.

I see Third World peoples and women not as oppressors but as accomplices to oppression by our unwittingly passing on to our children and our friends the oppressor's ideologies. I cannot discount the role I play as accomplice, that we all play as accomplices, for we are not screaming loud enough in protest.

The disease of powerlessness thrives in my body, not just out there in society. And just as the use of gloves, masks, and disinfectants fails
to kill this disease, government grants, equal rights opportunity programs, welfare, and foodstamps fail to uproot racism, sexism, and homophobia. And tokenism is not the answer. Sharing the pie is not going to work. I had a bite of it once and it almost poisoned me. With mutations of the virus such as these, one cannot isolate the virus and treat it. The whole organism is poisoned.

I stand behind whatever threatens our oppression. I stand behind whatever breaks us out of our bonds, short of killing and maiming. I stand with whatever and whoever breaks us out of our limited views and awakens our atrophied potentials.

How to turn away from the hellish journey that the disease has put me through, the alchemical nights of the soul. Torn limb from limb, knifed, mugged, beaten. My tongue (Spanish) ripped from my mouth, left voiceless. My name stolen from me. My bowels fucked with a surgeon’s knife, uterus and ovaries pitched into the trash. Castrated. Set apart from my own kind, isolated. My life-blood sucked out of me by my role as woman nurturer – the last form of cannibalism.

**El Mundo Zurdo (the Left-handed World)**

_The pull between what is and what should be._ I believe that by changing ourselves we change the world, that traveling El Mundo Zurdo path is the path of a two-way movement – a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society. And yet, I am confused as to how to accomplish this.

I can't discount the fact of the thousands that go to bed hungry every night. The thousands that do numbing shitwork eight hours a day each day of their lives. The thousands that get beaten and killed every day. The millions of women who have been burned at the stake, the millions who have been raped. Where is the justice to this?

I can't reconcile the sight of a battered child with the belief that we choose what happens to us, that we create our own world. _I cannot resolve_ this in myself. I don't know. I can only speculate, try to integrate the experiences that I've had or have been witness to and try to make some sense of why we do violence to each other. In short, I'm trying to create a religion not out there somewhere, but in my gut. I am trying to make peace between what has happened to me, what the world is, and what it should be.

"Growing up I felt that I was an alien from another planet dropped on my mother's lap. But for what purpose?"

*This section consists of notes “Toward a Construction of El Mundo Zurdo,” an essay in progress.*
The mixture of bloods and affinities, rather than confusing or unbalancing me, has forced me to achieve a kind of equilibrium. Both cultures deny me a place in their universe. Between them and among others, I build my own universe, *El Mundo Zurdo*. I belong to myself and not to any one people.

I walk the tightrope with ease and grace. I span abysses. Blindfolded in the blue air. The sword between my thighs, the blade warm with my flesh. I walk the rope— an acrobat in equipoise, expert at the Balancing Act.

The rational, the patriarchal, and the heterosexual have held sway and legal tender for too long. Third World women, lesbians, feminists, and feminist-oriented men of all colors are banding and bonding together to right that balance. Only together can we be a force. I see us as a network of kindred spirits, a kind of family.

We are the queer groups, the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions. But the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not fit, and because we do not fit we are a threat. Not all of us have the same oppressions, but we empathize and identify with each other's oppressions. We do not have the same ideology, nor do we derive similar solutions. Some of us are leftists, some of us practitioners of magic. Some of us are both. But these different affinities are not opposed to each other. In *El Mundo Zurdo* I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet.
A Black Feminist Statement

*Combahee River Collective*

We are a collective of Black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974. During that time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.

We will discuss four major topics in the paper that follows: (1) the genesis of contemporary black feminism; (2) what we believe, i.e., the specific province of our politics; (3) the problems in organizing Black feminists, including a brief herstory of our collective; and (4) Black feminist issues and practice.

1. The Genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism

Before looking at the recent development of Black feminism we would like to affirm that we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation. Black women's extremely negative relationship to the American political system (a system of white male rule) has always been determined by our membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes. As Angela Davis points out in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Black women have always embodied, if only in their physical manifestation, an adversary stance to white male rule and have actively resisted its inroads upon them and their communities in both dramatic and subtle ways. There have always been Black women activists – some known, like Sojourner...
Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E. W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, and thousands upon thousands unknown—who had a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggles unique. Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters.

A Black feminist presence has evolved most obviously in connection with the second wave of the American women's movement beginning in the late 1960s. Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start, but both outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation. In 1973 Black feminists, primarily located in New York, felt the necessity of forming a separate Black feminist group. This became the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO).

Black feminist politics also have an obvious connection to movements for Black liberation, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of us were active in those movements (civil rights, Black nationalism, the Black Panthers), and all of our lives were greatly affected and changed by their ideology, their goals, and the tactics used to achieve their goals. It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was antiracist, unlike those of white women, and antisexist, unlike those of Black and white men.

There is also undeniably a personal genesis for Black feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women's lives. Black feminists and many more Black women who do not define themselves as feminists have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence. As children we realized that we were different from boys and that we were treated differently. For example, we were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being “ladylike” and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people. As we grew older we became aware of the threat of physical and sexual abuse by men. However, we had no way of conceptualizing what was so apparent to us, what we knew was really happening.

Black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and most importantly, feminism, the political analysis and practice that we women use to struggle against our oppression. The fact that racial politics and indeed racism are pervasive factors in our lives did
not allow us, and still does not allow most Black women, to look more deeply into our own experiences and, from that sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression. Our development must also be tied to the contemporary economic and political position of Black people. The post World War II generation of Black youth was the first to be able to minimally partake of certain educational and employment options, previously closed completely to Black people. Although our economic position is still at the very bottom of the American capitalistic economy, a handful of us have been able to gain certain tools as a result of tokenism in education and employment which potentially enable us to more effectively fight our oppression.

A combined antiracist and antisexist position drew us together initially, and as we developed politically we addressed ourselves to hetero-sexism and economic oppression under capitalism.

2. What We Believe

Above all else, our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else’s but because of our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression as a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression. Merely naming the pejorative stereotypes attributed to Black women (e.g. mammy, matriarch, Sapphire, whore, bulldagger), let alone cataloguing the cruel, often murderous, treatment we receive, indicates how little value has been placed upon our lives during four centuries of bondage in the Western hemisphere. We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression. In the case of Black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves. We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.
We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by white men as a weapon of political repression.

Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism.

We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe the work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and antiracist revolution will guarantee our liberation. We have arrived at the necessity for developing an understanding of class relationships that takes into account the specific class position of Black women who are generally marginal in the labor force, while at this particular time some of us are temporarily viewed as doubly desirable tokens at white-collar and professional levels. We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives. Although we are in essential agreement with Marx's theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that his analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women.

A political contribution which we feel we have already made is the expansion of the feminist principle that the personal is political. In our consciousness-raising sessions, for example, we have in many ways gone beyond white women's revelations because we are dealing with the implications of race and class as well as sex. Even our Black women's style of talking/testifying in Black language about what we have experienced has a resonance that is both cultural and political. We have spent a great deal of energy delving into the cultural and
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experiential nature of our oppression out of necessity because none of these matters has ever been looked at before. No one before has ever examined the multilayered texture of Black women's lives. An example of this kind of revelation/conceptualization occurred at a meeting as we discussed the ways in which our early intellectual interests had been attacked by our peers, particularly Black males. We discovered that all of us, because we were “smart” had also been considered “ugly”, i.e., “smart-ugly.” “Smart-ugly” crystallized the way in which most of us had been forced to develop our intellects at great cost to our “social” lives. The sanctions in the Black and white communities against Black women thinkers is comparatively much higher than for white women, particularly ones from the educated middle and upper classes.

As we have already stated, we reject the stance of lesbian separatism because it is not a viable political analysis or strategy for us. It leaves out far too much and far too many people, particularly Black men, women, and children. We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society: what they support, how they act, and how they oppress. But we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se – i.e., their biological maleness – that makes them what they are. As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. We must also question whether lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race.

3. Problems in Organizing Black Feminists

During our years together as a Black feminist collective we have experienced success and defeat, joy and pain, victory and failure. We have found that it is very difficult to organize around Black feminist issues, difficult even to announce in certain contexts that we are Black feminists. We have tried to think about the reasons for our difficulties, particularly since the white women's movement continues to be strong and to grow in many directions. In this section we will discuss some of the general reasons for the organizing problems we face and also talk specifically about the stages in organizing our own collective.

The major source of difficulty in our political work is that we are not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions. We do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any one of these types of privilege have.
The psychological toll of being a Black woman and the difficulties this presents in reaching political consciousness and doing political work can never be underestimated. There is a very low value placed upon Black women's psyches in this society, which is both racist and sexist. As an early group member once said, "We are all damaged people merely by virtue of being Black women." We are dispossessed psychologically and on every other level, and yet we feel the necessity to struggle to change the condition of all Black women. In "A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," Michele Wallace arrives at this conclusion:

"We exist as women who are Black who are feminists, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle – because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the world."²

Wallace is pessimistic but realistic in her assessment of Black feminists' position, particularly in her allusion to the nearly classic isolation most of us face. We might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.

Feminism is, nevertheless, very threatening to the majority of Black people because it calls into question some of the most basic assumptions about our existence, i.e., that sex should be a determinant of power relationships. Here is the way male and female voices were defined in a Black nationalist pamphlet from the early 1970's.

"We understand that it is and has been traditional that the man is the head of the house. He is the leader of the house/nation because his knowledge of the world is broader, his awareness is greater, his understanding is fuller and his application of this information is wiser... After all, it is only reasonable that the man be the head of the house because he is able to defend and protect the development of his home... Women cannot do the same things as men – they are made by nature to function differently. Equality of men and women is something that cannot happen even in the abstract world. Men are not equal to other men, i.e. ability, experience or even understanding. The value of men and women can be seen as in the value of gold and silver – they are not equal but both have great value. We must realize that men and women are a complement to each other because there is no house/family without a man and his wife. Both are essential to the development of any life."³

The material conditions of most Black women would hardly lead them to upset both economic and sexual arrangements that seem to
represent some stability in their lives. Many Black women have a good understanding of both sexism and racism, but because of the everyday constrictions of their lives cannot risk struggling against them both.

The reaction of Black men to feminism has been notoriously negative. They are, of course, even more threatened than Black women by the possibility that Black feminists might organize around our own needs. They realize that they might not only lose valuable and hard-working allies in their struggles but that they might also be forced to change their habitually sexist ways of interacting with and oppressing Black women. Accusations that Black feminism divides the Black struggle are powerful deterrents to the growth of an autonomous Black women's movement.

Still, hundreds of women have been active at different times during the three-year existence of our group. And every Black woman who came, came out of a strongly-felt need for some level of possibility that did not previously exist in her life.

When we first started meeting early in 1974 after the NBFO first eastern regional conference, we did not have a strategy for organizing, or even a focus. We just wanted to see what we had. After a period of months of not meeting, we began to meet again late in the year and started doing an intense variety of consciousness-raising. The overwhelming feeling that we had is that after years and years we had finally found each other. Although we were not doing political work as a group, individuals continued their involvement in Lesbian politics, sterilization abuse and abortion rights work, Third World Women's International Women's Day activities, and support activity for the trials of Dr. Kenneth Edelin, Joan Little, and Inez Garcia. During our first summer, when membership had dropped off considerably, those of us remaining devoted serious discussion to the possibility of opening a refuge for battered women in a Black community. (There was no refuge in Boston at that time.) We also decided around that time to become an independent collective since we had serious disagreements with NBFO's bourgeois-feminist stance and their lack of a clear political focus.

We also were contacted at that time by socialist feminists, with whom we had worked on abortion rights activities, who wanted to encourage us to attend the National Socialist Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs. One of our members did attend and despite the narrowness of the ideology that was promoted at that particular conference, we became more aware of the need for us to understand our own economic situation and to make our own economic analysis.

In the fall, when some members returned, we experienced several months of comparative inactivity and internal disagreements which
were first conceptualized as a Lesbian-straight split but which were also the result of class and political differences. During the summer those of us who were still meeting had determined the need to do political work and to move beyond consciousness-raising and serving exclusively as an emotional support group. At the beginning of 1976, when some of the women who had not wanted to do political work and who also had voiced disagreements stopped attending of their own accord, we again looked for a focus. We decided at that time, with the addition of new members, to become a study group. We had always shared our reading with each other, and some of us had written papers on Black feminism for group discussion a few months before this decision was made. We began functioning as a study group and also began discussing the possibility of starting a Black feminist publication. We had a retreat in the late spring which provided a time for both political discussion and working out interpersonal issues. Currently we are planning to gather together a collection of Black feminist writing. We feel that it is absolutely essential to demonstrate the reality of our politics to other Black women and believe that we can do this through writing and distributing our work. The fact that individual Black feminists are living in isolation all over the country, that our own numbers are small, and that we have some skills in writing, printing, and publishing makes us want to carry out these kinds of projects as a means of organizing Black feminists as we continue to do political work in coalition with other groups.

4. Black Feminist Issues and Projects

During our time together we have identified and worked on many issues of particular relevance to Black women. The inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World and working people. We are of course particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex and class are simultaneous factors in oppression. We might, for example, become involved in workplace organizing at a factory that employs Third World women or picket a hospital that is cutting back on already inadequate health care to a Third World community, or set up a rape crisis center in a Black neighborhood. Organizing around welfare and daycare concerns might also be a focus. The work to be done and the countless issues that this work represents merely reflect the pervasiveness of our oppression.

Issues and projects that collective members have actually worked on are sterilization abuse, abortion rights, battered women, rape and health care. We have also done many workshops and educational on
Black feminism on college campuses, at women's conferences, and most recently for high school women.

One issue that is of major concern to us and that we have begun to publicly address is racism in the white women's movement. As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue.

In the practice of our politics we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many reactionary and destructive acts have been done in the name of achieving "correct" political goals. As feminists we do not want to mess over people in the name of politics. We believe in collective process and a nonhierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society. We are committed to a continual examination of our politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice. In her introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful* Robin Morgan writes:

"I haven't the faintest notion what possible revolutionary role white heterosexual men could fulfill, since they are the very embodiment of reactionary-vested-interest-power."

As Black feminists and Lesbians we know that we have a very definite revolutionary task to perform and we are ready for the lifetime of work and struggle before us.

**Endnotes**

1 This statement is dated April 1977.


3 Mumininas of Committee for Unified Newark, Mwanamke Mwananchi (The Nationalist Woman), Newark, N.J., © 1971, pp. 4-5.

The Welder
Cherríe Moraga

I am a welder.
Not an alchemist.
I am interested in the blend
of common elements to make
a common thing.

No magic here.
Only the heat of my desire to fuse
what I already know
exists. Is possible.

We plead to each other,
*we all come from the same rock*
*we all come from the same rock*
ignoring the fact that we bend
at different temperatures
that each of us is malleable
up to a point.

Yes, fusion *is* possible
but only if things get hot enough –
all else is temporary adhesion,
patching up.

It is the intimacy of steel melting
into steel, the fire of our individual
passion to take hold of ourselves
that makes sculpture of our lives,
builds buildings.

And I am not talking about skyscrapers,
merely structures that can support us
without fear
of trembling.
For too long a time
the heat of my heavy hands
has been smoldering
in the pockets of other
people's business –
they need oxygen to make fire.

I am now
coming up for air.
Yes, I am
picking up the torch.

I am the welder.
I understand the capacity of heat
to change the shape of things.
I am suited to work
within the realm of sparks
out of control.

I am the welder.
I am taking the power
into my own hands.
O.K. Momma, Who the Hell Am I?: an Interview with Luisah Teish
Gloria Anzaldúa

Part One: “There was this rumbling in the background…”

G: Teish, in Numerology you can derive what your mission or life path is by adding the day of your birth, the month and the year and reducing it to a single digit number. The number corresponds with a Tarot card. According to this system you are a 19-10 and 1, the “genius.” What do you see as your task in this life and how did you find that out?

T: I've had a series of experiences that point the way. It's as if I was given a road map, and started travelling at different points. There is a travel consultant that meets me and says okay, now you go this way. The big vision, which I call my reformation, happened in the Fall 1974. I was in a terrible situation. I was coming out of having been deeply steeped in the Black Power movement. I had spent since 1970 quite a bit of time trying to ignore feminist teachings. There was this rumbling in the background saying that women ought to consider the position of women. I'm here screaming at the top of my lungs that Black people have to be free, you see. And over here I'm hearing people saying women have to be free too; there's a certain kind of oppression women suffer. But because it was primarily white women in the movement and white women who were vocalizing at the time, for a while I went along with the idea that, well, what they're talking about is only relevant to white women. At the same time, in my personal life I was being mistreated by people who claim to be about the fight for freedom. That contradiction was staring me in my face. My inner self was telling me, “You have marched, you have demonstrated, and you have fought for freedom, and Malcolm said 'freedom by any means necessary.'

And yet I'm taking certain kinds of crap off of my brothers, you know. Why doesn't this apply clean across the board? And it put me in a position where I felt literally crippled. I felt like I had nowhere to turn and nothing really to do. Other things that had happened in my life – I was broke, underemployed, pregnant. I had had a child that died, went through a whole number of things and came to the position that if I didn't have the right to fight to create a world that I could live in, if I could not have the right to fight absolutely everybody for the kind of world that I could live in – then I wouldn't live. I wouldn't live in a world where I would have to pretend to be inferior so that some
man would look superior. I wouldn't live where somebody got a better break than me only because their skin was lighter.

But at the same time I didn't feel that I had enough power to really fight it. So I became suicidal. At the time I was taking Valium at the suggestion of a gynecologist who had a terrible reputation. You go in with a vaginal infection and they give you Valium, you know what I mean? And I'm on these Valiums and I'm saying I'm not going to live this kind of life, and I look around and I decided that I'm going to leave here. I lay down to die and my soul raised up out of my chest and sits up on the ceiling. She has a long debate with me about why am I trying to check out of here. And I tell her why I'm trying to check out and she says 'no, no, no, no, you are going to live and you are going to fight, and I'm going to show you what you are going to do.'

I lay there and here comes this parade of visions. Sometimes it was pictures, sometimes it was words – bold white letters traced in black. And she was telling me to go fight. Essentially, she was telling me to fight for my right to be a free woman. She was telling me to fight for my right to create beauty in the way that I see it. You know, when you're in the theatre there's always a struggle with people's art being junk and Hollywood and Broadway being the place to get to. She made it clear for me that my work had to have substance. There's no sense in me trying to play Miss Cupie Doll; I'm not one of the June Taylor dancers. I am the person who is going to work with the folk movement. Part of my assignment is legitimizing, bringing to life, the value of folk knowledge. And so I see myself using my art for the rest of my life, using my art to illuminate the culture of the common people.

Just about everything that I have done since 1973 has been the outgrowth of this spiritual prompting. Once I accepted my role – that I am an important person with a purpose – I have listened to that still small voice and she says things to me. You must always confront that which you fear. You gain strength by that, you see. And there's a bit of magic here.

I went through a period of time when I seriously thought I was going to lose my mind. That was because I was accepting, not what my goddess said my role was, but what other people said my role ought to be. Putting on false clothes. She said take them off. And there I was naked and I said 'O.K., Momma, who the hell am I?' You know? And she says 'you're a person who has been afraid of going crazy. You should do something about that.' So the natural thing you must do is that anything you want to be spared of, you must work toward diminishing the possibility of it happening to you. And if it can happen to somebody else, it can happen to you, you know. So I can't afford to just walk around worried that I individually am going to be locked up for no rea-
son. I have to make sure that nobody can be locked up for no reason. You have to eliminate the fear not only in yourself but the real basis for that fear.

So consequently, my work with the battered women shelters and my work with rape are basically an attempt to protect myself. It's about my own survival instinct and understanding that my destiny is infinitely tied with that of everybody else. You know there's a reason why we're here together on this same planet at this point in time.

Part Two: "I see the reemergence of the women's movement as the manifestations of the desires of the goddess energy."

T: The thing that I'm feeling very intuitively about is that something important is going on at this point in time, not only in my life but in the lives of women in general and in the life of writing. There are times when I look at what human history has been and I say Oh, OK there have always been people like us who get a momentum started and then it dies down and nothing becomes of it. And it's a hundred years or so before those thoughts are resurrected. But there's a little voice in my ears that insists that I continue. It insists that something really important is happening here, something that is going to have an effect here for years. Something that is going to make a significant change in the world.

G: Si, I see it in terms of the left handed world coming into being. For centuries now, ever since the industrial age or maybe even before, it has always been a world of the intellect, reasoning, the machine. Here women were stuck with having tremendous powers of intuition experiencing other levels of reality and other realities yet they had to sit on it because men would say, well, you're crazy. All of a sudden there's a reemergence of the intuitive energies — and they are very powerful. And if you apply them in your life on the personal and political plane then that gives you a tremendous amount of energy — it's almost like a volcano erupting. We have yet to learn how to control that power. And we're scared of it.

T: I think too that it's part of the balance that always goes on in nature. It's like technology, which is purely masculine, material, and all about aggressive-conquering power, has taken itself to the point of sleeping on the self-destruct button and now it's as if the mother goddess is coming in and saying, "Wait a minute son, hold it boy. Now there are other things; there is life. I've allowed you to play with your death machines long enough. Now be quiet, cool down, I have to clean the situation up." And I definitely see the reemergence of the women's movement as the manifestations of the desires of the goddess energy.

G: What part does feminist spirituality have in taking back our own power?
T: It is slowly doing a lot. Feminist spirituality had a real problem because most revolutionary circles have considered spirituality a no-no area. Because the male god and the institutionalized church has been so counter-revolutionary, there has been the temptation to say that there is nothing but the material world, and this is all we should deal with. Okay? So slowly but surely the people who are in tune with both the need for revolution and understanding of the spiritual world are beginning to say, "Hey, these worlds are not diametrically opposed to each other. Look, these two can work together." But now we are tapping our powers in self-defense. We are using our power in self-defense. For example if you look in Z. Budapest's book, *The Book of Lights and Shadows* you will see a charm for how to combat a racist. We use our spiritual power now to understand that this man does not have the right to overpower me, and because I know that this is right, I'm calling on that force to stand up to him. When we reclaim women's blood we increase our power.

Every time a sister learns that she is not born to live in a world of fear, to be dominated, every time a sister sits down with a glass of water in front of her and understands that she is intimately tied to water and that all life is tied to water she is gradually building an inner strength that gives her armour to go out and fight the world.

For centuries we heard woman is no good, we have been beat down, we have been made lethal, we have had to recycle our strength in other ways. But now, because we have a spiritual understanding that this myth is bull, we have the nerve to test our strength. In testing it we will find out what it is, how much of it we have, and how much we can do with it. *See, we're coming out of the shadow.*

We have to use our strength to break the chain. And there are concrete, very very concrete things we can do. Like I teach a lot of wealth charms because a lot of the women who come to my workshops are working class women who have no money, you know. So yes, we do a lot of charms to pull money out of the rich and have it rechanneled into our hands. We do a lot of healing on each other so I can keep my sister out of the hands of that nice happy man over there. It's very small, but we have to recapture what is going to keep us alive. Because we have to keep alive.

If you take medicine for example, the man is always putting down herbal remedies because they're too available to everybody. Because if you find out you can heal yourself on your own, without him, he's out of the job. So you've got to come to him to give him a chance to run his Frankenstein experiments on you, you see. It's like that Indian proverb that if you give a man a fish, he eats for a day. If you teach the
man to fish he eats forever. They're into "Here, here little momma, big
daddy's gonna do this for you, take a crumb here (snap), take a crumb
there." And I'm saying, I'm the one that baked the bread, baby. You
can't do that no more.

G: You have spoken many times about the different charms you use for
healing. Would you give an example of each one of those?

T: Sure. It's really good that you asked because right now I'm putting
together notes for a book that I want to do on women's spirituality*
that would be a combination of my own personal experiences and
certain historical information, but mostly a book of charms. When I
came into this I would not give anybody a charm that I had not experi-
enced with myself. That's something you don't get from your local
doctor. He uses a rat and then transposes it to a human.

Two charms that I think are especially important to women are
those involving water and those involving earth. Fire and light are
important, but water and earth charms seem to work very very fast.
It's interesting that most of my charms require cooperation from one
other person.

Let us say that we have a situation where we have two women who
find themselves in dire, dire poverty, you know. We can put the
principle of water to work in a charm called "pouring the money." That
is, you know that you are going to run out of money soon, you know
what's coming. Each day, for seven days, you come into your house
and you take whatever small change you have, and you put it into a
bowl. Preferably you should have two bowls, a white bowl and a
green bowl. And then with the new moon, especially a new moon in
an earth sign or a water sign is best, you sit down with the money
you've saved, you sit down with a candle, green or white, and you take
something that is the symbol of wealth for you. Sometimes I use one of
the cards from the Tarot deck, other times I will use a dollar bill, other
times I will use a picture of the thing I want to buy. If it's groceries I put
pictures of food there, if it's clothes I use pictures of the pair of shoes I'd
like to buy. You put water in the bowl with the money, and you pour
the water and the money into one bowl and you state what you need.
The other woman pours the money into the other bowl and she states
what she needs. You continue to do this, you see, for some time
depending on how much you need.

One night I did it with a sister in LA from sunset to sunrise, when the
moon was no longer visible. And in the period of time between the
new moon and the full moon several very interesting things

*The book in progress is Working the Mother.
happened. She got a check from these people she used to work for. She hadn't worked for them in a year, their bookkeeper looked on the books and decided that they hadn't sent her some back pay. They sent it to her, right? I was a waitress at a health food restaurant at the time, and the other waitress decided that she wanted some vacation so I got to work her hours – the tips increased, right? And that was a small amount of money to take us out of the starving stage and put us back on our feet. That's a small one. It depends on how much energy you put into it and what you need it for. It's important that you know what you need it for because the spirit deals in need.

But we live in a world where you think I gotta have so many things, dollars in my hand and that is just not true, you know. The energy that is out there that created the universe gave us everything we need. If we treated the earth properly there would be enough for everybody to eat. You know that bullshit about over-population is a crock. A mis-distribution, you know.

Another earth charm that I really like is paralleling your growth with that of a plant. If I'm getting ready to write a book, the first day that I lay the first page out, I go out to get either a seedling or a baby plant. I put it near that place where I'm working with the water. I feed the plant and I work page two. I clip the plant today and I work page three. I spray the plant today and I work page four. So that there is a direct relationship between my growth and the growth of that plant.

G:  But that's scary because what if the plant starts dying?

T:  If the plant starts dying then you have to reconsider the way you're operating, you see. And we do a lot of stuff around fear. In reality the two basic emotions are fear and love and everything else is an aspect of one of those. Fear has been drummed into us. Fear has been drummed into us like nothing else. If you don't go ask this expert then you're supposed to be afraid. Once you go see the infallible expert nothing can go wrong anymore. A lot of times messages are coming through to us and we receive them with fear because we've been trained to be fearful and that fear is the thing that ruins the charm. My plant dying would be for me the sign that I've come to a point of stagnation, you know. I've got to go back to the root of the problem. I've got to take the plant out of its pot, look at it, see what is not being done. I've got to lay that book down and read what is missing. And you can set things up that way so that it is parallel. Overcoming certain fears is so easy. It amazed me when I found out how to do it.

It's really interesting that right now I'm speaking with a woman who is in her early thirties and is having her first sexual experience. And some of the things that she worries about I forgot that I used to worry
about because I've gone through enough of a process of cleaning myself — out of old guilt and false responsibility and false senses of oppression. Speaking with her I find that I am going to have to put her through the same thing that I've been through.

You are a woman, you are human, you have the right to be sexual, you have the right to be sexual with whoever you see fit to be sexual with. You know, the false sense of morality has been designed, if you look at it, to keeping women's power in check. That comes through real clear on the psychic level. Look at all the taboos around women's blood. Women's blood contains the seed of new life. That is the power of the creator. Yet you travel from circle to circle and they tell you women's blood is this evil thing. Then life itself has to be an evil thing. And I just feel that patriarchy has made the god concept so lopsided, that man is all positive and woman is all negative and that is bullshit, you know. Day cannot be day without night.

G: What do you think men hold against women most?

T: Well, specifically, the question of women's blood. It's the one thing we have that they don't. Now, the uterus, the vaginal blood, the power of creation, the nurturing power that we have, the sustaining power that we have is something that they don't have. And when I look into the folklore of Louisiana, when I look into the charms and the spells I find that the charms involving women's blood are the charms designed to overpower men. That's how women's blood was used.

G: Even the love potions?

T: Yeah, it's for bending his will. You use women's blood to bend man's will. Of course there is a great taboo against it. As long as they (men) are involved. That's like Superman outlawing Kryptonite; of course he will.

G: Teish, I always felt when I was growing up that women had the power, that women were strong, that women were the nurturers, and they pretended that they didn't have it, that the men did; it was a conspiracy. Men don't have it. So here is a woman using rituals and charms to bend men's power, when actually she could be straightening up her own.

T: We have now become victims of our own benevolence. We see certain weaknesses. We are accustomed to mothering, raising, nurturing, looking for potential, speeding the imagination with children. We have seen the child in men and nurtured it in the same way. So now you have the son growing up thinking that he can slap the mother who nursed him. I see that happen a number of times. Before I liberated myself it was part of my culture. You go out to dinner and the man didn't have enough money you slip it under the table so it looks like he paid for it. You learn how to suggest subtly that
this or that be done and then when he follows your advice and it works
you praise him for having such a wonderful idea. Bull. Bull. The whole hog. I'm not doing that anymore. The goddess is not doing that
anymore. The trial is coming to an end. The grace period is slowly
drawing to a close. The queen is about to move on the chess board.
G:  *It's about time.*
T:  Now I'm saying that the period where the goddess allows the little
boy, allows her son to go rampaging through the universe, is coming to
a close. She's saying, "Johnny, you've misbehaved long enough. Now
mother's going to whip you."
G:  *Another thing I want to ask you is what kind of world do you want to
live in and when do you see this kind of world existing on the physical plane?*
T:  Well, it's not in my lifetime. I know that. That's the sad thing about
it. It is not in my lifetime. I'm into a world where people are judged by
the wealth of their soul, not their pockets. You know what I mean? I
want each person to have what they've earned by *right of consciousness*,
you see. The basis of it is what you can conceive mentally –
the infinite power will give you the substance to create it, you see.
There has been entirely too much rip off for me. There have been too
many people who have tilled the soil and not eaten the fruit. There have
been too many people that have written the poems and not gotten the
praise. There have been too many people that have created the
invention and then been used by the machine. That has to stop.
I am shooting for a world where everybody eats, where everybody
has decent housing, where everybody has their basic necessities and
the freedom to be who they are. The freedom to express the spirit that
is inside of them. What is all this bowing and scraping to these various
two legged authorities, you know? The only person I'm willing to bow
to is the spirit. And in my faith you don't scrape in front of them, see.

Our fates are tied. We have this strange notion on this planet that our
fates are *not* tied. If it were not so we would not be here together. It's
that simple. But there's this refusal to understand, so we create these
false classes. I'm richer than she is. I'm a different color than that one.
I'm taller than that one. That's all bull. We all eat and shit in the same
manner. 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.*
G:  *That would be a beautiful world. I kind of think that we will see that
kind of world in our lifetime. Or at least its beginnings. Otherwise it's going*
to be the end of us because we're poisoning ourselves and our world pretty fast.

T: Yeah. That's another job that women spiritualists are taking over. We seem to realize, because of our intimate connection with earth, that she is sending us the message. She's not going to tolerate any more of that. I don't know what the geologists think, they may have their theories of air getting trapped under the earth and that's why St. Helens was blowing. The woman is blowing to tell you that *she is mad* and it's that simple.

G: *According to the Mayan calendar we are in El Quinto Sol (The Fifth World Sun) and that this world will end by earthquake and fire on Dec. 24, 2011. I guess it parallels the end of the Piscean Age and the beginning of the Aquarian. The sixth sun, which the Mayans call Consciousness, will follow the fifth one.*

T: I believe it. It's really, really obvious when the water is messed up and the air is messed up and the mountain begins to rumble, that is a real indication: "Johnny, put your toy down; pay attention to your health; momma's about to explode." But they won't listen because they're blinded by greed. They are blinded by this grabby, grabby . . .

G: And they're very insecure, peeny little beings, they're very scared they're going to lose their power.

T: Exactly. And they ignore the one who is power. Where would their power be if earth decides she's had it?

**Part Three: Smashing the Myth**

G: *What are the particular barriers or struggles involved in Third World Women's spirituality?*

T: You have to understand that first and foremost, the greater part of our problem as Third World people is that for a long time we internalized a lot that we *are nobody with nothing*. You know, God is white therefore the all-powerful is on the side of the one who is in power.

I remember quite some years ago when I was in St. Louis I was doing a lot of demonstrating and stuff. There was this old Black woman I was talking to and trying to get her to go to a demonstration with me, you know. It was down by the old courthouse by the St. Louis arch and she said to me, she said, "You know, there's a chopping block in there where they used to sell niggers." She said, "Now if you go down there and take a look you will see that the blood is still on that chopping block. It's stained in the wood, you know. You can't be going down and telling these white folks what to do." I said, "Oh yes, I can. I have some power, they have to hear me. I'm not going to just lay down and die,
dada dada dada." And she said to me, "Chile, don't you know god suffered the Indians to die so that the white men could have this land." And I blew my stack. Because there it was right there, you know.

G: **Believing in the white man's conditioning, in their shit.**

T: **My gods tell me that things are not that absolute, that there is always a struggle of power going on and that I must struggle for this power.**

The basic problem that we have had was believing somebody else's story about us – what we can and cannot do, who we can and cannot be. As Third World people we needed it more than anybody because we have been kept down for so long and this is the thing that's so hard for people to accept. Most Third World people on the surface seem to have accepted the rigidity of Christianity, yet certain true things still survive. And what we've got to do is feed that which has survived, build on that which has survived till our gods and goddesses speak. "Oh, yes, my children are strong now, they are ready now. Give them a total green light. Let's go, ya'll." You know the baby goes from crawling to walking. We've come out of an infancy of oppression into our own power because there's enough archeological evidence that everybody at one point or another had a great civilization. Every people alive had a great civilization until this man came along whose environment tricked him, you know. It was the snow, I feel, that was responsible for the unusual aggression of the Europeans and their chance encounter with gunpowder, you see, from the East. Put those two things together and here comes this big conquering hero.

G: **And also fear I think, fear had a great deal to do with it, fear of not surviving made him more aggressive. Made him take up weapons for defense, become cold, reasoning.**

When you said that that which has survived through the ages comes from women's power and spirituality, I was thinking of La Virgen de Guadalupe that my Mamá grande Ramona had on her altar. When the Spaniards took over Mexico they instituted Catholicism, but a lot of my people kept some of the old gods and goddesses by integrating them into the Christian ones. So now La Virgen de Guadalupe contains within her Tonatin, the Aztec creation goddess. Mexicans attach more power to her than they do to the patriarchal god and his long-suffering son.

T: **Yeah. I came into religion in the sixties. We were looking for the history. We were looking for the rhyme and reason behind our struggle. How did things get turned around? How can we reclaim our blackness? And so when you look at what has come down we immediately see the militant aspect, we see this is something that has survived through the threat of death. The whole Black power move-**
ment was a very sexist movement, you know, here the main theme was reinstating the Black man, OK. The problem with the Black men, the reason that they couldn't get jobs, and this is another piece of bullshit, was because Black women were too strong. That she was the castrator and that that was what was wrong with us.

G:  What was wrong with you was that you were too strong?

T:  I was too strong. I was not a woman, dada dada da. So I came into the movement, trying to be the perfect African woman. In the process I find out there used to be a cult of women in Africa who were warriors, you know, who cut a man's penis and stuck it in his mouth as a mark that they had done this. I find out that the major god was an androgynous god. I learn that the lightning bolt originally belonged to a female deity. I start learning things that whisper of very strong women, you know. I was very confused by it all for awhile, until I accepted a personal message from her. She was telling me that the sexism I was experiencing in the movement religion should not be tolerated anymore and she was laying the responsibility on me to put an end to it. So from there, I had to confront, finally, the "men's room." When I talk about the "men's room," I mean a room in this collective spiritual household where women were not allowed to go, because according to the males we would be struck by lightning if we went in there. So one day I just on my own decided I'm going to walk in there and disprove this myth. I was somewhat scared that hey I would get struck by lightning until I had a dream that said, you know, go. I want you to go, go, go, go. And finally, if you don't go you'll be sorry. So very nervously I said, "OK momma, this is what you told me to do. I'm a good chile. Please stop the thunder god from hitting me. Please, please momma, I'm depending on you" and I walk on in there and smash a myth.
Brownness*

Andrea Canaan

I am brown and I have experienced life as a brown person. Outwardly I have traversed with ease the salons of the white rich, the bayous and lakes of cajun South Louisiana, the hot-white racism of Shreveport, the folksy back-slapping, peculiar institutions of Natchez, the friendly invisible oppression of Bay St. Louis and Ocean Springs, the humid, lazy apathy of New Orleans. With soul intact, identity sure, sense of humaness unchained by myth and ignorance, I have lived my years inside brown skin that didn't show the bruises, the wounds, to anyone.

Since before I can remember, brownness was always compared to whiteness in terms that were ultimately degrading for brownness. Lazy, shiftless, poor, non-human, dirty, abusive, ignorant, uncultured, uneducated, were used to convey conscious and unconscious messages that brown was not a good thing to be and the ultimate model of things right and good was white. Yes, white people called me nigger, forced me to drink from separate fountains, would not allow me to sit in the front of the bus. This message, however, was first and most transmitted by brown. There was an all powerful and real knowledge, like the pungent smell of chitterlings cooking on a rainy winter day, that no matter how good, how clean, how pious the brown, they could not equal or reflect the ultimate good and right-white.

Now understand, no brown person acknowledged feeling this way or accepted responsibility for conveying the message. Everyone joked, laughed, and put down white. We put up and revered brown. For all the up brown and down white a black comedy twisted and reversed the jokes, the laughs, and the put downs back into brown. We welcomed this black comedy routine. We made its scenes our rituals. We claimed the right of self-defacement. We remained degraded inside ourselves and we continued to empower others to control us.

Don't mistake me, brown is not The Oppressor but the victim. But part of our victimization is self-oppression. Our adaptations were creative, the end goal, survival. This peculiar system of degrading self

*While I know and identify black, my first knowing of myself before I knew much about skin color and its effects was as a brown baby girl looking in the mirror of my mother's face. Brown is my color, the very shade of which colors my existence both inside the black community and outside of it.
so that outsiders won't hurt us so much has its base in remembered servitude, helplessness and powerlessness combined with the pride and hope that comes from surviving, mixed with the shame of surviving, the humiliation of servitude, and the rage of being considered non-human. The system's apex is the reality that while adapting to white language, dress, worship, thought and social interaction we had not gained social acceptance. Further, while sacrificing, working, praying, singing, fighting, and dying for and with white, we had not gained equality, economic security, or freedom. What we had gained was an insidious terrifying, self-negating desire – even need – to be white.

By the time I was a woman, I had all the necessary external survival skills needed, supposedly, to protect me from the rejection and humiliation projected onto me by white media, government, church, and social institutions. I had unending strength, ever-growing intellect, a heart as big as the heavens and earth, a soul more forgiving than gods themselves, and I accepted total responsibility for myself, my own oppressed state, the oppression of the brown man, and the sin of being both brown and woman. This super-woman veneer protected me from the external world much of the time. This super-woman veneer also warded off internal self-reflection needed to assess if indeed I was strong enough to carry such heavy burdens. The ever-growing intellect was an additional burden because the ability to think allows me to look at, if not truly see, options and truth. The open heart and forgiving soul stifled my rightful indignation, gagged my rage, and forced my fears, my needs, my rage, my joys, my accomplishments, inward. The acceptance of total responsibility, real, concrete, or abstract, for myself and others became my ultimate strait jacket, the last and strongest barrier to self. The guilt alone associated with such responsibility should have broken the backs of brown women long ago. The isolation is deafening and support is non-existent. The inherent conflicts of interests of parents, children, husbands, lovers, church, state, and self cry out like sound and fury and we think ourselves crazed because there is a constant buzz in our ears. In this state I began to see, as through a lifting mist, the enemies of self.

Racial memory coursed through my veins. Memories of being snatched away by friend and stranger, stuffed into vessels that traversed vast spaces of water, chained, whipped, branded, hunted and sold by over-lapping generational systems of degradation that were supported by male gods, male governments, male-controlled social institutions across the globe, across the centuries. I was sure that the ultimate evil was the white male, and I became afraid of him. It was a survival fear of being fooled by bright promises, hope-laden
movement songs, loop-holed constitutional amendments and proclamations. Afraid of being enslaved again, afraid of being annihilated this time.

My brown woman community counted our most dangerous enemy as the white woman. Didn't she seduce brown men and cry rape? Didn't her status forever decree our children born out of forced rape by her brothers, sons, husbands, and fathers illegitimate and create a caste system within brown that made light brown better than dark brown and her delicate white, best? Doesn't the hand that rocks the cradle rule the world? Is she not responsible for the actions and sins of her men? Did not her essential evil cause the downfall of her men? Is she not cloaked in sexual mystery so that our brown men cannot resist her? Does she not compete with us for brown men, the centers of our lives, as well as white men, our benevolent, if somewhat distracted and crabby, fathers? Does she not force us to use our bodies as a commodity in the white marketplace in order to feed our babies in order to feed our men?

The mist began to clear. I could no longer justify viewing the white woman as the personification of the evil done to us, the dangerous enemy. I began to look at the things brown women faced with a watchful eye for a power base. What is rape but power? What is racism but power? What is poverty but power? What is sexism but power? What is oppression but power? What is deception but power? What is fear but power? I began to see the enemy as those forces within me that allowed others to control me and those who empowered or sought to empower themselves to control me.

I could see my enemy as my brownness, my community, my mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers. This is logical, given my patterns of self oppression. I could isolate myself from the brown community, claiming my right to be me without concern for our growth and development as a whole. I would, however, be cutting off an essential part of my development to nurture another. I would simply be acknowledging the oppression of my brownness and not that of my femaleness. They are both essential and important, however. The fact is I am brown and female, and my growth and development are tied to the entire community. I must nurture and develop brown self, woman, man, and child. I must address the issues of my own oppression and survival. When I separate them, isolate them, and ignore them, I separate, isolate, and ignore myself. I am a unit. A part of brownness. My health, energy, intellect, and talent are resources of my community. When I fall ill my community is weakened. When my community is invaded by disease I am affected, even killed. I must
Andrea Canaan

work both as an individual and as a part of my community in order to survive in order for my community to survive.

It would be very easy to identify white women as my enemy. As long as I do, however, I accept my devalued, oppressed, unliberated woman state. We do not trust her because she is white. We do not seek to know her because we would be betraying our brownness, collaborating with the enemy, whiteness. We do not embrace her because she is woman. And women, we remain believing, are evil beings who started this entire mess in the garden of eden. The problem here is that as we remain isolated and unknowing of woman, any woman, we continue to accept the basis for a part of our oppression. As we trade distrust and irresponsibility we trade off our liberation. It's as if we think liberation a fixed quantity, that there is only so much to go around. That an individual or community is liberated at the expense of another. When we view liberation as a scarce resource, something only a precious few of us can have, we stifle our potential, our creativity, our genius for living, learning and growing.

It is hardest to see my enemy as brown men yet in order to see myself clearly I must face the closest threat to my survival for it is he who most rapes me, batters me, devalues my strength, will not allow my weakness. He is closest to me for he is my father, my brother, my son, my man, my lover. I love him, I glory in his maleness and agonize in his degradation. I must refuse to allow him to oppress me while I must be concerned for his survival. This major conflict of interest is basic to brown oppression. Divide and conquer. Choose who is more worthy of liberation. I refuse to play this diabolical self destructive game. I refuse to play out the super-woman image as I refuse to believe the powerless, weak, politically ineffective, super-stud image of the brown man. We are both strong and weak, oppressed and oppressor of each, as well as by the white super culture. Our individual and collective development as men and women will not jeopardize but enhance our liberation. The brown man is not my enemy. Nor I his, but we must recognize that we both contribute to each other's oppression.

It would be easiest of all to see the white male as the enemy. He has the giant share of power. He controls our governments, resources, social institutions, language, education. Essentially he controls the world. To see him as the evil all-powerful enemy, however, forces me to accept little responsibility for my own oppression. It negates my power to change my status. When I accept white male power as inevitable and not within my control, I accept my impotence to acquire power and control for myself, through and for my brown community,
through and for my world community. To give to brown, white, men, women, etc., the status of all-powerful is to cloak them in mystery and power. We must focus on those things within us that allow others to control us, know those who would empower themselves to control us and understand that the forces can be brown male or female, white male or female, as well as our selves. We must demystify and know more in-depth the world around and in us in order to distinguish friend from foe rather than accepting prefabricated enemies.

The enemy is brownness and whiteness, maleness and femaleness. The enemy is our urgent need to stereotype and close off people, places, and events into isolated categories. Hatred, distrust, irresponsibility, unloving, classism, sexism, and racism, in their myriad forms, cloud our vision and isolate us. This closed and limited view blocks women embracing women, brown women embracing brown women, brown women embracing brown men, brown women embracing white women and women embracing men. We close off avenues of communication and vision so that individual and communal trust, responsibility, loving, and knowing are impossible.

In facing myself, while eliminating my self oppression, I stumble into a terrifying and isolated place. If I reject and question concepts, mores, and values of my brown community, where is my support, where is my family, what becomes of my sense of community... peoplehood? While becoming myself, will I become so different, so threatening, that they too will reject me?

I am facing that terror and isolation as are brown women across the globe. When we question ourselves, seek to create harmonious, supportive, nurturing, liberating environments for ourselves, we find the white and brown super cultures ready to wage battle together in order to make us reform, in order to decrease their stress and difficulty in visualizing difference and selfhood as revolution and revolution as positive and necessary for cohabitation on this planet.

The white super culture has not yet erased my brown presence, but it continually seeks to erase my individual freedom to be different, to make decisions and choices for myself. The brown community feels the awful terrifying pressure and transmits urgent messages to me to blend, hide, retreat, in order to survive even at the expense of self. Survive by any means necessary, including self defacement, self negation, and the allowance of powerlessness.

I hold arm raised, fist clenched to the white super culture. I embrace the brown community with respect and deep loving but with firm insistence that being myself, being different, even radically different from my mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, is my right, my duty, my way of living a whole and sane existence, accepting
responsibility and consequences of being true to myself in order to be true to my humanness in order to be true to my community.

I send a warning to you white woman. The women's movement the feminist movement is not a middle class clique. It is not an elitist class of white women hiding from men. It is a positive ever growing movement of women who believe in the equality of all people. Women who are not willing to settle for token change but insist that the economic and political resources and power of this nation this world be distributed equally. It is women being concerned about women and being willing to place women's needs and their development first. It is a battle for economic, political, and social freedom and not a battle of sexes. It is not white. It is not racist. It is not classist. It is not closed. Understand that although we are of the same gender we must cross over miles of mistrust and cross victimization in order to meet, in order to learn and grow and work together. Understand that sexism is not the ultimate evil but a place of unification, a place of commonality, a place from which to become a political force for women, for humanness.

I challenge you brown woman. You, who will not interface the women's movement. You, who say the movement is separatist, white, lesbian, without glamour. Further, you say you are too liberated and want to be dependent, protected, shackled to the pedestal. "Ain't you a woman?" Look at yourself, your community, your country, your world and ask yourself, who has the least to lose and the most to gain from economic security, equality, freedom? Who has waited longest, deferred most, worked hardest, lived poorest, nurtured, encouraged, loved more while asking the least in return. Who I ask you? Yes, you are correct. You yourself. Yet who is most oppressed in this land today? No! Don't put on your visor. It is not the brown man or the third world man. It is the brown woman, the third world woman. Understand, the people who are most oppressed in a society have the most investment in that society's change. It is when that bottom layer becomes a political force for itself that change will occur. Changes will not only occur for that layer but will move outward and upward throughout that society. Remember the civil rights movement? It has reverberated around the world to become a human rights movement. We are the bottom of the heap brown women. We have the most to gain and least to lose. Straight and lesbian among us we must fight, learn and grow with, and for, ourselves, our mothers, daughters, and sisters across this nation across this globe and yes brown women we must fight, learn, grow with, and for our fathers, brothers, sons, and men.

The buck stops here as it did with a brown woman in Montgomery, Alabama. The women's movement is ours.
Revolution: It's Not Neat or Pretty or Quick

Pat Parker

The following speech was given at the BASTA conference in Oakland, California, in August 1980. It represented three organizations: The Black Women's Revolutionary Council, the Eleventh Hour Battalion, and the Feminist Women's Health Center in Oakland.

I have been to many conferences: People's Constitutional convention in Washington, D.C., Women's Conference on Violence in San Francisco, Lesbian conference in Los Angeles, International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Belgium. I've been to more conferences than I can name and to many I would like to forget, but I have never come to a conference with as much anticipation and feeling of urgency.

We are in a critical time. Imperialist forces in the world are finding themselves backed against the wall; no longer able to control the world with the threat of force. And they are getting desperate. And they should be desperate. What we do here this weekend and what we take from this conference can be the difference, the deciding factor as to whether a group of women will ever again be able to meet not only in this country, but the entire world. We are facing the most critical time in the history of the world. The superpowers cannot afford for us to join forces and work to rid this earth of them, and we cannot afford not to.

In order to leave here prepared to be a strong force in the fight against imperialism we must have a clear understanding of what imperialism is and how it manifests itself in our lives. It is perhaps easier for us to understand the nature of imperialism when we look at how this country deals with other countries. It doesn't take a great amount of political sophistication to see how the interest of oil companies played a role in our relationship with the Shah's Iran. The people of Iran were exploited in order for Americans to drive gas guzzling monsters. And that is perhaps the difficult part of imperialism for us to understand.

The rest of the world is being exploited in order to maintain our standard of living. We who are 5 percent of the world's population use 40 percent of the world's oil.

As anti-imperialists we must be prepared to destroy all imperialist governments; and we must realize that by doing this we will drastically
alter the standard of living that we now enjoy. We cannot talk on one hand about making revolution in this country, yet be unwilling to give up our video tape records and recreational vehicles. An anti-imperialist understands the exploitation of the working class, understands that in order for capitalism to function, there must be a certain percentage that is unemployed. We must also define our friends and enemies based on their stand on imperialism.

At this time, the super powers are in a state of decline. The Iranians rose up and said no to U.S. imperialism; the Afghans and Eritreans are saying no to Soviet-social imperialism. The situation has become critical and the only resource left is world war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. We are daily being given warning that war is imminent. To some people, this is no significant change, just escalation. The Blacks, poor whites, Chicanos, and other oppressed people of this country already know we're at war.

And the rest of the country's people are being prepared. The media is bombarding us with patriotic declarations about "our" hostages and "our" embassy in Iran. This government is constantly reminding us of our commitment to our allies in Israel. Ads inviting us to become the few, the chosen, the marine or fly with the air force, etc. are filling our television screens.

And it doesn't stop there. This system is insidious in its machinations. It's no coincidence that the "right wing" of this country is being mobilized. Media sources are bombarding us with the news of KKK and Nazi party activity. But we who were involved in the civil rights movement are very familiar with these tactics. We remember the revelations of FBI agents, not only infiltrating the Klan but participating in and leading their activities. And we are not for one moment fooled by these manipulations.

The Klan and the Nazis are our enemies and must be stopped, but to simply mobilize around stopping them is not enough. They are functionaries, tools of this governmental system. They serve in the same way as our armed forces and police. To end Klan or Nazi activity doesn't end imperialism. It doesn't end institutional racism; it doesn't end sexism; it does not bring this monster down, and we must not forget what our goals are and who our enemies are. To simply label these people as lunatic fringes and not accurately assess their roles as a part of this system is a dangerous error. These people do the dirty work. They are the arms and legs of the congressmen, the businessmen, the Tri-lateral Commission.

And the message they bring is coming clear. Be a good American – Support registration for the draft. The equation is being laid out in front of us. Good American = Support imperialism and war.
To this, I must declare – I am not a good American. I do not wish to have the world colonized, bombarded and plundered in order to eat steak.

Each time a national liberation victory is won I applaud and support it. It means we are one step closer to ending the madness that we live under. It means we weaken the chains that are binding the world.

Yet to support national liberation struggles alone is not enough. We must actively fight within the confines of this country to bring it down. I am not prepared to let other nationalities do my dirty work for me. I want the people of Iran to be free. I want the people of Puerto Rico to be free, but I am a revolutionary feminist because I want me to be free. And it is critically important to me that you who are here, that your commitment to revolution is based on the fact that you want revolution for yourself.

In order for revolution to be possible, and revolution is possible, it must be led by the poor and working class people of this country. Our interest does not lie with being a part of this system, and our tendencies to be co-opted and diverted are lessened by the realization of our oppression. We know and understand that our oppression is not simply a question of nationality but that poor and working class people are oppressed throughout the world by the imperialist powers.

We as women face a particular oppression, not in a vacuum but as a part of this corrupt system. The issues of women are the issues of the working class as well. By not having this understanding, the women's movement has allowed itself to be co-opted and mis-directed.

It is unthinkable to me as a revolutionary feminist that some women's liberationist would entertain the notion that women should be drafted in exchange for passage of the ERA. This is a clear example of not understanding imperialism and not basing one's political line on its destruction. If the passage of the ERA means that I am going to become an equal participant in the exploitation of the world; that I am going to bear arms against other Third World people who are fighting to reclaim what is rightfully theirs – then I say Fuck the ERA.

One of the difficult questions for us to understand is just “what is revolution?” Perhaps we have had too many years of media madness with “revolutionary eye make-up and revolutionary tampons.” Perhaps we have had too many years of Hollywood fantasy where the revolutionary man kills his enemies and walks off into the sunset with his revolutionary woman who has been waiting for his return. And that's the end of the tale.

The reality is that revolution is not a one step process: you fight – you win – it's over. It takes years. Long after the smoke of the last gun has faded away the struggle to build a society that is classless, that has no
traces of sexism and racism in it, will still be going on. We have many examples of societies in our life time that have had successful armed revolution. And we have no examples of any country that has completed the revolutionary process. Is Russia now the society that Marx and Lenin dreamed? Is China the society that Mao dreamed? Before and after armed revolution there must be education, and analysis, and struggle. If not, and even if so, one will be faced with coups, counter-revolution and revision.

The other illusion is that revolution is neat. It's not neat or pretty or quick. It is a long dirty process. We will be faced with decisions that are not easy. We will have to consider the deaths of friends and family. We will be faced with the decisions of killing members of our own race.

Another illusion that we suffer under in this country is that a single facet of the population can make revolution. Black people alone cannot make a revolution in this country. Native American people alone cannot make revolution in this country. Chicanos alone cannot make revolution in this country. Asians alone cannot make revolution in this country. White people alone cannot make revolution in this country. Women alone cannot make revolution in this country. Gay people alone cannot make revolution in this country. And anyone who tries it will not be successful.

Yet it is critically important for women to take a leadership role in this struggle. And I do not mean leading the way to the coffee machine.

A part of the task charged to us this week-end is deciding the direction we must take. First I say let us reclaim our movement. For too long I have watched the white-middle class be represented as my leaders in the women's movement. I have often heard that the women's movement is a white middle class movement.

I am a feminist. I am neither white nor middle class. And the women that I've worked with were like me. Yet I am told that we don't exist, and that we didn't exist. Now I understand that the racism and classism of some women in the movement prevented them from seeing me and people like me. But I also understand that with the aid of the media many middle class women were made more visible. And this gave them an opportunity to use their skills gained through their privilege to lead the movement into at first reformist and now counter-revolutionary bullshit.

These women allowed themselves to be red-baited and dyke-baited into isolating and ignoring the progressive elements of the women's movement. And I, for one, am no longer willing to watch a group of self-serving reformist idiots continue to abort the demands of revolutionary thinking women. You and I are the women's movement. It's leadership and direction should come from us.
We are charged with the task of rebuilding and revitalizing the dreams of the 60's and turning it into the reality of the 80's. And it will not be easy. At the same time that we must weed reformist elements out of our movement we will have to fight tooth and nail with our brothers and sisters of the left. For in reality, we are "all products of a decadent capitalist society."

At the same time that we must understand and support the men and women of national liberation struggles – the left must give up its undying loyalty to the nuclear family. In the same way it is difficult for upper and middle class women to give up their commitment to the nuclear family, but the nuclear family is the basic unit of capitalism and in order for us to move to revolution it has to be destroyed. And I mean destroyed. The male left has duped too many women with cries of genocide into believing it is revolutionary to be bound to babies. As to the question of abortion, I am appalled at the presumptions of men. The question is whether or not we have control of our bodies which in turn means control of our community and its growth. I believe that Black women are as intelligent as white women and we know when to have babies or not. And I want no man regardless of color to tell me when and where to bear children. As long as women are bound by the nuclear family structure we cannot effectively move toward revolution. And if women don't move, it will not happen.

We do not have an easy task before us. At this conference we will disagree; we will get angry; we will fight. This is good and should be welcomed. Here is where we should air our differences but here is also where we should build. In order to survive in this world we must make a commitment to change it; not reform it – revolutionize it. Here is where we begin to build a new women's movement, not one easily co-opted and mis-directed by media pigs and agents of this insidious imperialist system. Here is where we begin to build a revolutionary force of women. Judy Grahn in the "She Who" poems says, "When she who moves, the earth will turn over." You and I are the she who and if we dare to struggle, dare to win, this earth will turn over.
No Rock Scorns Me as Whore

Chrystos

5:32 am – May

The water doesn't breathe No rowdy boats disturb her serenity I dream of days when she was this way each moment Days when no one went anywhere full of loud pompousness self-importance Days when dinosaurs were not being rudely dug up for their remains Days when order dignity & respect were possible Days when the proportions of things were sacred O the moon in a dawn sky is good enough

Where are the people who cry "I am I am" as the gulls do? They rope themselves off with labels They stand inside a box called their job, their clothes, their political & social opinions, the movies or books they read I've never believed those items which is why I was considered crazy I want to know the truth I glimpse under that malarky called "civilization" Maybe people have become so stupid as a result of having too many machines The company we keep

It is clear to me that the use of nuclear power is dangerous – as is almost every other aspect of the dominant culture Including the manufacture of the paper on which this is written No produce from Vashon Island can be sold because the earth there is poisonous from the chemicals Tacoma's paper plant produces My life is a part of the poisoning & cars Alternate energy sources cannot fuel what "America" has become I know this way of living will not last much longer I accept it I will be glad if we destroy ourselves We have made a much bigger mess than the dinosaurs Other ways will follow Perhaps not It is none of our business I draw because I can't think what else to do until the end Maybe it will take longer than I think I'm not willing at the moment to give up the electric blanket I am under & I do not notice too many radicals giving up their stereos, hot showers, cars & blenders Energy to run those machines must come from somewhere No protest march will alter the head-on collision Nothing short of completely altering the whole culture will stop it I don't think that all of the people here could be supported on an alternative culture Well if they manage to make a revolution they'll kill lots of people Most could not survive adjustment to simpler life & so they will unknowingly fight it even the radicals Another case of lecturing vegetarians in leather shoes
Although it is heresy to admit it, many Indian people could not survive either. It takes a lot of power to manufacture a can of Budweiser. We have become as poisoned as the eagle's eggshell. We have fought. We still fight. Most of us have died fighting. Some of us walk around dead inside a bottle. I am ashamed. I am heartbroken. I still fight to survive. I mourn. I get up. I live a middle class life. Sometimes we have lost touch with the sacred. To survive we must begin to know sacredness. The pace which most of us live prevents this. I begin only now to understand faint glimpses of the proper relationships of time, of beings. I don't dig for clams because that is the main food of many birds here. I have an abundance of other food available to me. Too many humans clam this beach already. A stronger & stronger sense that I want to grow food ourselves. Probably that is not possible. I'm not thrilled about the idea of slaughter & I am not a vegetarian. We'll see. Gradually, I am taught how to behave by new teachers. By leaves, by flowers, by fruits & rhythms of rain. My mother & father were not good teachers. They are too deeply damaged by this culture which is one of obliteration. I don't know why I see differently than they do. My blessing and burden. The depth that I seek here only comes when I remove the ears in my mind. Ears discourage my honesty & because I am so isolated here honesty is absolutely essential to my survival. There is no way to "be nice" to a tree or politely endure a thunderstorm. I am stripped of pretensions as I was at nine by the wild gentle beauty of California before everybody came with stucco track houses & turquoise plastic couches. I am a child again here. A child frightened by the idea of progress, new housing, more strangers. I begin to love these lines of dark trees as I loved the hills to which I belonged as a girl. Those hills hold nothing now. Mostly leveled. Without deer, without puma, without pheasant, without blue-bellied lizards, without quail, without ancient oaks. Lawns instead. Deeply disgusted by lawns. Stupid flat green crew cuts. Nothing for anybody to eat. I am still in love with the mystery of shadows, wind, bird song. The reason that I continue despite many clumsy mistakes, is love. My love for humans, or rather my continuous attempts to love, have been misdirected. I am not wise. However there is no shame when one is foolish with a tree. No bird ever called me crazy. No rock scorns me as a whore. The earth means exactly what it says. The wind is without flattery or lust. Greed is balanced by the hunger of all. So I embrace anew, as my childhood spirit did, the whispers of a world without words.
I realized one day after another nuclear protest, another proposed bill to make a nuclear waste disposal here, that I had no power with those. My power rests with a greater being, a silence which goes on behind the uproar. I decided that in a nuclear holocaust, for certainly they will be stupid enough to cause one if their history is any example, that I wanted to be planting corn & squash. After there will be other beings of some kind. They'll still need to eat. Aren't the people who come to take clams like those who lobby at the airport for nuclear power? Who is not guilty of being a thief? Who among us gives back as much as we take? Who among us has enough respect? Does anyone know the proper proportions? My distant ancestors knew some things that are lost to me & I would not have the insidious luxury of this electric heat, this journal & pen without the concurrent problems of nuclear waste storage. When we are gone, someone else will come. Dinosaur eggs might hatch in the intense heat of nuclear explosions. I will be sad to see the trees & birds on fire. Surely they are innocent as none of us has been.

With their songs, they know the sacred. I am in a circle with that soft, enduring word. In it is the wisdom of all peoples. Without a deep, deep understanding of the sacredness of life, the fragility of each breath, we are lost. The holocaust has already occurred. What follows is only the burning brush. How my heart aches & cries to write these words. I am not as calmly indifferent as I sound. I will be screaming no no no more destruction in that last blinding light.