This bridge called my back and The third woman: the politics of third-world women's anthologies

Paul Bradley
University of Wollongong

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG
COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author.

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK

AND

THE THIRD WOMAN:

THE POLITICS OF THIRD-WORLD WOMEN'S ANTHOLOGIES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

HONOURS MASTER OF ARTS

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

PAUL BRADLEY M.A., B.A., Dip. Teach.

Department of English

1996
Abstract

This dissertation is a study of This Bridge Called My Back and The Third Woman. Both texts are anthologies of third-world women’s writings. First editions were published in 1980 and 1981 respectively.

In my analysis of the texts I explore how each text came into being and the issues of agency involved in their production. This Bridge Called My Back was organised by third-world women as a positive step in overcoming their exclusion from the feminist movement. Its aim was to forge links with women of color [sic]. By contrast, The Third Woman was organised by a white academic at the request of a publishing company and in this regard it may be considered an example of the hegemonic practice of white feminism that This Bridge Called My Back addresses.

The thematic content of the various pieces of writing in both texts is largely feminist in its outlook. The writers explore the issue of how third-world women are marginalised through sexism, racism and classism. The writers anthologised in This Bridge Called My Back specifically try to overcome this by taking a subject position that defies the Western practice of totalising.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Issues of Agency and Production</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>This Bridge Called My Back</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Third Woman</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this dissertation I will examine two anthologies of writing by third-world women. Both were produced during the late nineteen seventies in the United States of America, a period of turbulence in the feminist movement. The first text, *This Bridge Called My Back*, whose first edition was published in 1981, was produced as a response to the hegemonic practice of the white, middle class members of the feminist movement. The second text, *The Third Woman*, published in 1980, was produced by a white academic as a special Modern Language Association project with the stated aim of giving recognition to the largely neglected writing of third-world women in the U.S.A. Fisher says that she wishes to "ameliorate the situation". (Fisher, 1980, XXVII) What I wish to explore in this dissertation is the nature of both anthologies, the writings that they contain and how their production addresses issues of subjectivity and agency for third-world women.

*This Bridge Called My Back* is an example of a text formulated as a response to the hegemonic praxis of white women in the feminist movement. Indeed, in the soliciting letter that preceded the book Moraga wrote,
We want to express to all women - especially to middle class women - the experiences which divide us as feminists, we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences within the feminist movement ....We want to create a definition that expands what feminism means to us. (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983a, XXIII)

It is interesting that Moraga refers to middle class women in this instance when she usually refers to white women in other parts of the text. This might suggest that she sees class as an important issue in that white women have had greater opportunities and are thus able to be hegemonic. Nonetheless, in this sense This Bridge Called My Back can be seen as an embryonic text within the third world feminist movement in that it provides a commentary on the split within the feminist movement that resulted in there being a white feminist movement and a third-world feminist movement.

At the heart of the split within the feminist movement was the question of subjectivity and the question of where one writes from. As many theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Thrinh Minh-ha have since asked, does one write as a women, or as an Asian or as a lesbian. Minh-ha believes that women are forced into a situation where they must prioritise the way they write. In Woman Native
Other she asserts that they are,

driven into situations where (they are) made to feel (they) must choose from among three conflicting identities. Writer of color? Woman writer? Or woman of color?
(Minh-ha, 1989, 6)

Of course it is impossible to choose one position and write from this as writing reflects the intersections of the various facets of subjectivity and so

As focal point of cultural consciousness and social change, writing weaves into language the complex relations of a subject caught between the problem of race and gender...
(Minh-ha, 1989, 6)

Following this logic, Minh-ha rejects the original question as there is no universal experience of being a woman, just as there is no universal experience of being lesbian or being Asian. She recognises the complexity of the source of writing, rather than trying to tie it down, and acknowledges the heterogeneity of the subject, thus rejecting the totalising agenda of early Western feminist theory, where the subject of ‘woman’ was constituted around the single theme of gender. This was particularly true of the Anglo-American
school of feminism, including theorists such as Elaine Showalter.

If this complexity is accepted then the problem that the feminist movement faced was that in attempting to create a movement that represented people from a broad background of experiences, it could not represent everybody. Within the white-hegemonic feminist movement of the sixties and seventies in The United States of America many people did not feel that they were being included in the common experience that was being voiced. As the ‘leaders’ of the movement tended to be white, middle class, tertiary educated women, the interests that they chose as pertinent to the movement were not necessarily the issues that affected a poor, primary-school educated African-American woman.

In regard to the “movement”, this concern raises the whole issue of agency. To say that the leaders of the feminist movement were not choosing issues that affected women in minority groups suggests that minority women were passive members of the feminist movement. This is not necessarily the case. Minority women were passive only by their exclusion. As Audre Lorde points out in “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”, as white women control the meetings and the conferences they are in a position to dictate what papers are heard and what topics are workshopped. The under representation or exclusion of minority
women at such conferences and meetings resulted in the feminist movement largely being about issues affecting white, middle class, tertiary educated women. The problem of course was how could third-world women overcome this problem of agency? How could they break this cycle of exclusion other than by creating a separatist group that was dedicated to the issues affecting third world women.

In pondering this whole issue of exclusion, many of the women involved in This Bridge Called My Back, including Moraga, Anzaldúa, Lorde, Yamada and davenport [sic] felt that it was a direct result of racism on the part of the leaders of the feminist movement. As davenport states, “the feminist movement is racist, but that news is old and stale.” (davenport, 1983, 85) The motivation to produce the text could be described as a response to that racism. Moraga and Anzaldúa decided that if third-world women were to be excluded from the feminist movement and not given a chance to speak and publish then they would provide the opportunity through This Bridge Called My Back. As Anzaldúa says in the foreword, “there are no bridges, one builds them”. (Anzaldúa, 1983a, Foreword)

The motivation of the anthology can be found in the chapter of the text dedicated to minority women’s experiences of racism. The title of the chapter is ‘Racism in the Women’s Movement’ and, in the
introduction to the section, Moraga quotes Barbara Smith’s explanation of why racism is a feminist issue.

The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color [sic - shall be used throughout this dissertation], working-class women, poor women .... Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self aggrandisement. (Smith, 1983, 61)

Smith’s choice of words is interesting. She refers to the “inherent definition”, “inherent” meaning that feminism can be defined by unchanging or set standards. This suggests that Smith views feminism from an essentialist view-point, which, if this is the case, problematises the claim that racism divides feminists.

Nonetheless, Moraga says that while many white feminists in academic circles choose third-world women as the subject matter of their literary and artistic endeavours, third-world women were denied access to “the pen, the publishing house, the galleries, and the classroom.” (Moraga, 1983a, 61) While this might be true, she does not specify who denies third-world women this access. Although she may infer that it is white feminists, she provides no
evidence to support the claim. Even though this partly undermines her argument, the ultimate point that Moraga makes about it is that racism will not be overcome through theory as racism is not experienced theoretically. She says,

Repeatedly acknowledged throughout this section and infusing the entire collection of this anthology is our understanding that theory alone cannot wipe out racism. We do not experience racism.... theoretically. (Moraga, 1983a, 62)

In this section of the text there are various writings that tell of the experience of being on the end of white women’s racism. One particularly interesting title is Doris Davenport’s “The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third World Wimmin” [sic]. Davenport’s choice of the word “pathology” is very interesting. Pathology, by definition, is that branch of science that deals with the nature and cause of a disease. Davenport uses “pathology” to indicate that racism is beyond intellect and can be reduced to essentialism. To highlight this point Davenport says,

When we attended a meeting or gathering of theirs, we are seen in only one of two limited and oppressive ways; as being white-washed and therefore sharing all their values,
.... etc; or, if we mention something particular to the experience of black wimmin, we are seen as threatening, hostile, and subversive. (Davenport, 1983, 85)

Audre Lorde expresses a similar concern in “An Open Letter To Mary Daly”. Daly had sent Lorde a draft of her text Gyn/Ecology to read and make comment upon. Lorde was disheartened by the lack of focus on anything other than white women. She wrote to Daly and said,

As an african-american [sic] woman in white patriarchy, I am used to having my archetypal experience distorted and trivialised but it is terribly painful to feel it being done by a woman whose knowledge matches my own. As women identified-women, we cannot afford to repeat these same old destructive, wasteful errors of recognition. (Lorde, 1983a, 94)

What Lorde is suggesting is that the omission of the experiences of non-white women by white women is the same as the neglect of all women by patriarchy. In this sense she equates the white hegemonic feminist movement with patriarchy. The analogy is an interesting one in that Lorde focuses on knowledge. When she refers to Daly as a “women-identified-women” she implies that
identification carries a responsibility to work to overcome the oppression of women. If women with knowledge ignore it and perpetuate a system of oppression then it is arguable that this is the same as patriarchy.

In equating white feminists with patriarchy Lorde rejected the then current concept of "sisterhood". She said, "today there is a pretence to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word SISTERHOOD in the white women's movement." (Sandoval, 1991, 5) Not only did Lorde placed herself outside of the women's movement as it was but she furthers this by taking a confrontational stance when she says,

the history of white women who are unable to hear black women's words, or to maintain dialogue with us, is long and discouraging. (Lorde, 1983a, 94)

Perhaps the most well known piece of writing in the anthology about the division within the feminist movement is "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House". This is the transcript of a speech given by Lorde at the Second Sex Conference at New York University in 1979. Lorde begins her paper by asserting that a conference on feminism that failed to examine the many differences among women and failed to have significant input
from "poor women, black and third-world women, and lesbians" was nothing but an example of "academic arrogance" (Lorde, 1983b, 98). Here again Lorde's use of "academic" raises the issue of knowledge.

The basis of Lorde's argument is that difference equals strength rather than division. Lorde says, "for difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic." (Lorde, 1983b, 99)

What Lorde is suggesting is that rather than seeing differences as a cause for separation and suspicion, they should be seen as the impetus for the feminist movement. By acknowledging the diversity within the movement it can become stronger because it is not limited by a sole interest or agenda. By failing to acknowledge differences among women, white feminists perpetuate the patriarchal system. They act in the same dominant and hegemonic way that patriarchy does. By contrast, Lorde's vision is dialectic. When she says that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house, she is suggesting that women will never overcome the patriarchal system that operates in society if white women try to do it by being hegemonic. The best that this can achieve is to set up a binary opposition which can never bring about genuine change.
Lorde sees the responsibility to broaden the limited agenda of the feminist movement as the responsibility of white feminists. One of the primary tools of the oppressors, she says, is “to keep the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns.” (Lorde, 1983b, 100) Women for example, have been asked to educate men as to their existence and needs. By doing this they maintain the position of power. White feminists, Lorde argues, cannot fall into the same trap. It is not acceptable to expect that black women, or other third world women, should have to educate white feminists about their existence and needs. Lorde says this is

a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought. (Lorde, 1983b, 100)

This argument is similar to what Moraga says in the introduction to the section where she argues that the act of oppression comes from the fear of losing one’s power. Moraga suggests that because women know what it is to have no power, being oppressed through sexism, they should be aware of not oppressing others through racism. She says, “as women, on some level we all know oppression.” (Moraga, 1983a, 62) What Moraga fails to consider is that knowledge and experience do not necessarily equate with behaviour and action. While white women know some level of oppression, Moraga does not consider what they have to gain by giving up their position of
power or privilege over third-world women.

Mitsuye Yamada, like Audre Lorde, also discusses the issue of educating white women. She begins by asserting the need of Asian American women to become more visible by speaking out on the condition of their lives. The problem though is how much of this other women want to hear. Yamada maintains that every time she speaks to a group, it is as if she had never spoken before. If she is invited to speak at a white feminist conference, she believes the audience wants to be charmed and entertained rather than challenged and educated in ways that are threatening. People would like a speech where they can come up and say “that was lovely my dear, just lovely.” (Yamada, 1983, 71) For Yamada the problem with this, just as Lorde experienced it, is that you become tired from the constant effort. She says,

I am weary of starting from scratch each time I speak or write, as if there were no history behind us. (Yamada, 1983, 71)

It is interesting that the point Yamada makes here can be compared to the experiences of colonialism. The erasure or evacuation of the history of the colonised is necessary to establish and maintain the power of the dominant coloniser. Similarly every time that Yamada
and other minority women have to start from scratch, white feminists maintain their position.

To highlight her point Yamada quotes from a speech that Cherríe Moraga gave at a third-world women’s conference in San Francisco where she said that “what each of us needs to do about what we don’t know is to go look for it.” (Yamada, 1983, 72) Yamada says that the burden of teaching should not fall on third-world women and yet they are made to feel that “if the majority culture know so little about (them) then it must be (their) problem.” (Yamada, 1983, 72)

This theme, which appears to dominate the section on racism, can also be found in Judit Moschovich’s “-But I Know You, American Woman”. Moschovich, however takes her argument one step further. Not only does she criticise the white women who expect third-world women to educate them, she also criticises those who think that one book or one conference is enough. She says,

An experience where American women learn on their own without wanting to be spoon-fed by Latinas, but don’t become experts after one book, one conversation, or one stereotype. It is a delicate balance which can only be
achieved with caring and respect for each other. (Moschovich, 1983, 83)

The only writer who seems to deviate from this theme is doris davenport. I started this discussion by quoting davenport and I would like to quote her to end it. In “The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third World Wimmin” davenport comes to a conclusion. She says,

so sisters, we might as well give up on them...we should stop wasting our time and energy until these women evolve. (davenport, 1983, 89)

davenport verbalises the obvious conclusion to the writings in this section of the text. The primary responsibility of education lies with the ignorant, when, of course, they are in a position to undertake this education. For third-world women to undertake the education of white women is to perpetuate the white woman’s position of superiority. It is only by ignoring them until they evolve that third world women can break free of that binary.

This idea of racism is really the organising force behind the anthology. In her foreword to the text Cherrie Moraga says that the idea of “Bridge” (This Bridge Called My Back) “was to forge links
with women of color from every region”. (Moraga, 1983b, Foreword) By ‘links’ she does not mean to totalise or categorise all third-world women as having the same experiences which can be appropriated into an hegemonic movement, but rather that links, as a metaphor, acknowledges similarities and differences and forms the basis of dialogue and strength. The text then becomes an opportunity for third-world women to talk, to express their experiences of being a third-world woman in the women’s movement.

Central here is the issue of agency. By creating their own text, third world women are overcoming their exclusion by giving themselves the opportunity to speak. As Moraga says in the preface,

we have come together on these pages to make faith a reality and to bring all of our selves to bear down hard on that reality. (Moraga, 1983c, XIX)

Further to agency is the issue of writing which is explored in the chapter of the text called “Speaking in Tongues” which focuses on the third-world woman as writer. These pieces assert firstly that third-world women should write “biologically” and secondly that they should ignore all hindrances and take control of their work and its publication.
This issue of agency, however, goes deeper than third-world women having an opportunity to speak. As Anzaldúa explains in the opening piece of the section titled “Speaking In Tongues: A Letter to 3RD World Women Writers”, third-world women must overcome the initial barrier of believing they have permission to write. For many third-world women, having worked in labour intensive occupations, having had little education and little experience of reading, it is very difficult to then believe that you can write, or that you have something worth saying. As Anzaldúa says,

Who am I, a poor Chicana from the sticks, to think I could write? How dare I even consider becoming a writer as I stooped over the tomato fields bending, bending under the hot sun, hands broadened and calloused, not fit to hold the quill ... (Anzaldúa, 1983b, 166)

There are two issues in what Anzaldúa says. Firstly there the issue of “worth”. While Anzaldúa does not specify exactly why her hands are not fit to hold the quill, it is reasonable to assume that she is expressing her own internalised prejudice. Added to this is the second issue of guilt. As she says later in the article, there is a certain amount of guilt involved in becoming a writer when you know that other third-world women are labouring in fields. This guilt comes from a feeling that in some ways they have “sold-out”
to first-world values. To compensate for her feelings of being not worthy, unlike her sisters in the fields, Anzaldúa, and other third world women like her, have pursued degrees and credentials to give themselves merit in the world of academia and writing. She says that,

many of us women of color who have strung degrees, credentials and published books around our necks ... are in danger of contributing to the invisibility of our sister-writers. “La Vendida,” the sell-out. (Anzaldúa, 1983b, 167)

The way out of this, as Anzaldúa envisages it, is to write from within, to fuse personal experience and social realities into your writing. Nellie Wong describes writing as “the three-eyed demon shrieking the truth” (Anzaldúa, 1983b, 171) and Anzaldúa believes that the demon must be let loose. By writing about the realities of their lives third-world women can come to understand themselves better and, at the same time, educate others about the realities of their daily existence. Anzaldúa’s argument here returns to the earlier discussion about racism not being overcome theoretically and it can be summed up in the simple phrase, “the personal is political”.

To touch more people, the personal realities and the social
must be evoked - not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat. (Anzaldúa, 1983b, 173)

Minh-ha (1989) confirms this opinion in a discussion of the nature of art. She rejects the concept that the artist must be seen as opposed to the masses in favour of a view of third-world art as "art for the people, by the people, and from the people", (Minh-ha, 1989, 13) art that will touch more people.

In asserting this view Minh-ha creates an alternative view of what art/literature is and, this being the case, questions how we look at art and indeed how we judge it. The question that Minh-ha asks is, "can literature be a 'freedom that has taken freedom as its end' (Satre) and still concern itself with elements like structure, form and style." (Minh-ha, 89, 16) In posing such a question in her work Minh-ha is questioning the dominance of Western literature with its preoccupation with stylistics and instead asserting a different way of judging the quality of writing. Her method is not to reject stylistics completely, as writing must still present its political message unambiguously, but to find a medium where content and stylistics complement each other. She says, "I must acknowledge the mutual dependence of these two aspects if I am to avoid taking the partial for the absolute." (Minh-ha, 89, 21)
Minh-ha's stand on writing is a complex one; ultimately she opts for a return to the experimental French feminism of Helene Cixous. Whilst she does criticise the view that "the minor-ity's voice is always personal .... man thinks, woman feels" (Minh-ha, 89, 28), she believes that women of color can write using a biological essentialism.

.... when women were denied the right to create, or not create. With their bodies. "All happens in the real womb": writing as an "intrinsic" child/birth process takes on different qualities in women's contexts. No man claims to speak from the womb, women do .... Their inner gestation is in the womb, not in the mind. The mind is therefore no longer opposed to the heart; it is rather perceived as part of the womb. (Minh-ha, 89, 37)

This type of writing is exactly what Anzaldúa suggested eight years before. In her vision of making the personal the political she suggested that

It's not on paper that you create but in your innards, in the gut and out of living tissue - organic writing I call it. (Anzaldúa, 1983b, 172)
The weakness in visions of organic writing and corporeal fluidity, as Selden said of Cixous's original theory, is that whilst the "approach is visionary, imaging a possible language rather than describing one, it runs the risk .... of driving women into an obscure retreat where silence reigns interrupted only by uterine 'babble'". (Selden, 89, 152)

It is interesting that Selden chooses the term "babble" in his description of this visionary writing. Babble is traditionally associated with the idea of many languages and, as I argue later in this dissertation, the position that most of the third-world women writers in This Bridge Called My Back choose to take is that of the multi-voiced subject. What Selden sees as a weakness, third-world women see as a strength.

Nonetheless, Minh-ha is careful to avoid Selden's criticism. She asserts that

writing the body ..... exceeds the rationalised clarity of communicative structures and cannot be fully explained by analysis. (Minh-ha, 89, 44)

From a Western intellectual point-of-view this seems inadequate. While she offers some insights into the nature of writing and
the issue of agency for third-world women, as a theoretician, postulating a theory of post-feminism, her assertion that corporeal writing is beyond explanation by intellectual analysis leads many critics like Selden to question the validity of her theory.

However, moving beyond the argument that women of color write biologically and accepting that by whatever means they overcome the various barriers and manage to write, there are still barriers in regard to agency as hattie gossett [sic] explains in "who told you anybody wants to hear from you? you aint nothing but a black woman!". gossett goes further than Anzaldúa. She does not just question the right to write, but wonders whether there will be an audience if she does so. The problem for gossett is a "catch 22". While she writes about social realities, many of the people to whom she speaks in her writing cannot read or cannot afford books or will not be able to buy her work due to publishing and sales restrictions. This being the case, her argument goes to the value of writing and its worth as an agent of social awareness and change. She says,

i mean who do you think you are? and who cares what you think about anything enough to pay money for it during these days of inflation and cutbacks and firings and unemployment and books costing at least $15 in hardcover and $5 in paperback? plus theres a national literacy crisis
It is ironic that if her work is to be an agent of social awareness and change it is not sold in ghetto bookshops. The assumptions in regard to the sale of her work is that the text is aimed at educating white, middle class readers about the social realities of third-world women but this overlooks the important role of the work as an agent of validation for third-world women. Just as Moraga and Anzaldúa discussed forming links with all women of color, in the hands of a third-world audience, the work has value in validating the experiences of a being third-world woman.

Regardless of this gossett ignores these difficulties and pursues her writing in the belief that the very act of producing work is of value in itself. As the title of the piece suggests, the very act of production is an act of defiance that challenges beliefs in the nature of literature, or more specifically what we might call the literary canon.

The literary canon might be defined as that body of literature which is seen as representative of the best literature of a society. Writers central to the canon, such as Shakespeare and Austen are
recognised and acknowledged as having produced high quality writing that speaks universal truths to a wide audience. Thus, inclusion in the canon implies a value judgment about your work in relation to the work of other authors. When Gossett says “who told you anybody wants to hear from you?” she is not questioning the value of what she has to say and its ability to speak universal truths to a wide audience so much as she is questioning the need of literature to speak to universal truths to a wide audience. In this way she is arguing against a canonical view of literature much as von Hallberg, in his analysis of the literary canon does.

A canon is commonly seen as what other people, once powerful, have made and what should now be opened up, demystified, or eliminated altogether. (von Hallberg, 1991, 3)

If this is accepted then what takes the place of absolute judgments of worth is market forces. A text might be deemed “valuable” if there is a readership or market for it. In this sense the canon might be seen as ever changing. As Lecker argues in his introduction to Canadian Canons,

this notion of a single literary tradition is a canonical misconception. Traditions and canons are always in the
process of being made and unmade.....there are no constant
and prevailing values. (Lecker, 1991, 7)

By defying what she sees as the popular opinion, gossett is taking
part in this process of redefining the canon. Even if ultimately her
work is rejected and she is right that nobody wanted to hear from
her, the production and distribution of her work provides markers
to which the current canon is compared and by which it is judged.

The final point that I wish to make in regard to the question of
agency and This Bridge Called My Back is that the second edition
was published by Kitchen Table : Women of Color Press. While the
first edition in 1981 was published by Persephone Press, a white
women’ press group, its closure gave the editors the opportunity,
after months of negotiations to switch to the new Women of Color
Press. This, in regard to the editors’ vision of the text, was
fortuitous in that it meant that the book was conceived of and
produced entirely by women of color. In regard to agency this is
very important. If Anzaldúa and Moraga envisaged that this book
would give third-world women an opportunity to speak, then the
exclusion of any first-world involvement meant that the text was
uncompromised.

In comparing This Bridge Called My Back with The Third Woman,
another major anthology of third-world women's writing that was published one year earlier, there is a vast difference between the texts in regard to their representation of questions of agency. As an anthology, *The Third Woman*, unlike *This Bridge Called My Back* was not organised by a cooperative of third-world women. In fact, *The Third Woman* was edited by Dexter Fisher, a white academic with The Modern Language Association, as a Modern Language Association funded project. This, in itself, raises many questions about the anthology, specifically in relation to agency. One wonders, since the first major anthology of their writing is organised by a white academic, working from a position of privilege, whether third world women have a speaking position within the confines of the colonial academic system. Spivak, in her analysis of the subaltern, comes to the conclusion that they do not.

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third-world woman. (Spivak, 1993b, 102)

As I stated in the introduction to *This Bridge Called My Back*, one of the important issues in the third-world feminist movement in the late seventies was being able to speak and being heard. From a
political point of view the limited agency of third-world women in
the organisation and publication of The Third Woman would
certainly be seen to compromise the exposure that the publication
of the text might afford them.

With this in mind, the purpose of this anthology is never quite clear
given the conflicting statements made by Fisher in the preface. At
the beginning of the preface Fisher suggests that minority women
writers "have not yet been represented adequately in anthologies"
(Fisher, 1980, XXVII). She says,

I hope to begin, at least, to ameliorate the situation by
demonstrating .... not only that minority women writers
have created and pursued a literary tradition of their own,
but that their works represent some of the most exciting
and creative innovations going on in contemporary
literature. (Fisher, 1980, XXVII)

Given the reference to "exciting and creative innovations" it would
appear that Fisher’s purpose is to introduce a wide range of
traditional and experimental third-world women’s literature, giving
many third-world women authors a chance at publication. There
seems to be a cross-purpose though when, later in the preface, she
say that she will present only the "best of the literature" written by
contemporary minority women. The use of “best” is problematic in that Fisher never details how “best” was decided. It becomes obvious however that she has in fact used white hegemonic values to estimate the literary worth of the writing of third-world women. What she attempts to do is provide a canonical reading of third-world women; giving recognition to third-world women writers is about appropriating select and ‘westernised’ third-world writers into the literary cannon. This can be seen in the introduction where Fisher details the various prestigious literary awards that many of the writers in the anthology have won.

Gwendolyn Brooks, for example, received the 1949 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry for Annie Allen .... In 1973 Alice Walker won the Rosenthal Award of the National Institute of Arts and Letters for In Love and Trouble .... and in 1976 the National Book Critics’ Circle Award went to Maxine Hong Kingston ..... These are just a few examples of the minority women included in this anthology who have received literary awards. (Fisher, 1980, XXIX)

Fisher seems determined to show that these writers are ‘good’ and that their work has been recognised as such. In analysing the biographical data that appears before each writer’s work, this becomes even more obvious. While she says that the purpose of the
text is to give third-world authors a chance at publication there are only four authors in the collection who have not been published before. In fact, of the seventy authors for whom details are available, sixty-three have had their work published on at least three occasions, be it in journals, anthologies or individual works. This figure is ninety percent, while many have been published a lot more than three times. What is even more staggering is that the figure is one-hundred percent for the African-American writers. The women being presented here are not women devoid of possibilities and opportunities. Forty-three percent are university graduates, twenty-nine percent actually work as lecturers in English faculties at university, many in positions of professor. Ten percent of the writers work as editors in magazines that publish literature while nine percent have received literary awards and nine percent have received national writing fellowships. The majority of women in the text are clearly well published and in positions where they have access to publishing. Indeed many are in a position to influence the types of literature that other people read. If you combine the figures for university lecturers and editors then thirty-nine percent of these women are in such a position. This is quite the opposite of the "neglected" image that Fisher paints elsewhere in the text.

By the end of the preface it becomes clear that the focus of the text
is academic. The text, Fisher says, may be used in "introductory, multiethnic, or women's literature courses." (Fisher, 1980, XXVII)

To this end it is organised into minority groups, rather than themes as This Bridge Called My Back is. The first section, for example, is "American Indian Women Writers". At the beginning of each section is an introduction, providing an historical and cultural context. At the end of each section there is a further reading list. At the back of the book there is also an appendix for each section that contains discussion questions and writing tasks.

Fisher's decision to organise the anthology as a textbook was explained in a letter that she wrote to me. In the letter she says,

Houghton Mifflin approached me to do the anthology because there was a demonstrable need for textbooks, particularly for minority women's literature. (Fisher, 1996)

The fact that the publishers approached Fisher suggests that the motivation of the book was economic. While Houghton Mifflin may well like to see more minority women's literature published, they commissioned the book with the aim of making profits. Whilst this does not deny that Fisher has a genuine interest in minority literature and the book gives exposure to third-world women writers, it does have ramifications in regard to the agency of the
text.

On the issue of the politics of the text, in the general introduction Fisher states that she has, in fact, avoided including only pieces that are exclusively political or feminist. The political statement of the book, she says, “derives from its existence as the first major collection of literature by American Indian, Afro-American, Chicana, and Asian American women.” (Fisher, 1980, XXX)

Fisher seems to have missed the point twice. Firstly I believe that it is impossible, given the nature of third-world women’s writing, to select a text that is not political. Texts by their very nature are a political act. To give an example, Fisher concludes the introduction by quoting Leslie Marmon Silko. She says “you don’t have anything if you don’t have the stories.” If this anthology is the “stories” of third-world women then the texts are all political. Even the feminist catch-cry that was in use at this time was ‘the personal is political’. Take Maxine Hong Kingston’s “The Woman Warrior” as one example. Hong Kingston’s comments on the silence of her family, including the women, during her aunt’s pregnancy outside of marriage and their never mentioning her existence after her consequent suicide, must be read as a strong political statement. Similarly, the poetry of Mari Evans is obviously ‘feminist’ and ‘political’. One example is “I am Black Woman” which ends with the lines
I
am black woman
tall as a cypress
strong
beyond all definition still
defying place
and time
and circumstance
assailed
    impervious
    indestructible.

(Evans, 1980, 260)

While I cannot analyse every piece of writing in the text, what I wish to show in the analysis of The Third Woman in Section Three is that most of the works in the text have similarly strong messages about the lives of third world women.

Secondly Fisher's claim fails to consider the politics of teaching. The commission and organisation of the text as a textbook to be used in university courses suggests that these writers are 'worthy' of study. Given the reputation and influence of The Modern Language Association it is quite likely that the text will have a wide distribution and as a consequence these writers will receive a wide
exposure. Thus, politically, the text’s organisation would almost certainly ensure its success. In this light, the politics of the text is not that it is the first major collection, so much as it is marketed at an educational market.

However, while this intervention, on Fisher’s part, in bringing third world women to a mass-market is a political act that will undoubtedly have some beneficial effect in regard to exposure for third-world writers, it is unfortunate that this is somewhat undermined by the politics of denying the subaltern its own point from which to speak by speaking for them from within the confines of an institutionally privileged position. As Gayatri Spivak says in Outside in the Teaching Machine,

“One must begin somewhere” is a different sentiment when expressed by the unorganised oppressed and when expressed by the beneficiary of the consolidated disciplinary structure of a central neocolonialist power. (Spivak, 1993b, 58)

Toni Chade Bambara takes up this issue in her 1982 review of the text for the journal, Phylon. She comments on the intrusive nature of Fisher’s commentary throughout the text and her inability to cut commentary short and “get out of the way”. (Bambara, 1982, 89)
Indeed, she takes this argument further and questions the issue of agency for third-world women. She says,

Fisher's laudable motive to be comprehensive is all too often superceded by the impulse to exhibit his/her (?) own 'mastery' of everybody's culture and subject matter. This .... compulsion to expropriate and own, is at best disconcerting when not wholly offensive. (Bambara, 1982, 90)

The point that Bambara makes in relation to agency is that her "bias .... is in favour of home-culture spokeswomen." (Bambara, 1982, 90) This raises a contentious point which really goes to the crux of the agency issue. Is Fisher speaking for third-world women or is she speaking about them? Bambara firmly believes that Fisher is attempting to speak for third-world women. She comments that her neglect to include various critical essays by third-world women is little more than an attempt to make herself appear as the sole expert on minority literature. Bambara says,

The omission of available critical essays by several of the writers from both the body of the text and from the reading lists, as well, imply their non-existence and the existence of the editor as sole expert, resulting for me in an
unbalanced text and a highly suspect editor. (Bambara, 1982, 90)

This issue is a difficult one to resolve. While some might argue that Fisher is simply speaking "about", Bambara firmly believes that a sense of ownership of the material comes through her editing and in this sense she is attempting to speak for third-world women. Whichever view the reader takes, what is obvious is that when minority literature is presented by a member of the privileged class from within the framework of the colonial institution, controversy is sure to follow.

With regard to my own positionality I wish to emphasise this distinction. My criticism of Fisher relates to her agency and is specifically grounded in the historical context. As the writers in This Bridge Called My Back asserted, at the time when these works were published third-world women wanted to find their own voice. They refer to This Bridge Called My Back being uncompromised because the organisation lay completely with third-world women. Fisher speaks for third-world women because she organises, edits and produces the text from within the academic institution and at the prompting of profit motivated publishers which third-world women did not have access to.
In further considering my own positionality I am very aware that I am open to the same criticism that I make of Fisher, perhaps even more so as there is the added complication of gender issues. Joseph Pugliese discusses this problem at length in his article, 'Parasiting “Post”-Colonialism'. He says,

...I want to place into crisis the assumed disjunction between a critical “post”-colonial practice and recursive strategies of neo-colonialism. It is in this disjunction which generates those polarised spaces which empower one to critique oppression in the “public” sphere without having to account for the ethics of one’s own cultural production within the confines of the institutional space(s) one occupies. (Pugliese, 1995, 351)

While Pugliese may well ask if my critique is “not just another alibi for the re-deployment of a second-order violence” (Pugliese, 1995, 349) I would argue that in my analysis of published works I am speaking about third-world women, not for them. Further, my critique moves outside of the colonial appropriation of which I accuse Fisher in that it is a reflection on an historical project. As I argue earlier, my criticism of Fisher is historical and my appropriation of Bambara’s view is necessary to support the view that Fisher was not acting in the interests of third-world women at
that time. Ultimately, I cannot escape the problematics of working from within the academic institution, just as I cannot escape the problematics of gender, but I hope, by acknowledging them, that my project does not reinscribe the violent parasitism of colonial practice.

To consider another of Fisher’s organisational choices, her decision to divide writers into racial groups is a questionable one. Fisher says,

*The Third Woman* is organized by minority group for the sake of efficiently presenting the framework within which individual works should be read. This is not to say that the Asian American woman writer is confined by her background, but rather to suggest the historical and cultural conditions that may enrich her perspective.

(Fisher, 1980, XXX)

Fisher clarifies this by discussing the importance of cultural context in the production of literature. In asserting this to be of primary importance, since as she says most Chicana poetry is bilingual and the oral tradition is integral to Indian writers, she assumes the position of where third-world women write from. Following this argument, the third-world woman does not write first as a woman,
or as a lesbian, or as a mother, the third-world woman writes as a Chicana, or as an Asian American and so on. This is why the context summaries at the beginning of each section give an historical overview of each particular group and each writer should be read within that context. While there is no doubt that social context can shape a writer and a knowledge of context can enhance a reading, Fisher’s decision to organise the text by ethnicity presupposes the speaking position of the writer. Moreover, in regard to subjectivity, as I argue later in this paper, it presupposes that the subject is constituted around a single theme.

Finally, at the time The Third Woman was published there were in fact many published anthologies of writing by particular minority groups. In the reading list at the end of the Black Women Writers section, for example, there are two pages of anthologies of Black Women Writers. There are similarly extensive lists at the end of the other sections and in the appendix in This Bridge Called My Back. When Fisher says that third-world women writers “have not yet been represented adequately in anthologies” (Fisher, 1980, XXVII) it is reasonable therefore to assume that she means composite anthologies and, this being the case, her organisation of the text into minority groups is counter productive. While it can be argued that separating racial groups avoids the practice of Western hegemony, if Fisher is genuine in her desire to create a composite anthology
and to show the diversity of third-world women’s literature then it may well have been better to organise the text thematically. Moreover, she does call the book The Third Woman. ‘Woman’ is in the singular form, one would assume, to indicate that these women share common experiences.
In examining the writings in both texts it is possible to find many thematic similarities. In looking firstly at *This Bridge Called My Back*, in the introduction to the text Anzaldúa and Moraga say that "*This Bridge Called My Back* intends to reflect an uncompromised definition of feminism by women of color in the U.S." (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983a, XXIII) What they mean by "uncompromised" is not entirely clear although one might assume that since the writing is produced by third-world women, edited by third-world women, and it is published by third-world women, the voice of the text is not tainted by first world editorial influences and is, as a consequence, uncompromised.

In presenting this definition of feminism the text is organised into sections that reflect issues for third-world women. The subtitles of these sections include "The Roots of Our Radicalism"; "Theory in the Flesh"; "Racism in the Women's Movement"; "On Culture, Class, and Homophobia"; "The Third World Woman Writer" and "The Vision" and much of the writing focuses on the politicisation of personal experience.

This creates a difficulty with regard to the issue of critiquing the work. Later in this section I argue that third-world women opt for a
multi-voiced subject position that defies the Western practice of
totalising. As Anzaldúa says, she doesn’t want to be “tagged with a
label.” (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 205) And yet Anzaldúa and Moraga, as
editors of the text, organise the works into chapters based around
common themes. These themes are intended as descriptive only. In
the introduction to the text Moraga and Anzaldúa say,

The six sections of *This Bridge Called My Back* intend to
reflect what we feel to be the major areas of concern for
Third World Women in the U.S. (Moraga & Anzaldúa,
1983a, XXIV)

This becomes problematic in that their editorial choices may be
taken by the reader of the First-World book to represent a singular
definition of third-world women’s writing. Moreover, such a
definitive selection, working in terms of ‘universal’ themes such as
“marriage”, may have the effect of obscuring the multiple politics of
race, class and ethnicity in the writing. To the extent that my
analysis is a discussion of the works as they are presented, my own
reading might be accused of also depoliticising the original works.
However, it is not necessary to accept the arrangement or selection
of material as representing the only set of issues concerning third-
world women, nor should the anthology’s focus be seen as
definitive. My analysis suggests that one cannot evacuate questions
of race and ethnicity, nor ignore the ongoing effects of contemporary colonial regimes on third-world women's writings.

In regard to the personal nature of much of the narrative, some critics such as Jagger (1983) have argued that the text is mere "description". I believe, however, that it is an example of theorising in a non-traditional way. That is to say the writers politicise their narratives in such a way that their theorising is informed by their experiences. The section, called "Entering the Lives of Others", for example, is subtitled "Theory in the Flesh". This is an appropriate title because the writers are generating implicit theories out of reflections on experience and disguising them as primary texts. Barbara Christian confirms this in her article, "The Race for Theory". She says,

For people of color have always theorized - but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing...is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create... (Christian, 1989, 226)

Moreover, in the act of editing the text, Moraga and Anzaldúa have further constructed a theory through their selection and arrangement of the material. In the introduction to the section
titled “Theory in the Flesh” Moraga argues that biological determinism has been socially constructed to oppress the ‘other’ and out of this comes the politics of their theorising. They say,

....the physical realities of our lives- our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings-all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. (Moraga, 1983d, 23)

The personal is political and so the personal nature of the narrative is the most appropriate form of discourse. For example, if third-world women are excluded from a meeting because they are not white then their exclusion is a political act. By telling their stories then, Moraga and Anzaldúa argue, third-world women are able to bring attention to those politics and bridge the gap. They are able to explain what it is to be colored in a white feminist movement, what it is to be a feminist among their own cultures or what it is to be a lesbian among straights. Ironically though, this is what they said they didn’t want to do. In the section on racism in the women’s movement, for example, the message was that third-world women should not have to educate white women. This now might be seen more as a figure of speech. By saying we shouldn’t have to do this and then doing it, third-world women disrupt the position of superiority that white feminists had assumed and take the position of knowledge-giver or parent. This is after all what the title of the
text is all about. While primarily it was meant as a bridge between third-world women, by its very existence it becomes a means of educating white feminists. The text becomes a bridge between ignorance and knowledge.

This too is a point where *This Bridge Called My Back* moves between text and theory. Previously the subject of feminist theory had been the single issue of gender. *This Bridge Called My Back* takes feminism beyond that and makes it about gender, race, sexuality, education and class. This challenges the idea that one becomes a woman by simple opposition to 'man'. It is in this problematisation of the category of “woman” that the theory of the text emerges. As Alarcon argues, no longer can “woman” be seen as “a speaking subject who is an autonomous, self-conscious individual” (Alarcon, 1991, 36). These sentiments are found in the *This Bridge Called My Back’s* title poem. Donna Kate Rushin says,

Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody

This bridge I must be

Is the bridge to my own power

I must translate

My own fears

Mediate
My own weakness
I must be the bridge to nowhere
But my true self
And then
I will be useful.

(Rushin, 1983, XXII)

Refusing to play the part of the bridge is an acceptance of defeat by those who see “woman” as a speaking subject who is unified and autonomous. As davenport said in the section on racism, “we should stop wasting our time and energy until these women evolve.” (davenport, 1983, 89) In being a bridge to nowhere but her true self, Rushin is working toward a consciousness where she is multi-voiced. This solves the problem that Minh-ha (1989) and Spivak (1993a) identify in that one does not have to write first as a woman or as a Chicana and so on. One’s consciousness can move between and beyond all these things and be more than one at any given time.

In telling their own stories third-world women do this. They empower themselves and, according to Moraga and Anzaldúa, their “flesh and blood experiences” can be used to concretise the vision of how things should be. This argument echoes the earlier argument that racism is not experienced theoretically and will not be
overcome theoretically and in this light the ‘stories’ of the text are attempts to merge the lives of third-world women into a theoretical framework.

The first section of the text explains the beginnings of the radicalism of third-world feminists. It is not what one expects in that it returns to childhood, a common theme throughout the anthology. The title of the section is “Children Passing In The Streets” but the subtitle - “The Roots of Our Radicalism” - is more telling. In the introduction to the section Moraga explains the problem of color. She says

For although some of us have traveled more easily from street corner to corner than the sister whose color or poverty made her an especially visible target to the violence on the street, all of us have been victims of the invisible violation .... the self-abnegation .... The constant threat of cultural obliteration. (Moraga, 1983e, 5)

The central issue as Moraga sees it is the spectrum of color. Being fair skinned, as she explains in “La Guera” she found it easy to pass as a white person and as a consequence she enjoyed a much less troubled childhood than a third-world person who had darker skin. By contrast in “La Prieta” Anzaldúa explains the difficulties of being
an exceptionally dark-skinned child in a family where everybody else's skin was more fair. The problem though is not just that you are treated differently by others. The deeper problem is how you treat yourself as a result of this. Davenport uses the term 'whitewashed' and this is the real danger for third-world women as can be seen in the recurring theme of the desire of the author, as a young woman, to fit into white society, to become white.

In Nellie Wong's Poem "When I Was Growing Up" she echoes Moraga's thoughts but also takes them a step further by explaining the psychological effects of being treated according to the shade of your skin. She says,

> when I was growing up, people told me
> I was dark and I believed my own darkness
> in the mirror, in my soul, my own narrow vision
> (Wong, 1983, 7)

When Wong says "people told me I was dark" (Wong, 1983, 7) she is suggesting something deeper than the color of her skin. The darkness that she refers to is a darkness in the "soul". (Wong, 1983, 7) In Western culture black is typically associated with darkness and evil. In literature, for example, writers like Poe use black crows and similar totems to symbolically represent evil. What Wong is
suggesting is that because her skin was dark she was labelled as evil and eventually this impacted on her to the point where she believed in her own “darkness” and longed to wear “imaginary pale skin”. (Wong, 1983, 7)

mary hope lee [sic], by contrast, writes about the difficulty of being somewhere in the middle of the color spectrum yet not wanting to be white. In her poem “on not being” lee explains that problem associated with being in the middle of white and black.

Momma took her outta
almost all black lincoln high
cuz she useta catch hell
every day in gym class.
(mary hope lee, 1983, 9)

lee says that she would much rather have been “moist earth brown” or “milk chocolate” (lee, 1983, 9) rather than “faded out yellow”. (lee, 1983, 9) “Faded out yellow”, as the title of the poem suggests, is like ‘not being’ or having no identity. This is the opposite to Wong who dreamed of being white.

These problems and the various contradictions inherent in being treated according to where you fit on the color spectrum are a
source of radicalism for third-world women. Sandoval, in her analysis of Oppositional Consciousness confirms this. In her analysis she says that once a person becomes aware of their subordinated subject position, the position can “become transformed into more effective sites of resistance to the current ordering of power”. (Sandoval, 1991, 11)

This process of recognition can be found in the second section of the text, “Theorising the Flesh” where the writers’ radicalism is channelled into a theory of experience. For this Moraga chooses to write in the form of a personal essay called “La Guera” which means the fair skinned. Moraga begins the essay by saying

I am the very well educated daughter of a woman who, by the standards in this country, would be considered largely illiterate...she was the only daughter of six to marry an anglo [sic], my father. (Moraga, 1983f, 23)

This opening sentence fractures many expectations. Moraga sets herself apart from her mother by contrasting her own education with her mothers illiteracy. But she also sets her mother apart from other Chicana women by saying that she was the only daughter to marry an anglo. This marriage results in Moraga’s fair skin and undoubtedly provided the economic means by which Moraga was
educated. Through her mother’s marriage to an anglo Moraga did not need to be “pulled out of school at the ages of five, seven, nine and eleven to work in the fields.” (Moraga, 1983f, 27) Thus class, race and gender interact in the formation of her identity.

In contrasting the easy existence that she had compared with that of her mother, Moraga felt a certain sense of pride. She says that even though she was educated she was more than this. She was fair skinned and this was an outward sign that she had made it. As a young girl she was taught to value what was “white”. Everything about her upbringing was an attempt to “bleach” (Moraga, 1983f, 28) her of her color. She says “it was through my mother’s desire to protect her children from poverty and illiteracy that we became ‘anglocized’” (Moraga, 1983f, 28) This idea of becoming ‘anglocized’ is an example of feminist hegemony in practice. Moraga was taught to suppress her racial voice and her class voice and value the voice that said white, educated woman.

As she became older and identified as a lesbian Moraga’s sense of pride (her unified speaking subject) was replaced with a sense of cultural identification. Through the oppression of lesbians she was able to identify with the oppression of being poor, uneducated and Chicana. In this process of identification Moraga acknowledges that she is more than an educated “white” woman. She recognises herself
as a subject with multiple voices. She says

In this country, lesbianism is a poverty - as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. The danger lies in ranking the oppressions. The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression. The danger lies in attempting to deal with the oppression from a purely theoretical base. (Moraga, 1983f, 29)

Anzaldúa explains this idea further in her book Borderlands/La Frontera. She explains that in identification the new woman learns "to juggle cultures. The juncture where the mestiza stands is where phenomena tend to collide." (Anzaldúa, 1987, 79) By accepting these collisions without needing to order them the third world woman rejects the totalising / homogenising agenda of western feminism and acknowledges her multiplicity as a subject.

Moraga comes to this realisation at the end of her essay. She says, "I am a woman with a foot in both worlds; and I refuse the split. I feel the necessity for dialogue." (Moraga, 1983f, 34) In her closing paragraph she states that "one voice" is not enough. She has many voices necessary for dialogue.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s personal essay titled “La Prieta” follows a similar
pattern to Moraga’s. Although they had very different childhoods, both come to profound realisations as a result of them. Anzaldúa begins the essay by outlining the difficulties of her childhood caused by being a third-world child in the United States. Unlike Moraga who felt blessed to have fair skin, Anzaldúa was extremely dark and this made her feel very obvious.

"Don’t go in the sun,” my mother would tell me ....” 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.” (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 198)

For Anzaldúa, the irony was that her mother did not realise that although her family was sixth generation American, they were still Mexican and “all Mexicans are part Indian”. (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 198) Anzaldúa feels much grief over her mother’s racism, and the racism of many other third-world people.

She is similarly embarrassed by her mother’s culturally based superstitions. When Anzaldúa began to menstruate as a very young girl her mother told her to “keep her legs shut” fearing that this was her own punishment for having “fucked before” (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 198) the wedding ceremony. The issue here is one of genealogy. As we find in many of the stories, there is a recurring belief that
women are united by bonds deeper than family or emotions, there is almost a sense that they are united biologically, as in this story where Anzaldúa’s mother believes that her actions have somehow manifested in her daughter’s body.

While Moraga grew up valuing her “whiteness”, Anzaldúa’s cultural heritage and the darkness of her skin left her feeling “strange, abnormal (and) QUEER.” (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 199) However, like Moraga she later came to a deeper understanding of the difficulties her mother faced and her resentment turned to love. She acknowledges that it was not her mother’s fault. She quotes from Nellie Wong’s poem, “From a Heart of Rice Straw”.

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...
(Anzaldúa, 1983c, 202)

In acknowledging the importance of her mother’s story Anzaldúa is accepting that we are all culturally constructed. One can never deny their past because even the very act of denial contributes to who you are. Accepting this is Anzaldúa’s first step toward becoming a multi voiced subject.
This is realised in the section called “Who Are My People” where Anzaldúa describes how she is torn in different ways by her various friends. Her Chicana friends call for her allegiance to La Raza, her Asian friends call for her allegiance to the third-world, her feminist friends call for her allegiance to women, and so on. While she feels like “a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds”, (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 205) these calls to commit to one cause beg the question, ‘What am I?’ and Anzaldúa’s answer is,

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. (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 205)

Anzaldúa resists the Western practice of totalising around a single theme and instead calls on Hindu mythology to explain her position/s. She likens herself to Shiva, a many armed and legged body capable of placing a hand or a foot in white, brown, gay, straight, working class, literary, male and socialist worlds. Her analogy gives her a multiple register of existence which resists Western notions self-identification. As Anzaldúa says, “only your labels split me.” (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 205)

This is the same point that Moraga arrives at in her essay. In the end both opt for a multi voiced subject position and like Rushin, in
the title poem, Anzaldúa attributes this to a search for ‘the self’. While Rushin says, “I must be the bridge to nowhere but my true self”. (Rushin, 1983, XXII) Anzaldúa says,

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. (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 209)

What Anzaldúa imagines is a completely plural society where people of all ideas, affinities and beliefs can live together without opposing each other.

Andrea Canaan imagines a similar society in her essay titled, “Brownness”. She begins, like Moraga in “La Guera”, by asserting a very definite sense of identity. She says, “I am brown and have experienced life as a brown person.” (Canaan, 1983, 232) As a brown person she has been able to live through a variety of situations because her identity was “sure”. Unfortunately however, due to the racism of society, the only sure thing about being brown was that you would be called “nigger” (Canaan, 1983, 232), that you would have to drink from separate fountains and that you would not be allowed to “sit in the front of the bus.” (Canaan, 1983, 232)
Life for Canaan became nothing more than a binary situation where "the ultimate evil was the white male" (Canaan, 1983, 233) and the most dangerous enemy was the white woman. This distinction is an interesting one in that Canaan separates the ideas of evil and enemy. One might necessarily assume that those who are most evil are the most likely enemy and yet, for Canaan, this is not the case. Nonetheless, what she did was to attribute all the evils to white society until she realised that this would not change things. She says,

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 things brown women faced with a watchful eye for a power base. (Canaan, 1983, 234)

What Canaan learnt from this was that the real enemy was the force within her that allowed others to control her. She came to the realisation that she is more than one subject, she is more than the sum of her brownness and as long as she saw herself as the sum of her color she would continue to be oppressed. After all, it is easier to pin someone down and oppress them when they are an obvious target. The only way out of this conundrum is to have several voices; to see yourself as the intersection of various forces, your gender, your sexuality, your class, your race, as Moraga and
Anzaldúa do by the end of their respective essays. Canaan reaches this point when she says, "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." (Canaan, 1983, 234)

This recurring theme where third-world women acknowledge the many voices within them, the various levels of consciousness that construct them becomes what Sandoval (1991) refers to as the fourth taxonomy in her analysis of feminist theory. Through her analysis of various third-world texts she believes that third-world women expand the original taxonomy of Showalter beyond its limits. In Showalter’s model the first phase of feminism is characterised by women proving that they are as fully capable and human as men. In the second phase women writers were no longer concerned with equalling male culture so much as dramatizing wronged womanhood. In the third phase women ignored men altogether and turned to female experience as a form of new, autonomous art. Third-world women, Sandoval argues, create a fourth phase where they develop a “differential consciousness”. By this she means that women are able to recognise and explore the fact they are more than their gender, more than a biological phenomena. Sandoval says,
U.S. third world feminism represents a central locus of possibility, an insurgent movement which shatters the construction of any one of the collective ideologies as the single most correct site where truth can be represented. (Sandoval, 1991, 14)

Moraga also envisages a similar existence which she refers to as living “between .... the .... lines”. (Moraga, 1983g, 106) This idea of living between the lines includes rejecting separatist ideologies and working from various standpoints to challenge, sexism, racism and homophobia. Avoiding a single subject position allows the third-world woman to achieve this. As Modleski argues, the concept suggests the woman’s refusal to be silenced as well as their resistance to the categories that a white patriarchal language has evolved in order to explain the world in racist and sexist terms. (Modleski, 1984, 200)

To return to Anzaldúa’s concept in Borderlands / la Frontera, she comes to a similar point that she calls mestiza consciousness. Mestiza consciousness occurs in what Anzaldúa refers to as the borderlands; the space between where one’s gender, race, class, sexuality and politics collide. The work of the mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality and thus recognise and
accept the ambiguities and contradictions within her existence.

Where this differs from Western concepts of consciousness, Mohanty argues, is in the subject position.

unlike a Western, postmodernist notion of agency and consciousness which often announces the splintering of the subject, and privileges multiplicity in the abstract, this is a notion of agency born of history and geography. It is a theorization of the materiality and politics of the everyday struggle. (Mohanty, 1991, 36)

The materiality and politics of the everyday struggle lead many of the third-world women in the text to want nothing short of a revolution. Indeed, Moraga and Anzaldúa acknowledge this point in the introduction to the text.

We named this anthology “radical” for we were interested in the writings of women of color who want nothing short of a revolution in the hands of women - who agree that this is the goal, no matter what we might disagree about the getting there .... (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983a, XXIV)

They use the term “revolution” in the sense of the original meaning
of the word - stemming from the word "root" - as their politics emerge from the roots of both their cultural oppression and heritage. The final section of the text is dedicated to this theme and is titled "El Mundo Zurdo" or "The Vision". Interestingly in the introduction to the section Anzaldúa rejects the idea of separatism which was a theme in the section on racism and was summed up when davenport said "we should stop wasting our time and energy until these women evolve." Anzaldúa says, "For separatism by race, nation, or gender will not do the trick." (Anzaldúa, 1983d, 196) Instead Anzaldúa encourages third-world women to unite with all oppressed groups to overcome the structures that hold oppression in place. Although she doesn’t identify them, she suggests that similar structures oppress the coloured, the queer, the poor, the female, the physically challenged. Through ties with all the oppressed of the world Anzaldúa envisions an international feminism that works autonomously. She has a vision which spans from the self-love of (their) colored skins, to the respect of (their) foremother who kept the embers of revolution burning, to our reverence for the trees-the final reminder of our rightful place on the planet. (Anzaldúa, 1983d, 196)

The various pieces in this section all express, to varying degrees,
visions of revolution or how things should be. The first piece, "A Black feminist Statement" by the Combahee River Collective begins by stating that the most general statement that they could make is that they are "actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression." (Combahee River Collective, 1983, 210) Like earlier writers in the text they understand that their oppression is more than gender based and in fact involves the many types of oppression working simultaneously to keep them in their subjugated position. They demonstrate this point by suggesting that sexual and racial oppression overlap in many areas of their lives where they cannot be separated. The high incidence of rape of African American women is an example. They say that "the history of rape by white men as a weapon of political repression" (Combahee River Collective, 1983, 213) can never be seen as solely racial or solely sexual oppression.

The Combahee River Collective believe that they only way oppressed people will be liberated is by an overthrow of the political-economic system of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. Ultimately what they argue for is a socialist revolution where the economic system is organised so that race and class are not determinants of your economic position. They say, "we are socialists because we believe the work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work .... and not for the profit
of the bosses.” (Combahee River Collective, 1983, 213) The position that the Collective take is essentially an anti-essentialist one.

We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society.” (Combahee River Collective, 1983, 214)

Nonetheless, theoretically they believe that an overthrow of the current system is possible because subject positions are not biologically determined but are rather socially constructed. This however does not negate the fact that the work of feminism will remain threatening as it is deeply ingrained in Western society that gender should be a determinant of power relationships.

In real terms however, since revolutions are rarely successful, the changes that the Collective envision are not possible. What they do however, is work on local situations where race, class and gender are simultaneous factors in oppression. They describe how they have been involved in workplace politics in organisations that employ a lot of third-world women, how they have picketed hospitals that are cutting back on services to the third-world communities and how they have set up a rape crisis centre in a black neighbourhood. Ultimately it is the pervasiveness of the problem that limits their work to a local level.
The Collective end their statement by asserting the need for constant self reflection and evaluation. Just as Cixous, in her theory of feminism, argues that you cannot overcome domination by setting up any equally powerful binary, the Collective are not willing to “mess over people in the name of politics.” (Combahee River Collective, 1983, 218)

Aware that you cannot dismantle the master’s house using the master’s tools, they say,

We believe in collective process and non-hierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society. (Combahee River Collective, 1983, 218)

Pat Parker, in “Revolution: It’s Not Neat or Pretty or Quick”, takes a socialist stance similar to The Combahee River Collective. Just as they argued for an overthrow of the political-economic system of capitalism and imperialism, Parker says,

In order for revolution to be 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 .... people are oppressed throughout the world by imperialist
powers. (Parker, 1983, 240)

The first step in Parker's revolution is taking ownership. As an example she cites the feminist movement. For too long, she says, she has watched white middle-class women lead the women's movement and she has heard people say that the women's movement is a white middle-class movement. But she says, "I am a feminist, I am neither white nor middle class." (Parker, 1983, 241) In this recognition she calls all third-world people to reclaim "our" movement.

The second step in Parker's revolution is to reject imperialism as she believes that imperial powers are largely responsible for oppression. As an example she discusses how the USA oppresses third-world people in its consumption of oil. "The rest of the world is being exploited in order to maintain our standard of living." (Parker, 1983, 238) What Parker would have third world people of the USA do is reject this privilege. She argues that,

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. (Parker, 1983, 239)

Where Parker differs in her revolutionary attitudes to the other
writers included in the section is her final step, her stance on the nuclear family. The nuclear family, as Parker sees it, is the basic unit of capitalism. It is used to control women and to keep them in a subjugated position. Women, Parker believes, have been controlled by men who tell them when and where to bear children. Parker says,

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. (Parker, 1983, 242)

The problem with Parker’s argument is that while it offers suggestions on how to implement a revolution, it offers no vision beyond the revolution. Indeed, perhaps she is self-defeating in her acknowledgment that “we have no examples of any country that has successfully completed the revolutionary process.” (Parker, 1983, 241)

Moraga, in her poem “The Welder”, also suggests a forceful revolution. She says

I am a welder.

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

(Moraga, 1983h, 219)

The image of the welder is an interesting choice. What Moraga suggests is not a system of binaries. The welder takes two metals and joins them. She does not want a revolution where third-world women are freed from oppression but achieve this in a separatist way, she wants a revolution that results in the union of each side. What third-world and first world women must do to achieve unity is to look for the “common elements”, a common ground.

This vision of common elements is not to suggests that the unity has to be hegemonic. As Moraga outlined in the introduction of the text, even her union with other third-world women is not meant to totalise. Rather, what Moraga has in mind is that in achieving unity, first and third-world feminists also acknowledge their differences, acknowledge

.... the fact that we bend
at different temperatures
that each of us is malleable
up to a point.
(Moraga, 1983h, 219)

The problem though is that this will not be achieved easily. As she reluctantly acknowledges in the introduction to the text, “Third World feminism does not provide the kind of easy political framework that women of color are running to in droves.” (Moraga, 1983b, Foreword) Moraga understands that her vision will only be achieved “if things get hot enough”. (Moraga, 1983h, 219) This idea of heat is repeated later in the poem when she emphasises heat’s capacity to “change the shape of things”. (Moraga, 1983h, 220) and while Moraga never explains exactly what she has in mind when she uses this image, the idea of heat might suggest arguments, or possibly even violence. What is obvious is that Moraga believes that things will get a lot worse before they get better.

The vision that Anzaldúa’s “La Prieta” offers is also revolutionary in nature, although it is certainly less forceful in its design. The point that she makes is that third-world people must overcome their complicity in their own oppression. Anzaldúa acknowledges,

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 an accomplice .... for we are not screaming loud enough in protest. (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 207)

What Anzaldúa remembers when she says this is that there were times when she could have done something, or could have said something to make a difference and she did not. Specifically she cites an example where she was asked why more third-world women did not attend Feminist Writers’ Guild meetings. Rather than saying, “because their skin is not as thick as mine, because their fear of encountering racism is greater than mine. They don’t enjoy being put down....” (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 207), she remains silent. Silence allows the continuation of oppression and, in her vision of revolution, Anzaldúa realises that the silences must be broken. Women of color must stop being modern Medusas - “throats cut, silenced into a mere hissing.” (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 206) Women of color must join with others who are oppressed so that together they can be a force and break the silence as “the rational, the patriarchal and the heterosexual have held sway and legal tender for too long.” (Anzaldúa, 1983c, 207)

In regard to the theme of revolution which is quite common in the writings in This Bridge Called My Back, the final piece that I would like to examine is Cheryl Clarke’s “Lesbianism: an Act of Resistance”.

Page 67
The basis of Clark’s argument is that heterosexuality is a system of oppression just like colonialism. She says,

patriarchs must extoll the boy-girl dyad as “natural” to keep us straight and compliant in the same way the European had to extoll Caucasian superiority to justify the African slave trade. (Clarke, 1983, 130)

Agreeing with Anzaldúa that heterossexuals have held sway for too long, Clarke argues that this system of sexual domination can be overcome through lesbianism. She says,

No matter how a woman lives out her lesbianism - in the closet, in the state legislature, in the bedroom - she has rebelled against becoming the slave master’s concubine, viz. the male-dependent female, the female heterosexual. (Clarke, 1983, 129)

Further into the essay she makes a similar claim when she argues that,

The lesbian has decolonised her body. She has rejected a lifestyle of servitude implicit in Western, heterosexual relationships (Clarke, 1983, 128)
The problem with Clarke's argument, as she words it, is that she suggests that lesbianism is a choice. When she says that "she has rebelled against becoming" she is suggesting that lesbians choose lesbianism as a lifestyle to actively resist colonisation by men rather than lesbianism, by coincidence, placing women in a position where they are beyond such colonisation.

From an historical point of view, Clark takes this stance because of the way in which she defines 'lesbian'. She believes that any woman who "says she is," (Clarke, 1983, 137) is a lesbian. What this allows for is lesbianism to become an act of speech, a cognitive decision. This position, which Clarke supports, is an historical strategy of 1970's radical feminism. Clarke's vision of lesbianism moves beyond sexual preference and becomes an act to subvert patriarchal dominance and the marginalisation of women by heterosexuality.
SECTION THREE  The Third Woman

In analysing the writings in The Third Woman, I would like to look for thematic similarities with This Bridge Called My Back and to question a claim made by Dexter Fisher in the introduction to the text. As I stated earlier, Fisher said she had avoided including only pieces that were exclusively political or feminist as the politics of the text derives from its existence as the first major collection of literature by American Indian, Afro-American, Chicana, and Asian American women. (Fisher, 1980, XXX)

In the introduction to the section on “Black Women Writers” she contradicts this claim when she explains the importance of history in the writing of African Americans. Historically in America Blacks were prohibited from learning to read and write. This was a form of colonial oppression designed to maintain the status quo. Learning to write became associated with the quest for freedom and thus, Fisher says, “each act of writing became a political and historical event.” (Fisher, 1980, 139) If this is so then it follows that the various pieces of writing in this section are all, by their very nature, political and their politics are a central concern.
Moreover, throughout the various sections of the text one can find recurring themes as many of the pieces of writing explore issues of sexism, the abuse of females, the difficulties faced by women caught in these culturally specific problems and finally the difficulties involved in being caught between two cultures. These themes are feminist and political.

Lucille Clifton, in *Lucy*, an extract from her autobiographical narrative titled *Generations*, explores the issues of slavery, freedom and womanhood through her family history. The narrative is not sequenced chronologically but rather resembles the form of snippets of memories that flow in a random order from the mind.

Clifton tells the story through her father and in the first section she explains how her grandfather, who was a slave, asked his master to buy her grandmother, who was considerably younger than him, from her master. In section two Clifton then explains how her father had four children by three different women and how it was only when a boy was born, the fourth child, that he stopped sleeping with other women.

The connection between these two sections paints an interesting picture of the relationship between men and women during this period in America history. While both Clifton’s grandparents were
slaves, she is implying a sense of double ownership in highlighting the vast age difference between them. She describes him as an “old man” and her as a “young woman”. (Clifton, 1980, 208) This sense of masculine ownership continues into the generation of her father who values only male children and will sleep with as many woman as is necessary to produce a son. The image of ‘woman’ is one of the double slave because she is enslaved by colonialism and sexism, and this is important to the sense of identity of the African American male. Because he had been emasculated by the slavery of whites, he feels it necessary to assert his authority over black women so as to maintain some sense of masculinity/strength. Thus, to Clifton’s father, women were little more than objects to be used. When his first wife died at twenty-one she was replaced by the narrator’s mother. While the narrator’s mother was a bride her father slept with another woman and ultimately when she died he brought in a third wife. Clifton comments on how many in the community did not believe that he would live for long after her mother had died. Many said he could not survive without her. The description of how he so easily replaced her comments on the failure of the community to recognise the reality of gender relations and the true nature of their relationship. Clifton says,

And Mama’s friend took care of him just as Mama had done, cooking and cleaning and being hollered at so much
that once my children had asked me Is [sic] that lady Papa’s maid or what? (Clifton, 1980, 209)

Clearly for her father women were nothing more than someone to sleep with, someone to do the cleaning and the cooking. Clifton’s answer to her children’s question sums up her attitude to this. She says, “no, not really, she’s like my Mama was.” (Clifton, 1980, 209) There is a great deal of sadness in her answer. While she loved her mother, she was deeply saddened by the way she allowed herself to be treated like a maid.

However, it was only when she attends her father’s funeral that Clifton reaches a point of recognition. He had been placed in the coffin on his side to hide his amputated leg. She says, “they were hiding his missing leg .... They were hiding his nothing. Nothing was hidden.” (Clifton, 1980, 209) It is with this recognition that she is able to walk away.

The narrator is able to stand outside of her family and see the power dynamics. The inner strength that she displays is what her grandmother would refer to as “Dahomey woman” (Clifton, 1980, 212), a woman of great strength, a quality that she inherits from her aunt Lucy. In the final section she tells the story of her aunt who married a white man named Harvey Nichols and then later
shot him dead. In the words of the narrator's father, Lucy was "mean and didn't do nothing she didn't want to do and nobody could force her." (Clifton, 1980, 212) It is clear that the narrator's father's description is coloured by his own image of women, that they are to be used by men. His choice of the word "mean" might be interpreted to mean that she would not be treated as a 'door-mat'. Mammy Ca'line summarises her situation. She says, "we be strong women .... not you, mister, you won't be weak. You be a Sayle." (Clifton, 1980, 211)

Toni Morrison, in the extract from her novel Sula, paints an equally interesting picture of women. The story revolves around three generations of women; Sula, her mother, Hannah and her grandmother, Eva.

Her grandmother had been abandoned with three children by her husband. Like the African-American male in Clifton's story, he "did whatever he could that he liked, and he liked womanizing best, drinking second, and abusing Eva third." (Morrison, 1980, 238) When he left her she had one dollar and sixty-five cents, five eggs and three beats. The demands of three children were too great and, rumour had it, because she didn't have money to feed them she put her leg on the rail track to receive ten thousand dollars compensation. The image is of a woman willing to do anything for
the love of her children. Interestingly though, Morrison contrasts this with other images of Eva, an image of a heartless woman who left her children with a neighbour for a day but didn’t return for eighteen months and then again with a woman who takes in orphan children and cares for them and finally with a woman who doused her son with kerosene and set him alight because he had become a junkie.

The greatest paradox though is not to be found in Eva’s treatment of her children. It is found in her attitude to men. While she felt nothing but hatred for BoyBoy who abandoned her with three children, she “simply loved maleness, for its own sake.” (Morrison, 1980, 243) She always had an abundance of male callers and yet, unlike other African-American women, she felt no need to play the role of the agreeable female. Ironically though, she “fussed interminably with the brides of newly wed couples for not getting their men’s supper ready on time” (Morrison, 1980, 243) The irony that Morrison describes suggest that her grandmother is a woman who is trapped between two ideologies. One the one hand she is fiercely independent and refuses to play the role of the subservient wife while on the other hand she encourages this role in others because she does not have the skills to break completely free of the sexual and cultural stereotypes that bind her.
Hannah, her daughter, also “simply refused to live without the attentions of a man” (Morrison, 1980, 244) and after her husband's death slept with the husbands of most of her friends. Unlike the strong women of Clifton's story, Hannah delighted in playing the role of the vulnerable and flirtatious female. Unlike the self-respecting women of many of the other stories Hannah rubbed no edges, made no demands, made the man feel as though he were complete and wonderful just as he was - he didn't need fixing - and so he relaxed and swooned in the Hannah-light that shone on him simply because he was. (Morrison, 1980, 243)

While it appears that Hannah plays the role of the 'pathetic woman' who desperately needs the love of a man, she is later described as somebody who would “fuck practically anything” (Morrison, 1980, 244), but would sleep with nobody because it implied a level of trust and commitment. The image that Morrison has created is that of a woman who behaves like a man. She likes sex, she has it often and she does not feel the need for commitment or guilt. Just as BoyBoy had womanized and done whatever he liked, so too Hannah did whatever she wanted.

In the extract, as Fisher chooses it, it is not clear whether Morrison
admires or admonishes these women for taking the initiatives that the sexual revolution later provided. However, it could be argued that since the women in the town resent Hannah for sleeping with their husbands more than they resent their husbands for sleeping with Hannah, perhaps Morrison is more interested in turning upside-down the image of the “easy” woman and as a consequence exposing the hypocrisy of the black community in perpetuating such stereotypes.

This recurrent theme of family and the importance of the links between generations of women can also be found in the section of the text dedicated to Chicana writers. In Rosalie Otero Peralta’s story “Las Dos Hermanos” we find many similarities with the African-American stories that have been analysed. The story is told through the eyes of a child, Margarita, still innocent and not yet aware of the ways of adult relationships, who describes how her great-aunt Marcelina comes to live with her and her grandmother Teresina because of her husbands infidelity and abuse.

As the story develops it is revealed that Marcelina had married a man much older than herself, against the advice of her family. As was the case in the African-American stories, the picture of the male is someone who treats women like servants, who has extra marital relationships and, specific to this story, someone who beats
his wife. Teresina says, "what he wanted was a maid." (Peralta, 1980, 343)

Peralta problematises Marcelina’s situation by offering no easy solutions. While Teresina sees that Marcelina must leave her husband, it is not so clear-cut. On the one hand the problem for Marcelina was that she felt a duty to remain in the marriage because of the children and it is only when all the children have left home that she is able to consider leaving her husband. But even here she is torn between what is best for her, her beliefs and the opinion of others. Her main concern in leaving the marriage was that people might say,

Tan buena Catolica y divorciada. (Peralta, 1980, 345)

[Such a good Catholic and now she’s divorced]

Added to this was a sense of guilt. She wonders what she did wrong, what she did to deserve this treatment. She asks herself, “what evil did I commit?” (Peralta, 1980, 346)

While ultimately, at the prompting of her sister, Marcelina does leave her husband, the image that we have of her is the “guilty victim”. Peralta portrays the way that women, through social conditioning sometimes believe that they must have done
Continuing this theme of the ‘woman as victim’, Guadalupe Valdes Fallis, in her story “Recuerdo”, also presents the image of women as victims of Chicano machismo. In an interesting twist however, this is encouraged by the mother, Rosa. The story centres on Maruca, the daughter of Rosa, who works for an old, fat, sweaty lawyer who touches her and fondles her breasts. When she decides that she cannot work for him any longer, her mother goes to see him. In this meeting the lawyer suggests that if he were to marry Maruca he would provide her with a child and a home. This offer seems like an attractive possibility to Rosa.

“Take care of her?”, Rosa was praying now, her fingers crossed behind her back .... That it might be, really, was unbelievable. (Fallis, 1980, 358)

However, like the women in the Morrison’s story, she is filled with doubts and concerns. She realises that her own husband is drunk and lazy and that he had “begun to look at Maruca”. (Fallis, 1980, 358). But because she has been so indoctrinated in the Chicana belief that a woman needs a man she is able rationalise her situation by suggesting that he didn’t beat her and he was a man to protect them. While his obvious interest in her daughter did worry
her, she says that men are men and if there is temptation then it is only natural.

Maruca's shock at her mother's suggestion that she consider Don Lorenzo's offer reinforces Rosa's hopelessness. This child-like innocence highlights the way in which culture can make women victims. Just like Marcelina in the previous story, Rosa is trapped. She believes that women cannot live without men and would have her daughter marry a lecherous old man because he can provide economic stability. Fallis mocks the cultural base of her ignorance by revealing her hypocrisy. When Maruca's friend dates an American soldier. Rosa says, "as if we did not know that she goes with the first American that looks at her." (Fallis, 1980, 359) While the Americans can also provide economic stability Rosa will only allow herself to be degraded by a Chicano. Again it is the voice of the child that reinforces this hypocrisy. Maruca says.

You want me to go to bed with Don Lorenzo? You want me to let him put his greasy hands all over me, and make love to me? You want that? Is that how much better I can do than Petra? (Fallis, 1980, 360)

While at this point in the story we might expect Rosa to come to some point of realisation, indeed she wanted to scream out, "No, no! 
You will hate it”, (Fallis, 1980, 360) she does not. She simply says, “Yes, Maruca, it will make you happy.” (Fallis, 1980, 360) Ultimately she is a woman trapped by her culture, unable to believe that women have a right to be treated with respect. She will go on perpetuating the role of the woman as victim. Whether her daughter can break free of this is unclear.

Marcela Christine Lucero-Trujillo summarises a paradox of Mexican-American culture in her poem "Machismo is Part of Our Culture”. Machismo is an exaggerated masculinity that kept women in a position of powerlessness during Mexican-American history. Machismo is the base or the cause of how the women behave and are treated in the Chicana stories. In the poem however, Lucero-Trujillo indicates that it is time for thing to change because Chicanos cannot have it both ways. Now that many are involved in relationships with white women who do not accept the treatment that Chicanas had, it is time to change. Lucero-Trujillo says

hey Chicano bossman
don’t tell me that
machismo is part of our culture
if you sleep
and marry W.A.S.P.

(Lucero-Trujillo, 1980, 401)
Lucero-Trujillo is suggesting that if Chicanos are willing to breach cultural practices by marrying a W.A.S.P. women then they cannot insist on other cultural practices such as machismo. Also, if white women are able to resist such treatment then Chicanas must realise that this is not a biological condition but rather a social one that can be changed. Lucero-Trujillo points to this when she says,

At home you're no patron,
your liberated gabacha (Anglo woman)
has gotcha where
she wants ya
(Lucero-Trujillo, 1980, 401)

Lucero-Trujilla calls all Chicanas to acknowledge that “y a mi me ves cara”. (Lucero-Trujillo, 1980, 401) (to you I must look like a stepping stone) This concept is similar to the title of This Bridge Called My Back in that Moraga and Anzaldúa see that third-world women are always a bridge, always being walked across. Lucero-Trujillo is calling on all Chicanas to stop being a stepping stone, to stop being stepped on.

The hypocrisy of men, and the ways in which some women perpetuate this is a theme that is also found in the section of the text dedicated to Asian-American writing. Maxine Hong Kingston's
“No Name Woman” from *The Woman Warrior*, starts with the narrator’s mother saying “You must not tell anyone ... what I am about to tell you.” (Hong Kingston, 1980, 460) What she goes on to tell is the story of Hong Kingston’s aunt who killed herself because her secret lover and the father of her child organised a raid of her home because she was pregnant and her husband had been gone for years. The villagers came in disguises in the middle of the night and destroyed the home and killed the livestock. The next day Hong Kingston’s aunt drowned herself and the baby in the family well.

Hong Kingston imagines the various circumstances under which her aunt became pregnant. She believes that in old China women did not have choices. She wonders whether

some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil. (Hong Kingston, 1980, 462)

Hong Kingston’s hypothesises that her aunt was forced to have sex with him under threat of being beaten or killed. Conversely she images her aunt actually being attracted to the man, defying Chinese tradition and initiating the relationship because she “liked the way the hair was tucked behind his ears, or she liked the question-mark line of a torso curving at the shoulder and straight at the hip.” (Hong Kingston, 1980, 464) Finally she wonders if her
aunt was not some "wild Woman" (Hong Kingston, 1980, 464) who did it simply because she liked the sex.

Hong Kingston draws many conclusions from her aunt's story. Firstly there is her aunt's acceptance of the double standards of Chinese culture. She did not name the father of her child so that he would not have to bear any of the burden. As Hong Kingston says, "to save her inseminator's name she gave a silent birth." (Hong Kingston, 1980, 466) Secondly she sees her mother is duplicitous in the treatment of her aunt. By beginning the story with "you must not tell anyone....what I am about to tell you", her mother perpetuates the idea that her sister-in-law was somehow shameful and deserved the treatment that she received. Her silence perpetuates the double standards of Chinese culture.

Just as was the case in the other stories, it is the child, Hong Kingston, who can see through this and acknowledge the reality of sexual and emotional relationships within her culture. Nonetheless, while she, as an Asian-American, is able to flaunt tradition by ignoring her mother's warning, the end of the section still reveals her own sense of identity is problematised because the values of the two cultures she shares are in opposition. She concludes the story by saying,
My aunt haunts me - her ghost drawn to me because now....I alone devote pages of paper to her. (Hong Kingston, 1980, 469)

Gail Y. Miyasaki also writes of the identity problems associated with being caught between the values of two cultures in her story "Obachan" (grandmother). This story, like those in the Chicana section, focus on generations of women, specifically, Miyasaki, her aunt Mary and her grandmother.

Miyasaki recalls how her grandmother was sent to America as a "picture bride", (Miyasaki, 1980, 450) an arranged marriage where the groom has only seen a picture of the bride and agrees to marry her. Miyasaki’s grandmother’s parents arranged this marriage because they believed that America was a land of prosperity where “the streets of Honolulu in Hawaii were paved with gold coins”. (Miyasaki, 1980, 450) Her grandmother was surprised to arrive and find that she sleeping on lauhala mats and working long hours in the hot cane fields. While Miyasaki is able to relate to her grandmother when she is younger, as she grows older and her grandmother retires, she seems more Japanese and as a consequence, more distant. Miyasaki says,
She looked so much older in a kimono and almost foreign .... I often felt very far away from her....She seemed almost a stranger to me, with her bent figure and her short pigeon-toed steps. She appeared so distantly Japanese. (Miyasaki, 1980, 451)

The real problem for Miyasaki though is not that her grandmother is very Japanese in her appearance so much as in her attitudes. When Miyasaki’s aunt Mary decided to marry a Caucasian her grandmother says that she will not be welcomed home if she does. Miyasaki’s mother explains how she was the first to condemn her mother for her prejudiced attitudes and yet now, being a mother she can fully understand how she must have felt, because first and foremost she is a “Japanese mother”. (Miyasaki, 1980, 452) The paradox, as Miyasaki’s mother explains it, is that in your mind you know such prejudice is wrong and yet in your heart you cannot help but cling to your culture. She says,

She was wrong about this man. She was wrong. But how can she tell herself so, when in her heart, she only feels what is right. (Miyasaki, 1980, 452)

The point that Miyasaki is making here is that cultural beliefs often work outside the domain of logic and this perhaps is why many
woman find it difficult to break free of their situation, even when in their head they know something is wrong.

To return to the theme of sex and sexuality, Diana Chang in an extract from her manuscript "Intimate friends" writes rather more candidly than the other writers that I have analysed. The passage is written in a stream-of-consciousness style and drifts from one thought to another. Chang begins by describing her recent dates with a man named Paul. After their third date he invites her back to his place. This reminds her of a friend, Liza, whose lover, Kenneth, would only make love to her at his place. While he tells Liza that her daughter Jessie is in the way, Chang surmises that the real reason is that he wants to be "on his own ground". (Chang, 1980, 501) When Chang suggests that Liza "swallows" the reason, it is clear that she thinks that Kenneth assumes a sense of ownership or control by always having sex in his home. When her own friend Paul then invites her to his place, supposedly because her place is too small, Chang "smiled because he wanted to make things clear to (her)." (Chang, 1980, 501) What is clear is that Paul, like Kenneth, wants to assume a sense of control. When he says, "you see, my bed is larger too", (Chang, 1980, 501) there is a sexual undertone. His fixation on control and size might be read phallicly, the larger the penis, the greater the control and ownership.
During the motions of sex with Paul, Chang remembers failed relationships and wonders if there is someone for everyone. As he enters her she regrets that her culture frowns on women taking the initiatives in relationships and remembers her first marriage to Joe. As with many of the men in the various stories, he saw

sex as conquest, sex as trophy, sex as a kind of grail. He absolutely lacked the light touch. (Chang, 1980, 503)

Chang says that with Paul though sex was different. Unlike the image of sex portrayed in many other stories where the woman was merely a necessity and which particular women participated didn’t really matter, she says with Paul “sex is sexual and love is lovely.” (Chang, 1980, 503) She portrays him as a modern man, who takes an interest in what the woman wants. Even when he had entered her he stops to ask if she would prefer him to use a condom.

What is interesting though is that while Chang describes the beauty and the intimacy of her lovemaking with Paul, she interrupts this with many thoughts. She laugh at how silly he looks as his erect penis nods up and down as he walks, she remembers her last husband and finally, as she is about to orgasm, she ponders various definitions of the word “come”. It seems somewhat of a paradox that when she is making love to what sounds like the ideal man she
says,

we approached, occurred; were brought to, born, and became undone again before we fell asleep together. (Chang, 1980, 504)

Her clinical definition of what was supposedly beautiful summarises the contradictions of being between two cultures. While on the one hand Chang presents herself as a modern woman who wants passion and consequently takes control of her sex life, she is still somehow unable to free herself and allow the passion take over.

Finally, I have decided to analyse the section of the text dedicated to American Indian [sic] writers last, even though it is the first section of the text. The reason for this is that thematically this writing is very different to the African-American, Asian-American and Chicana writing. While in each of those sections there were various texts that dealt with the poor treatment of women by men, this is a theme that is not found in American Indian writing in this text. Fisher explains that this is due to American Indian religious beliefs. While in Judeo-Christian religions it was thought that Eve was made from the rib of Adam and was therefore his inferior, American Indians believe that men and women are equal and dependent on one another for their existence. As John and Donna
The concept that woman was made from man is not found in Indian religion. Indians accept and adhere to the doctrine that the female of their kind was created simultaneously with the male. For apparent reasons each was endowed with particular qualities and sensibilities, neither was accorded supremacy, and each was made dependent upon the other. (Terrell, 1974, 27)

In Indian culture many tribes are matrilineal. Women are highly respected and are seen as the pillars of the home. This theme is explored in the American Indian writings contained in The Third Woman. Before analysing this writing it should be noted however, that while this theme is not uncommon, its broad presentation in this anthology is more a reflection of the editor’s selection than an editorial comment on the range of themes that can be found in American Indian writing in general. As Tranter argues in his article on anthologies, the tone of an anthology is often the direct result of the editor’s taste rather than a reflection of the range of a particular group of literature.

The rewriting of the traditional myth of “The Changing Woman” in
"The Changing Woman Story" by Kay Bennett provides an interesting twist on the original legend. In Navajo culture "The Changing Woman" is the story that tells of how Navajo society was formed. Kay Bennett, however, manipulates the plot to reinforce traditional Indian values.

Like the story from the Christian Bible's Old Testament, "The Changing Woman Story" begins with a baby being found in a basket on the river. The child is a girl and is taken in by a couple. Within four days she grows to be a beautiful woman. One day when she was gathering wood the God of the Sun saw her and decided that he wanted to make love to her. Four days later she gave birth to a son.

The twist that Bennett provides is that the God of the Sun then abandons the girl. Whereas in the traditional story she has twins to whom the God gives special powers to save the world, in Bennett's story she "waited for the god of the Sun to come .... but the God did not return". (Bennett, 1980, 46) Bennett fractures the reader's expectations even further when she heightens the unexpected behaviour of the god. When the young woman goes to search for him she arrives at his home to find that he has a wife and child. He denies any knowledge of the young woman in front of his wife and then he takes her outside and tells her to travel to the west ocean where he will provide her with a home. As she leaves the God of
the sun curses her so that her beauty is lost. The reader's understanding of traditional culture is turned upside-down by this.

Bennett, however provides a resolution. The young woman, feeling betrayed and dejected, begins the journey. On the way she stops at the foot of the Turquoise mountains where she speaks to the Gods of Wind and Morning. The Gods, taking pity on her and, believing that the God of the Sun had been unjust, restore her beauty. The God of the Sun witnessed this and felt ashamed that he had treated the woman like this. "He decided to give the Changing Woman everything she could wish for." (Bennett, 1980, 48)

The value that Bennett wishes to reinforce is that woman cannot be treated unjustly, even by the Gods. When the God of the Sun curses the Changing Woman, other Gods intervene to ensure that the injustice is made right. Eventually, even the God of the Sun realises the error of his ways and then ensures the Changing Woman's eternal happiness.

Traditional Indian Values are not found in every piece of writing in the American Indian section of the text. Fisher has chosen some pieces that detail the influences of white colonialism on Indian culture. Helen Sekaquaptewa, in her piece called "Marriage", for instance, touches on the recurring theme of marriage and the
difficulties of marriage when the participants are torn between two cultures. The story begins by explaining the Hopi traditions associated with a wedding. The father of the groom takes control of proceedings and must supply all the cotton for the weaving and all the food for the workers who prepare the garments for the wedding. In the case of Emory however, there was a problem. In the tradition of white Americans his mother had divorced his father. Emory had gone to boarding school and then to live with his cousin Susie. As a consequence he had not lived with his biological father for some time. This presented a problem if he was to have a traditional wedding ceremony.

Sekaquaptewa tells how the family worked to overcome all obstacles. She explains how the bride came to Susie’s house to do the traditional cooking and how Cousin Susie and the bride went at sunrise for three days to say silent prayers for a happy married life. The wedding ceremony is also explained in detail.

While Susie washed my hair, Verlie washed Emory’s. Then each took a strand of hair and twisted them together hard and tight as a symbol of acceptance of the new in-law into the clan (family) and also to bind the marriage contract, as they said, “Now you are united, never go apart.”

(Sekaquaptewa, 1980, 32)
Midway through all the preparation however, Emory and the narrator become uncomfortable with the traditional American Indian ceremony and decide to “get a licence and be married legally” because their “consciences” troubled them. (Sekaquaptewa, 1980, 35) The fact the narrator says she wanted to be married “legally” suggests that she does not believe that a traditional marriage ceremony is valid. To be valid the marriage must be recognised by The State, it must be seen as valid by white people. She abandons the traditional clothes and gets married in white, a Western symbol of purity. Interestingly the white ceremony takes place in the home of the school principal, a symbol of the colonial system at work as teachers, in this system, impart the values of white society which slowly disintegrates traditional beliefs.

After the white ceremony the couple decide to return home to complete the traditional rite. The reason is not made clear at the time and one might surmise that the couple were producing a hybrid culture but near the end of the story the narrator says that she went “through all that ceremony just to please (her) family.” (Sekaquaptewa, 1980, 37) It seems, in the end, that no matter what the reason, tradition and family are a hard thing to shake-off.

I would like to finish this analysis of the American Indian section of the text by looking at a poem which is atypical of the selection...
made by Fisher in that it is overtly feminist in its outlook. The poem is called "Making Adjustments" and it is written by Anita Endrezze-Danielson. The poem deals with the most prominent theme in the anthology; marriage. In the opening two stanzas Endrezze-Danielson outlines a sardonic picture of the compromises that a woman has to make when she enters into that bond.

Marry the man your parents want for a son
Go to bed with him like clockwork,
Keep your poems in the stove,
your hands away from the knives.
(Endrezze-Danielson, 1980, 121)

The first line of the poem might suggest a tradition of arranged marriage where the groom is chosen by the parents of the bride. Endrezze-Danielson is suggesting that this marriage can only be mechanical, and free from love and passion. Sex is something to be done, like a chore, things that matter, like poetry, must be kept hidden in the stove. Generally the whole experience is so awful that knives should be avoided lest the woman be tempted to suicide.

Sleep around with quick, ugly men.
Talk to yourself and let them answer for you.
Adjust your body to thieving hands;
count the times they come and subtract them like years from your life.
(Endrezze-Danielson, 1980, 121)

Endrezze-Danielson is suggesting that the marriage culture of the American Indian drives women into this situation. While women do not want to sleep around with ugly men, given that they have to talk to themselves as men usually answer for them, this may be offered as a diversion. The image of men’s “thieving hands” suggests that sex is taken rather than shared and each act takes years from the woman’s life.

Ultimately the woman will want to “burn (men’s) genitals” (Endrezze-Danielson, 1980, 121) but instead she will “wipe their feet” (Endrezze-Danielson, 1980, 121) with her hair. This image is one found in the Christian bible where a woman wipes the feet of Jesus with her hair. While it is uncertain if Endrezze-Danielson is alluding to this, if she is then the implication is that in American Indian culture women have been so conditioned to their treatment that they treat men like gods. This idea of being complicit in your own humiliation is once again a theme that was found in many of the other pieces of writing and, according to Endrezze-Danielson, it is at this point that “you will need no further announcement of your death”. (Endrezze-Danielson, 1980, 121)
Database and on-line searches revealed only one article about and two reviews of *This Bridge Called My Back* and no articles about and three reviews of *The Third Woman*. However, both are important volumes of third-world women's writing produced at an important time in the history of the feminist movement in the United States. *The Third Woman* was published in 1980 and the first edition of *This Bridge Called My Back* was published in 1981, a time when the feminist movement was experiencing a schism of sorts.

The texts differ greatly in how they address issues of subjectivity and agency for third-world women. *This Bridge Called My Back* was produced as a response to the hegemonic practice of the white, middle class members of the feminist movement. It provided an opportunity for third-world women to work together, to explore their common interests and it gave them the opportunity to speak. The lack of involvement in the second edition by first-world publishers certainly meant that the text was uncompromised in any way. *The Third Woman* by contrast, was published as a special Modern Language Association project with all the benefits that such a position of privilege entails. Its aim was not to address white women but to give recognition to the neglected writing of third-
world women writers in the United States. To serve this end Dexter Fisher organised the text as a course reader and marketed it at an educational audience.

In regard to the thematic content of the writing, those in This Bridge Called My Back are overtly political and feminist in their interest. The writings deal with issues such as racism in the women's movement, the difficulties faced by third-world women writers and the desire of many third-world women for revolution. The writers take a subject position that defies the Western desire to totalise and instead position themselves at the intersection of gender, class, race education and sexuality. Like This Bridge Called My Back, the thematic content of The Third Woman is also largely political and feminist. Many of the stories deal with the strong links between women, the problems of sexism, issues of sexuality and the effects of white culture on minority cultures.


