Womanism

By Rachel Olin

Womanism emerged in reaction to ‘white’ feminism. Non-white women wanted their unique experiences and needs expressed. Although the term is often used to refer to African women, it can apply to all women of color. Alice Walker first coined the term in *In Search for Our Mother’s Gardens* (1983) (Ntiri 2001:165).

“Feminism was conceptualized and adopted by white women, reflecting an agenda which was designed to meet their particular needs” (Ntiri 2001:164), which are incongruous with the needs of non-white women. Womanism emphasizes that gender is inseparable from ethnicity and other markers of identity. “Gender is bound up with race, class, ethnic and regional modalities” (Bacigalupo 2003:49). Therefore, women of color have qualitatively different experiences from white women, which require a qualitatively different approach to feminism.

In Latin America, womanism often applies to indigenous women. “Native women have often been homogenized by ‘first world’ feminists as poor, uneducated victims of oppression” (Bacigalupo 2003:48). However, indigenous women in Latin America are not marginalized only by ‘white’ feminists, but also by other women in their society. In Chile, for instance, Mapuche women often work for upper-class *wingka* women, who look down on them for being poor and indigenous. Paradoxically, an increasing number of *wingka* women seek help from *machi*, Mapuche women who serve as healers and mediators between the physical and spiritual worlds (Bacigalupo 2003:49).

Bacigalupo, Ana Mariella


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