Defining the Haitian Woman through Feminist Art

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Abstract

Current feminist literature includes an evolving understanding of gender identity. Therefore, it is crucial to provide a historical context for American feminism. In the late 19th century, during the Suffrage movement[1], suffragettes actively pursued equal liberties such as the right to vote, bodily autonomy, and higher education for American women.

Although the Suffrage movement originated from the Abolition movement and thus is "directly related to the struggles initiated by African Americans for freedom and equality," the successful addition of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution led to 'unsisterly strife' between Black and white women due to the abject racism inflicted onto Black suffragettes (Taylor, 1998). This racial friction developed "a collective feminist consciousness that reflected the particular experiences [of black female activists] as Black women as well as the aspects of sexism they shared with white women" (Taylor, 1998).[2] However, while "during the first wave of feminism, Black women had negotiated with racist white women [to achieve the passage of protected liberties like the right to vote], [a significant shift occurred and] during the second wave of feminism [intersectionality became a requirement for Black female-led activism] (Taylor, 1998).

Similarly to the first wave, which coincided with the abolition movement, the second wave unfolded alongside the Civil Rights movement. The second wave encompassed issues regarding gender representation and expression, gender normativity, and the oppressive nature of the patriarchal system.

Art took prominence within this era. Feminist art aimed "to rewire long-held sociocultural perspectives through art, thereby expelling prejudice and forming a new dialogue

[1] The suffrage movement is regarded as the first wave of feminism within the US.
[2] Within this paper this collective feminist consciousness will be referred to as the black female gaze.

about the feminine experience" (Rise Art). However, it often failed to address the intersecting oppressions of American Black women.

Current feminist art scholarship does extensively document the 1970s art movement and its long-lasting effects alongside its limited intersectionality. This considerable progress increases the scholarly visibility of feminist art and the struggles of intersectionality between activist campaigns. However, there is little documentation of non-Western feminist art. This study will thus pose the question: "How does the creation of visual art made using a third-world feminist gaze allow non-Western Black women to confront and deconstruct dominant Western ideologies of womanhood?" Through an analysis of feminist movements in Haiti and, subsequently, Haitian female artists, this research employs a unique methodology of art creation to investigate how feminist art produced by Haitian women empowers Black women to use the Black female gaze as a transformative lens to construct and deconstruct womanhood. This study's analysis of feminist art as a tool for deconstructing gendered barriers is essential because it provides visibility to the perspectives of third-world women while contributing to a deeper understanding of feminist art and its ability to be a medium for female artists to center themselves and define their representation.

Literature Review

Historical Overview of American Feminism

Although feminism denotes a collective effort between women to achieve equal liberties, throughout American history, tension has amassed between African-American women and white women. This tension gained prominence after the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. The passage of the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Amendments made many white women fear they would not receive legal suffrage before Black men (Taylor 1998). Consequently, the suffrage movement saw a deepening of the divide in solidarity between racial and gender minorities. The refusal of white suffragettes to acknowledge the existing intersectionality between the abolitionist and suffrage movements led to the ostracization of free and enslaved Black women.

During the Suffrage Movement, free and enslaved women suffered immense sexual abuse (Taylor 1998). This unrelenting cycle of sexual abuse resulted from pervasive mythical stereotypical images that sought to blame Black women for their abuse. “The core of these myths that shrouded Black womanhood resided in the Jezebel/Mammy dichotomy. Gray white points out that Jezebel excused miscegenation, the sexual exploitation of Black women, whereas stereotypes like the ‘Mammy’ helped justify Black female servitude in the South. Like their enslaved sistren, free women could not escape the harmful consequences of these myths and, as reformers, they organized against racial and sexual oppression simultaneously” (Taylor 1998). However, Black suffragettes mainly did so in the context of the abolition movement because white suffragettes often excluded them from partaking in the suffrage movement.

For example, when the 1913 Women's Suffrage Parade in Washington, D.C., occurred, the exclusion of Black suffragettes became alarmingly apparent. After fearing the loss of Southern support, Alice Paul[3] met the demand for a racially segregated march. Therefore, Black suffragettes had to march behind the parade and away from their white counterparts.

Constant exclusion from the suffrage movement prompted discussions regarding the definition of womanhood within its ranks. Notably, during the 1851 Women's Rights Convention, Sojourner Truth asked, “Ain’t I a woman.” She heralded that she not only had the same right to equality as a man but, like white women, she also bore children and suffered under the patriarchy. However, a crucial distinction emphasized by Truth was that she, unlike them, had to “bear the lash as well” (NPS 2017).

As Black women faced continuous hardship in advocating for recognition within the suffrage movement, it became evident that while the movement sought to expand female empowerment, it paradoxically excluded Black women. This exclusionary norm stems from the racial attitudes of white suffragettes. As products of a deeply segregated society, white women within the suffrage movement mirrored the white male mindset and sought to attain voting rights exclusively for themselves out of fear that sharing the right to vote would disrupt the white supremacist structures from which they profited. Therefore, Black female abolitionists and suffragettes had to arrive at an inescapable conclusion, “[granting the right to vote] for white women would give supremacy to the entire white race” (Taylor 1998). “Yet, African American women refused to desert the suffrage cause. They organized suffrage clubs and voter leagues, participated in rallies” and showed an increased fervor to organize (Taylor 1998).

Even after the passing of the 19th Amendment, the tension between Black and white women did not improve. Under the belief that Black women were not politically worse off than

[3] Alice Paul was the leader of the National Woman’s Party

Black men, white suffragettes abandoned Black women activists. However, during the second wave of feminism, a significant shift occurred with the emergence of intersectionality within activist movements, marking a departure from the past as "Black women [would no longer compromise] with racist white women, the second wave required nonracist entry tickets," (Taylor 1998). A notable example of this new approach was evident within organizations such as the SNCC[4] where Black and white women worked in cohesion alongside Black men. Together, "students initiated sit-ins and freedom rides to expose racial segregation and the violence used by whites to maintain separate and unequal facilities. As the movement grew in numbers and expanded regionally, it served as a political training ground for many Black and white women" (Taylor 1998).

However, with the intertwinement of race and gender, Black women encountered a complex dilemma: "[They] were forced to choose between pledging membership to a movement against racism or chauvinism" (Taylor 1998). Firstly, the chauvinistic attitudes of male leaders within Black power movements like the Black Panther Party led them to disregard suggestions from women because "the fact that the suggestion came from a woman gave it lesser value" (Taylor 1998). Moreover, despite their active involvement in these movements, "back at the headquarters-the 'freedom house'-[Black women] still, along with white women, did the housework; in the offices they typed, and when the media sought a public spokesperson they took a back seat" (Taylor 1998).

The Women's Movement exacerbated this complex reality endured by Black women. white women within this era did fully realize that Black people were still not yet free, thus prompting their involvement in sit-ins and marches. However, differences in the socioeconomic status between white and Black women created nuanced dynamics within their joint

[4] SNCC is the acronym for Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

participation. Although both groups converged on their stance against inequity, many white female activists came from financially privileged backgrounds; this granted them proximity to financial security that Black women did not possess. These contrasting socioeconomic statuses created varied levels of risk and sacrifice. The economic vulnerabilities of Black women left them without choice, “and [their] too often exploited labor power provided the means to liberate white women” because Black women had to do the housework and childrearing for white women, which led to the conclusion that, “if Women's Lib needs those grandmothers to thrive, it has a serious flaw,” (Taylor 1998).

Additionally, socioeconomic status created differences in the political agendas of Black and white female activists. Within women’s organizations, issues regarding the lack of political visibility of Black and poor white women took precedence as many felt that their belief that “anything associated with feminism was advantageous only to [elite] white women” was substantiated (Taylor 1998). Thereby, unable to address their unique experiences in just one movement, this era also witnessed the simultaneous development of Black feminist thought. The four major themes of Black feminist thought were (1) the creation of self-definitions and valuations to allow Black women to concoct and promote positive representations of Black Womanhood as a means of empowerment; (2) confrontation and destruction of systemic inequities regarding race, class, and gender; (3) the included interweaving of intellectual thought and political activism; (4) recognition of the distinct cultural markers and shared heritage which equip Black women to resist and change daily injustices, (Taylor 1998). This construction of Black feminist thought was made because they needed to create conditions for empowerment on their terms.

The continuous proliferation of Black feminism is needed to safeguard intersectional progress. However, a marker of Black feminism is its entrenched history with chauvinism and racial discrimination from white women, “It must also be identified with the glorious tradition of Black female activists' trenchant commitment to empowering themselves” (Taylor 1998) to combat systemic discrimination.

Modern Implications of the ‘Feminist’ Label: *Feminist Art Movement and the Black Feminist Art Movement*

A further act of resistance against gender-based discrimination was the creation and popularization of feminist art during the Women's Movement. Feminist art was vital to this era because it acted as a “successful vehicle for contemporary women artists working in Europe and North America to express feminist principles” so that they may resist dominant ideologies regarding womanhood (Kirchen 1999). However, a minute amount of art collectives supported female artists, such as Women Artists in Revolution and The Ad Hoc Women’s Artists Committee. However, with the bit of representation they had amongst prominent galleries, issues regarding representations of female identity arose; white women, who led the Feminist Art Movement, propagated an ideal shared perception of female identity by ignoring their “built-in privilege of whiteness” as they defined womanhood in terms of their own experiences thereby making Black women the subsequent “other, whose experiences of femininity were too ‘alien’ to comprehend” (Lorde 1984; Bailey 2017). Thus, the Feminist Art Movement of the 1970s primarily promoted white women's art.

Similarly, while the Black Arts Movement did promote the art of Black minorities, its demographics were only men, and thus, “neither movement catered to the needs” of Black female artists (Bailey 2017). Thereby, Black women not only faced exclusion from the Feminist

and Black Arts Movements but also within the art world; “most gallery owners in the 1970s did not believe Black women were legitimate artists” (Bailey 2017). The exclusionary attitudes of white women, Black men, and gallery owners led Black female artists to create the Black Feminist Art Movement (BFAM) as their own support system (Bailey 2017). BFAM’s emergence led to the founding of organizations like the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). Its founder, Faith Ringgold, was a central figure within BFAM and led other Black feminists to come together in 1971 to create the first Black woman’s art exhibition in New York City called *Where We At: Black Women Artist, WWA* (Bailey 2017). WWA’s success led to the creation of traveling exhibitions, art workshops, grants, and minimal recognition in the art world (Bailey 2017). In an era in which many Black women had to ask themselves, “When there is a group for Blacks and a group for women, where do I go, [and will I be accepted]?” BFAM helped Black women artists achieve visibility and support in art (Bailey 2017). Therefore, BFAM’s existence in the 1970s was a crucial resource for Black women to attain prominence in the art world as other “progressive and inclusive” organizations continued their culture of exclusion.

Not Every Feminist Is a Feminist: ***Resistance to the feminist label as artists***

Amongst the academic realm, Cindy Sherman emerged as a central artist during the Women's Art Movement, whose distinguished use of the female gaze[5] has redefined how we perceive, and challenge established norms of representation. Through works such as Sherman’s Untitled Film Stills, Sherman’s distinctive use of herself as the subject of her visual artwork emphasizes “the woman as active subject rather than a passive object” while reimagining traditional portrayals of gender and identity (Kirchen 1999).

[5] Female gaze denotes cultural perspectives and aesthetics that are uniquely grounded in the experiences of women.

However, while Sherman's work has been celebrated academically and informally for its poignant feminist themes, discussions amongst scholars have risen as to whether Sherman's images are valid portrayals of feminist principles or destructive to its theories. Sherman, however, has resisted both the feminist and anti-feminist moniker and "refuses to call either herself or her work feminist and insists that her work is anti-theoretical" (Meagher 2002). This sentiment aligns white female artists like Sherman with their Black counterparts. Many Black women, regardless of artistry, do not regard themselves as feminists.

Contemporarily, although participation within feminist organizations has risen, a considerable majority of American Black and Third World Black women have yet to adopt the ideologies of contemporary feminism[6]. Detachment from the feminist moniker is attributed to the fact that being Black and a feminist has been regarded as a betrayal to the race; choosing to be a feminist is like choosing to forgo one's membership within the Black community. This detachment is particularly striking when considering feminism's profound ability to ignite a reevaluation of gender norms and dynamics. However, it is when feminism is contextualized as a perceived threat that the hesitancy towards its embracement is understood. Black men, out of their desire to hoard and maintain power over 'their' women, as detailed by Barbara Smith[7] "have been among the most willing reinforcers of the fears and myths about the Women's movement" (Smith 1985). It is out of their fear of loss of power that the displeasure in the feminist label proliferated; thus, persisting further in the journal article, *Some Home Truths on the Contemporary Black Feminist Movement*, Smith reveals and debunks the four distinct myths propagated by the Black community that have deterred Black women from the feminist moniker.

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[6] Contemporary Feminism in this context refers to feminism found in the second wave (1970s-present).

[7] Barbara Smith "is a founding member of The Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist organization that worked in Boston from 1974 to 1980", (Smith 1985).

Myth 1: “The Black woman is already liberated.”

In noteworthy ways, Black women have achieved the goals of middle-class white women. They have been the heads of their families and joined the workforce, rejected the expectation of male dependency, and seldom were they ever pampered or sheltered as women. Although the addition of race and class privileges profoundly alters the achievements of these goals, it is because these goals have been achieved that this myth of liberation for the Black woman has been perpetuated; as underscored by Smith, this is because “this myth confuses liberation with the fact that Black women have *had* to take on responsibilities that our oppression gives us no choice but to handle,” (Smith 1985). Black women are given the least number of options. Unlike middle-class white women, most are not the heads of their families and a part of the workforce because they want to; it is because they must. Not having the luxury of choice and being forced to cope under the worst conditions is not liberation. Assuming so portrays the Black woman as a pillar of strength “who neither feels nor needs what other human beings do, either emotionally or materially” (Smith 1985). Regardless of its detriment, this myth is a pervasive belief accepted by Black women, and it has dissuaded many from actively partaking in the Women's Movement. This is partly because Black women do not perceive the necessity of partaking in a movement for female liberation. They perceive themselves as already being liberated due to their achievements in the goals pursued by the movement.

Myth 2: “Racism is the primary (or only) oppression Black women have to confront.”

The secondary myth that racism is the most significant and only oppression Black women should confront is propagated by the belief that eliminating racism will ultimately end the strife of Black women. However, this myth negates “how sexual oppression cuts across all racial, nationality, age, religious, ethnic, and class groupings” (Smith 1985). It asks Black women to

prioritize race when ranking their oppression, thereby deferring attention from issues of sex and sexuality. Nevertheless, “denying that sexual oppression exists or requiring that we wait to bring it up until racism, or in some cases capitalism, is toppled, is a bankrupt position” (Smith 1985). One in three women will be raped in their lifetime. This continuous violence against women makes deterring attention away from issues of gender unfeasible; if Black women are made to wait until racism is eliminated to address issues of sex, then issues of violence against women, like rape, will never be addressed. Given that the feminist and anti-racist movement aims to secure equity for marginalized people, opposition to either movement is anti-human, and there is no use for ranking either oppression because of the simultaneity of marginalization. Despite this, the racism exhibited by white women, which forms a formidable barrier to entry towards the Women’s movement, compels Black women to work within the confines of anti-racism movements to effect sexual and racial justice.

Myth 3: “Feminism is just man-hating”

There has been widespread confusion about the distinction between attacking institutional oppression and being a ‘man-hating’ feminist. As a feminist journalist, Smith admits this is in part because “some of the most widely distributed writing about women's issues, [particularly Black women’s issues], have not made [the] distinction sufficiently clear. [The] issues have not been concisely defined in these writings, causing much adverse reaction and confusion about what feminism is” (Smith 1985). The lack of unified conciseness towards this distinction has allowed non-feminists to circulate misinformation. This misinformation renders feminist criticism of patriarchal institutions an attack against male individuals. However, “women's desire for fairness and safety in [their] lives do not necessitate hating men” (Smith 1985). Reducing a movement that has aided in the reduction of sexual violence and physical abuse and proliferated

a positive self-image for women to a ‘man-hating organization’ is a disingenuous oversimplification that undermines the achievements and goals of feminism. This divisive narrative, however, continues to successfully deter Black women from the feminist movement because they do not identify with the ‘man-hating’ characteristic of feminists.

Myth 4: “Feminists are nothing but lesbians”

Although many outspoken and celebrated Black feminists have been lesbians, their leadership and participation within the feminist movement have circulated this myth that all feminists are lesbians. This myth is particularly harmful because it has deterred many Black women from partaking in feminist movements. Black lesbians become outsiders of the heterosexual mythical norm and become categorically alien. They are no longer the “sisters, mothers, daughters, aunts, and cousins, but bizarre outsiders like no one you know or ever knew” (Smith 1985). Thus, this myth becomes an accusation, and the fear of being accused deters Black women from manifesting themselves. However, “Black feminism and Black lesbianism are not interchangeable” (Smith 1985). Feminism is a political movement comprised of an array of different people; no singular woman or person defines a feminist. However, it is essential to note that as feminism advances into the modern age, this myth has become less pervasive. Black women, regardless of sexual preferences, have become interested in intersectional designs of liberation that do not uphold homophobic biases. Nevertheless, remnants of this myth still avert some Black women from being “feminists.”

Myth 5: “Feminism is for white People”

Third-world women have not identified with contemporary feminism because of the rampant myth that there is no room within feminism to address their needs. The dominance of Euro-centric feminism within the media often only amplifies issues of Western middle-class

white women, which inadvertently creates a skewed perception of feminism globally. For instance, movements like the 2012 “Free-the-Nipple” movement, while significant in sexual autonomy advocacy in America, did not align with the beliefs and challenges of third-world women, and instead, movements like these worked to alienate further and affirm the conviction of some third world women that first world feminism could not be used as a tool for liberation or representation for those in the third world. First-world feminism also denotes the notion of a ‘sisterhood.’ However, this notion forms a pretense for homogeneity, and those outside of the ‘sisterhood,’ such as women in the third world due to geographical limitations, are considered foreign to the concept of womanhood.

Subsequently, Black feminism makes the positive support of Black women possible by encouraging political action. There is a significant lack of media coverage of Black feminists. Often, there is an absence of a consistent and accessible communication platform between first-world and third-world Black women; thus, the marginal representation of Black feminists is not appropriately made visible internationally. Therefore, white women become centered as the mythical norm of femininity, and feminism becomes an issue with a stark racial barrier that prevents non-Euro-American women from entering.

Literature Review II: A Third-World Overview of Feminism: An Analysis of Haitian Feminism

Justification

Because Western feminism is a well-documented sector of feminism, understanding post-colonial feminist theories becomes essential for a holistic view of differing feminist narratives. Post-colonial feminism presents alternative perspectives on defining feminine needs and goals through a third-world context of women’s resistance. In the context of transnational

feminism, Haiti is most interesting to examine because of its distinctive cultural, socio-economic, and political history. As the world's first independent Black nation, Haiti's historical legacy involving slavery and its subsequent fight for sovereignty and independence has profoundly influenced gender dynamics and feminism. Additionally, Haiti's continuous struggles against poverty, political instability, and international interference provide a rich backdrop to examine how transnational feminist perspectives intersect and impact struggles for gender equity locally. Thus, by explicitly analyzing Haitian feminism, insight into the challenges of global feminist movements through a third-world context is gained.

Gender and Politics in Antiquated Haiti: Haiti's First Wave

It is a widely accepted belief that feminism has never existed in Haiti; however, this is a misguided belief. Recognizing women within politics and the socio-economic landscape has been a long struggle. In 1934, a group of women from Haiti's bourgeoisie class founded the Ligue Féministe d'Action Sociale[8], henceforth LFAS. Led by Alice Garoute and Madeleine Sylvain Bouchereau, LFAS advocated that Haiti's future depended on the freedoms it allotted its women. While active, LFAS' collective efforts led to the revision of the Haitian constitution in 1950; this revision recognized "women as fully emancipated human beings with equal rights" (Kirchen 1999). Although men and some women at the time favored Haiti's patriarchal system, which prohibited a woman's right to vote, "LFAS displayed its strength by reuniting 500 delegates from Haitian women's organizations and international organizations to the First National Congress of Haitian Women. [This was an] ultimate success of the women's suffrage movement. [A] few months later, on November 4, Haitian Women won the right to vote in all local and national elections" (Alianza por la Solidaridad 2014). However, with the continuous

[8] Ligue Féministe d'Action Sociale translates to The Feminist League of Social Action

definition of Haitian women as dependent wives and daughters, although women gained the right to vote, not much changed regarding their political and social status.

The Second Wave: The Duvalier Regime

Gender-based violence in Haiti is not a new occurrence. American soldiers sexually assaulted many Haitian women and girls during the US occupation. It was not until 2005, through the efforts of prominent leaders Myriam Merlet, Magalie Marcelin, and Anne Marie Coriolan (who founded three of the most successful feminist organizations in Haiti), a law which criminalized rape was passed, "which until then had been considered an offense against morals" (Charles 1995). Beforehand, domestic and sexual abuse was a national pastime which worsened under the Duvalier Regime. When Jean-Claude Duvalier, who is colloquially referred to as "Baby Doc," succeeded his father Francois (also known as "Papa Doc"), rape became a political tool to wield against gender minorities. It would later be used beyond the duration of the Duvalier regime and throughout Haiti's unstable political climate (Charles 1995). The role of gender within the authoritarian rule of Duvalier made the regime a novelty because of the widespread levels of state corruption and the frequency of institutionalized gender-based violence.

In contrast to other Latin American countries, the Duvalierist state attacked women systemically. As best explained by Carolle Charles[9], in the journal article, *Gender, and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism, and the Emergence of a New Feminism (1980-1990),* "the Duvalierist state focused on a 'patriotic woman' whose allegiance was first to Duvalier's nation and state. Any woman or man who did not adhere to these policies became an enemy subject to political repression" (Charles 1995). Duvalier's most famous proclamation: "My only enemies are those of my country," only furthered this precedent that

[9] Charles is a sociologist specializing in feminist studies.

anybody who opposed him was an enemy of the state. Soon after, it was clear that 'anybody' also included women. This addition of women as potential enemies of the state was a first for Haiti.

Before the Duvalier regime took power, while gender-based violence was not new in Haiti, it often did not extend into the political sphere. Women and children were considered political innocents; "because women, in particular, were viewed by the state as dependents, they had the 'privilege' of not being subjected to state violence. Under the Duvalierist state, however, systematic repressive policies undermined the prevailing conception of women as passive political actors, devoted mothers, and political innocents" (Charles 1995). Instead, women not loyal to the Duvalierist state were seen as unpatriotic and unnatural, becoming political targets. One way Duvalier weaponized gender to assert dominance and control was through the brutal rape, murder, and kidnapping of anti-Duvalierist activist Yvonne Hakime Rimpel. The horrific killing of Rimpel, carried out by the Duvalierist military force, the "Tonton Macoutes," shocked the nation. After Rimpel's death, it was clear that the gender of anti-Duvalierist activists did not prevent violent retribution, and as "many women refugees and political exiles testify, women were held accountable not only for their actions but also for those of their relatives" (Charles 1995); thus, the age in which women and children were safeguarded from state violence ended.

In response to the Duvalier regime's institutional violence, active feminist organizations adopted anti-dictatorship movements into their doctrine in 1965. "Women organized food riots and school stoppages, mobilized in grassroots movements, and formed their own organizations" (Charles 1995). When the thirty-year dictatorship of the Duvalier regime was finally overthrown, "women's increased mobilization even influenced a 'feminism from above,' with the 1990 nomination of an interim female president and three female secretaries of state in 1991 (Charles 1995). By 1990, the modern feminist movements in Haiti accompanied the downfall of the

Duvalierist state. Haiti has many women's groups and feminist organizations with different goals, demographics, and agendas. However, regardless of how these organizations differed, they all worked towards improving gender equity within the nation.

The Disruption of Feminism: Haitian Feminism After the 2010 Earthquake

The Haitian feminist movement came to an abrupt halt after the 2010 Earthquake. Haiti's fragile social infrastructure weakened, and access to social services worsened because "as much as one-third of Haiti's civil servants died" (Tøraasen 2020). The earthquake also claimed the lives of approximately 230,000 people, and "more than 300,000 people were injured and 1.3 million became homeless" (Tøraasen 2020). As a result, "around 1,300 internally displaced person (IDP) camps were set up as a temporary solution" (Tøraasen 2020). However, Haiti was unprepared for a disaster of this magnitude. Energy, resources, and funding were diverted from ongoing state programs, and the focus shifted toward emergency assistance.

Thereby, gender-based violence was exacerbated, especially within the IDP camps. "The lack of public facilities in the camps had a disproportionate impact on women," young women had to shower in public, which made Haitian women and children "targets of sexual violence and exploitations in (IDP) camps. Overcrowded camps that lacked safe accommodation and sanitary facilities for women and girls, combined with poor lighting at night and a lack of police forces that patrolled the camps, made women extra vulnerable to rape" (Tøraasen 2020; Schuller 2015). Situations in the IDP only worsened months after the earthquake as "42.3 percent of the camps did not have access to water" (Schuller 2015). These worsening conditions forced the international community to step in. As stated by doctoral researcher Marianne Tøraasen, "the international community stepped in providing around 9 billion USD in relief and rebuilding efforts. However, much of the money was never delivered" (Tøraasen 2020). Much of the funds

provided were actual debt relief. However, a large portion of the funds were given to the UN or NGOs because the Haitian federal government was deemed too corrupt "for direct budget support, which could have helped rebuild strong, well-funded institutions" (Tøraasen 2020). The Haitian government received less than 1% of the money spent (Tøraasen 2020). Heavy reliance on NGOs and the UN for aid in crisis relief efforts had an unfavorable reception domestically.

In the context of feminism, the distrust of foreign entities like the UN and various NGOs in Haiti is rooted in the interference they have demonstrated in local feminist organizations. Firstly, feminist organizations in Haiti are overwhelmingly led by wealthy women from Haiti's bourgeoisie class. Their wealth serves as a stark contrast to the extreme poverty experienced by most Haitian people as most of the "wealth and power have been concentrated in the hands of a small economic elite of Creole whites, mulattoes, and Blacks supported by a violent military institution" (Charles 1995). Recognizing their status as an economic minority, affluent Haitian women have frequently used disadvantaged and poor Haitian women as the faces of their feminist organizations, even when these organizations have primarily aligned with the interests of the wealthy rather than the poor. Because of this, for example, "many Haitian women reported that mainstream feminist organizations lost legitimacy for them because of the organizations' opposition to Jean-Bertrand Aristide" (Schuller 2015). Aristide was a president who was highly favored amongst poorer Haitians. However, foreign NGOs working in Haiti and feminist organizations that accepted aid from Canada, France, and the United States opposed him. These countries were later implicated in the ousting of Aristide. Involvement with these nations thus created distrust between Haitian women from different classes because they would often take advantage of the lack of education of poor Haitian women to persuade them to advocate for an agenda that acted against the wishes of many in the poor majority: poor women herald that "they

felt as if feminist organizations used them—low-income victims of violence and supporters of Aristide—as pawns in their campaigns against Aristide" (Schuller 2015). Therefore, the poor female majority became distrustful of the organizations and the women working for them. This caused many women to experience a moment of self-reckoning, compelling them to assess where their allegiances indeed resided as many felt they were being "forced to choose between sisterhood with middle-class women or solidarity with their husbands, fathers, sons, and also with their class" (Schuller 2015). However, despite not having the same funding and, therefore, the impact of foreign NGOs, feminist organizations run by the wealthy elite, and the UN, this reality has not deterred poor Haitian women from mobilizing. Many Haitian women have founded much smaller organizations that distinguish themselves by being called "women's organizations" instead of feminist organizations. Although these women's organizations have not had a significant legislative impact compared to their NGO and feminist organizations, most of their mission has been impacted by domestic issues such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and food and education insecurity within local Haitian communes. This further reinforces that irrespective of their differences, feminist and or women's organizations in Haiti share a common goal of advancing gender equality. However, because of the immense class divide, their methods and societal reputations may diverge significantly.

Signifiers of Haitian Art:

Scholarships with qualitative analyses of Haitian feminist artworks are abundant. Emerging from current scholarship on Haitian feminist art are the distinct signifiers that define this art; within the current literature, five key signifiers are identified. In an extensive interview with distinguished women's studies and art history professor Anita Kirchen of Florida Atlantic University, three Haitian artists begin to illuminate the reoccurring themes demonstrated by the

subjects of their art. These artists had works involving non-gendered subjects or rarely male figures. This key theme correlates with the first signifier of Haitian feminist art: “indications of the significance of the woman within society” (Kirchen 1999). This stylistic theme, excluding gender-specific depictions, asserts that individual identities are not inherently anchored to societal gender roles. In this signifier, artists illustrate the complexity of womanhood and the broader spectrum of identities beyond the gender binary by involving non-gender subjects. Furthermore, rarely, including men in these works amplifies the visibility of women.

Promoting the visibility of women is integral to the second signifier. The second signifier denotes “the woman as subject, acting rather than as acted upon” (Kirchen 1999). As active subjects, the women depicted in these works become autonomous, dismantling their status as secondary-class citizens in Haiti. It also aligns the artwork with the broader gender equality goals of the women’s and feminist movements in Haiti by making the women within the artwork the architects of their own stories. The third signifier is: “the spiritual energy of woman, manifested in the image of potential female divinity” (Kirchen 1999). This third signifier corresponds to a notable dimension of Haitian artistic identity. Many Haitian artists use Voodoo imagery to convey the potential female divinity. This utilization of voodoo to express femininity is rebellious, given the religion’s stigmatization amongst Haitian locals. Usually, the imbued imagery of divine femininity is Erzulie, a Loa of beauty, love, and femininity. Erzulie’s portrayal as a maternal figure asserts her importance in Haitian spirituality because the maternal role is highly regarded in Haiti.

This depiction is also significant because it connects the third to the fourth signifier, which necessitates “a matricentric worldview in which woman is both fundamental and integral” (Kirchen 1999). “Currently, 45% of households in Haiti are female-headed” (United Nations

2021). Thus, employing a maternal figure like Erzulie in artwork reflects a matricentric worldview. Feminist art's rebellious theme is also continued because Erzulie is a divine feminine entity in artwork, and this portrayal surpasses conventional ideologies of womanhood, given the mainstream rejection and stigmatization of Voodooism.

The final signifier requires "the subject conveys the sensitivity to women's life experiences within their socio-cultural context" (Kirchen 1999). In a landscape where issues plaguing Haitian women remain invisible domestically and internationally, Haitian feminist artists form a space where they can express and bring attention to the strife they are enduring through their artistic works. Thus, art is a formidable tool for change and a safe haven for Haitian artists to express their dissatisfaction with the political landscape without punitive repercussions. Through art and the promotion of these signifiers, female artists can craft their own narratives of womanhood.

Gap in Research:

Most literature on female artists centers around European and North American artists, and these analyses employ a Euro-American-centered perspective. There is a gap within feminist theory concerning the third world. As a nation through which insight into a Black third-world perspective is gained, most scholarship regarding Haitian art centers on works created by male artists. In Haiti, art as a discipline has an inherent gender bias, which has acted as a barrier to entry for many women. For the few active female Haitian artists known, an analysis of their artistic influences has been conducted, thereby making a qualitative analysis of the signifiers of female Haitian art redundant. However, within scholarship, while visual arts have been acclaimed for their ability to serve "as a medium which contains both the artists ' expressions -- intentional and nonconscious," there does not seem to be a paper in which a researcher uses

visual arts to explore the cultural context of a third-world female artist. Therefore, creating artwork that reflects the cultural narratives of Haitian women and art through a third-world gaze will highlight the importance of a holistic comprehension of feminist principles in the third world.

Methodology:

This research uses art creation to address the research question: *How does the creation of visual art made using a third-world feminist gaze allow non-Western Black women to confront and deconstruct dominant Western ideologies of womanhood?* This study hypothesized that through art creation, the Haitian woman confronts and deconstructs the dominant Western ideologies of womanhood by offering a counter-narrative grounded in her unique experiences, lived-in strife, and cultural identity. Additionally, by utilizing the Black female gaze, which is typically grounded in Western Black women's experiences and perspectives, she enables Western Black women to engage with alternate modes of empowerment, desires, strife, and resistance. This assumption is supported by the signifiers of Haitian feminist art and the current qualitative analyses of feminist Haitian art prominent in America. Therefore, because of the existing documentation of Haitian feminist art's resonance with the lived-in realities of Haitian women, it can be logically assumed that art created by Haitian women has the potential to reshape ideologies of womanhood.

Approach:

To test the hypothesis, the researcher of this paper delved into the art creation process to produce Haitian feminist art. As a female Haitian-born native, the researcher has the ethos to embrace and utilize the Black female gaze in a third-world context. The researcher has also lived through the Haitian earthquake, which had a profound impact on feminist movements in Haiti.

This adds a deeply personal dimension to this study and illuminates how feminist art can center on female representation and exposure, particularly in nations where women are relegated to a second-class citizen role. The genre of art chosen in this study is visual art, specifically photography, and portraits. Visual art was chosen because visual art can be used as a medium "which contains both the artists ' expressions -- intentional and nonconscious -- and the cultural context in which the artwork was created" (Kirchen 1999). The artwork, therefore, becomes a text with many meanings that the viewer may interpret differently. Visual arts have also been the chosen vehicle of expression for many prominent Western feminist artists. However, Haitian female artists usually use sculptures and paintings, so there is a gap in visual arts as a medium for expression, which this study addresses.

Results:

Artwork 1:

The Duvalier Woman: Mammy the Riveter

Artwork 2:

Pa Manyen Fanm Konsa[10]

[10] Translates to: Do not touch women like that.

Analysis: The Duvalier Woman: Mammy the Riveter

I created this art piece using an AI art generator.[11] It did not seem fitting to use an actual human person because the Duvalier woman was not a true embodiment of many Haitian women. As previously stated, "the Duvalierist state focused on a 'patriotic woman' whose allegiance was first to Duvalier's nation and state. Any woman or man who did not adhere to these policies became an enemy subject to political repression" (Charles 1995); in sum, she was a woman who was invisible outside of domestic matters. However, that is the Haitian woman. Despite Duvalier's fear-mongering, Haitian women still protested and spoke out; although they were punished for this act of resistance, they still did not embody the Duvalier woman. Thus, I chose not to use a live subject for this piece.

Additionally, to further demonstrate that this woman is a Duvalier woman, she is branded simply with his name on her shirt. The blue and red background within this piece also pays homage to the patriotic nature of the Duvalier woman because blue and red are colors found on Haiti's flags. However, the background looks as if it is in disarray. This disrupts conventional ideals of control and order often associated with patriotism. By purposefully distressing the blue and red background, I challenge the notion that Haitian national pride is defined by and or conformed to a singular, "harmonious" narrative.

The woman in the background was made like an older Haitian woman. That is because the targets of Duvalier's Ton Ton Macouts were young women. Older Haitian women, however, were not completely absolved from the overarching impact of this regime. They unwillingly became the mythical norm/standard for other Haitian women because they were often relegated to housework and avoided politics. Older Haitian women were mythologized and praised for their adherence to domestic roles, as they oversaw maintaining their children's and house's

[11] The generator was: Imagine.art

well-being. This status, as the mythical norm, came at the cost of media portrayal of older Haitian women as mammies[12]. The likeness of the Duvalier woman to the mammy illustrates an exciting intersection between the struggles faced by Haitian women and challenges against stereotypes in American society. This convergence becomes the point at which the Black female gaze is enhanced. The central female figure in the artwork inhabits both identities, almost donning them both as costumes through playful satirization; with a sly smile, she stands amidst the disarrayed background, embodying defiance.

Although she is centered, and a pivotal element to feminist visual art is the woman as the active subject, the words, "MY ONLY ENEMIES ARE THOSE OF MY STATE," take focus away from the woman. In a certain sense, the words crush her because they seize the spotlight and obstruct the viewer's ability to see her. The comments are directly quoted from Duvalier, positioning him at the forefront of constructing and defining Haitian womanhood. Crossing out "enemies" was also done deliberately to signify Duvalier's act of eradicating anyone he deemed as enemies.

Additionally, it is relevant that the words not only assume a central position in the artwork but also subtly overshadow the woman. This reflects the enduring influence of Duvalier's regime. Even after his regime was overthrown, remnants of the Duvalierist state remained in Haiti. Women are still perceived as a threat to the state and ostracized from the mythical norm. The consequences of the Duvalierist state are reflected in the distressing levels of abuse, rape, and kidnapping of women in Haiti. This artwork, therefore, serves as a visual imagination of the intricacies of the impact of the Duvalierist state.

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[12] The mammy is a racist stereotype used to portray older Black women as ignorant caretakers/domestic workers and this stereotype "helped justify Black female servitude in the south" (Taylor 1998).

Pa Manyen Fanm Konsa

This piece is a series of photographs centered around a showering woman. In the first photograph, she has a relaxed facial expression. What is pivotal to this first photograph is her unawareness of the camera; this unawareness creates an intriguing interplay of tension. Her eyes avert the camera's gaze, and she appears at ease. Her casual gaze downward instills a sense of curiosity within the viewer, as viewers are drawn to wonder what she is looking at. As their gaze wanders through the piece, tension arises between the viewer and the subject. The viewer is an intruder whose voyeurism encroaches on the boundaries of the female subject's personal space.

The intersection between voyeurism and privacy correlates to the more significant issue of sexual assault in IDP camps. Public showers, which were scarce but valuable resources in IDP camps, became sites of danger for women. Women only had the option of showering in public, and doing so heightened their chances of sexual assault. The viewer's voyeurism negates the female subject's right to privacy, which reflects the real experiences of many displaced Haitian women.

In the following photograph within this piece, the woman becomes aware of the viewer. The camera is out of focus, and her face and expression are blurred. Her gaze, which now acknowledges the camera, confronts the viewer with confusion and distrust. Distrust manifests as she takes a protective stance and wraps her hand around her chest, although she is clearly vulnerable. Her body language mirrors how women have often tried to defend themselves against perversion, although they are unarmed and physically defenseless.

The soft blur within this photograph disrupts the viewer's voyeurism mirrors the subject's initial expressions of confusion and distrust. By purposely disrupting their ability to view the photo comprehensively, the woman is made to regain autonomy. The user is not allowed to grasp

the subject's expression fully. Although they may try to deduce the meaning of the subject's gaze, the lack of clarity around her face due to the soft blur disrupts the viewer's voyeuristic lens. She maintains autonomy over her body even as she is invaded.

As it is an essential requirement of Haitian feminist art, female divinity within this photograph is presented by the whole presentation of the subject's body. The first photograph focuses only on the subject's face, while the second photograph is the first photograph that unveils her entire body. Haitian culture connects the female body to femininity, fertility, and nurturing. Unveiling the subject's entire body asserts her divinity as the presentation of her womanhood becomes essential to her visage. By shifting from just showing her face to also showing her body, she is made whole and shifts from a fragment to a complete representation of the Haitian woman. Essentially, this piece echos the connection between women, their bodies, and Haitian notions of divinity. Connecting her body to divinity also gives a nuanced understanding of why the subject takes a defensive stance. Divinity denotes sanctity, and the viewer's intrusion demolishes the established sanctity of the female subject's body. It echoes the lack of respect for a woman's body displayed by many Haitian predators.

Furthermore, her defensive stance is a visual reminder of the necessity of female vigilance. Women must safeguard their bodily autonomy. This experience transcends borders and connects Haitian women to their Euro-American counterparts. Like other women, they must guard their bodies, especially within a world that encroaches on its sanctity. This photograph perfectly captures the balance between strength, vigilance, and vulnerability.

The last photograph illustrates a more exaggerated expression from the female subject. She denotes a fearful expression and looks taken aback by the camera's presence. While a soft blur is present within the photograph, the blur is seen only around her hands to denote the

subject's movement. The blur around her hands illustrates that she is frantic, which adds to the photograph's fearful mood. This juxtaposition of her blurred hands against her sharp expression represents the emotional turmoil she experiences. Unlike the second photograph, nothing deters from her face and her expression. The subject has an exaggerated fearful expression, which startles the viewer. As she is shown being displeased by the viewer's presence, the viewer is thus made to feel ashamed for intruding upon the female subject's privacy. Her deliberate expression also instills a feeling of "caught in the act" discomfort within the viewer. Purposefully removing the showerhead prop seen in the second photograph is done to focus the attention further on the female subject.

Overall, this piece weaves a narrative between the delicate balance between resilience and intrusion. Through these three photographs, the viewer is made to confront their perspectives on privacy, intimacy, and the ethical dimensions of their gaze. Therefore, this artwork offers thought-provoking reflections on the complexities of personal autonomy, privacy, and womanhood.

Conclusion:

The Euro-American feminist movement gained notoriety for its fight for gender equity. However, from these movements, Black feminism emerged, and it addressed the intersectional issues that mainstream white feminism could not. While women from these various movements worked towards gender equity, they did so through differing methods, and thus, as famously put by the poet Audrey Lorde, these differences made it abundantly clear that "Black feminism is not white feminism in Black face." However, within this parallel school of thought, third-world feminism is not a passable duplicate of Euro-American feminism. Especially within the art medium, Haitian female artists, although they converge on some areas with Euro-American

feminist artists, given their unique socio-economic cultural experiences, analysis, and attention towards how Haitian women use feminist art to address the ideology of womanhood, need to be made. Thus, this research sought to explore how the creation of visual art made using a third-world feminist gaze allows non-Western Black women to confront and deconstruct dominant Western ideologies of womanhood. To address this research question, the researcher created art because, in Haiti, art as a discipline has an inherent gender bias, which has acted as a barrier to entry for many women. Some research has brought visibility to female artists through qualitative analyses, but no scholarship employs the signifiers of Haitian feminist art to add to the visibility in this field. Through this methodology, two pieces of art were produced. The first artwork, titled *The Duvalier Woman: Mammy the Riveter,* reflects the state of Haitian womanhood before the Earthquake and highlights the detrimental effects of the Duvalierist state. The second artwork, *Pa Manyen Fanm Konsa,* reflects the state of Haitian womanhood after the 2010 Earthquake and highlights the current socio-cultural experiences of Haitian women. The creation of the artwork unveils that Haitian feminist art deconstructs Western ideologies of womanhood by telling stories of Haitian female strife. While the issues that plague Haitian women remain invisible within the media, Haitian feminist art brings visibility to these issues. This art form requires that the subject of the artwork conveys "the sensitivity to women's life experiences within their socio-cultural context" (Kirchen 1999)." Thus, this enables artists to weave their narratives of their experiences with gender inequity in Haiti; thereby, the artwork becomes a primary source that can be used to understand the experiences and perspectives of different Haitian women. Haitian feminist art also forges a space for Haitian women to discuss their strife and allows feminist artists to center themselves within their narratives. The woman's centeredness becomes fundamental in analyzing and understanding her experiences. Overall,

presenting an alternative narrative within the feminist art space enhances what it means to be a feminist or a womanist because it broadens the scope of inclusivity within these movements. Haitian women are using feminist art to enrich feminist discourse and thereby emphasize the dynamic and intersectional nature of gender activism. Ultimately, by crafting their own ideals of womanhood by envisioning the Haitian woman in art, Haitian feminist artists address the often-limited spectrum of Euro-American ideals of womanhood.

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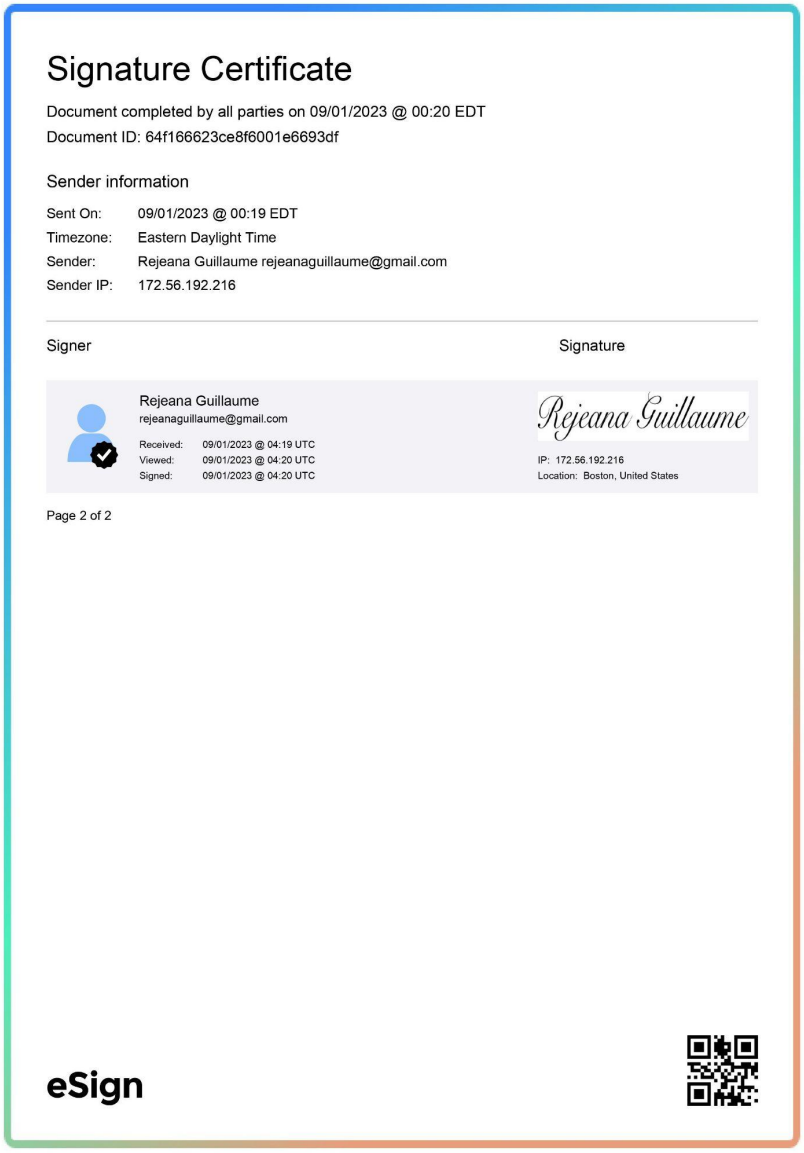

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