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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

iv From the Editors

## **Chicana Conversations**

- 1** The Future of Chicana Studies: An Intergenerational Conversation with Historian Vicki L. Ruiz and Filmmaker Virginia Espino

Lori A. Flores, Stony Brook University

- 6** A History of Their Own: A Conversation with Vicki L. Ruiz

Anupama Arora (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth)

Laura K. Muñoz (Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi)

Sandrine Sanos (Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi)

- 16** Creating Consciousness, Creating a Legend: A Conversation with Virginia Espino, Historian and Producer of *No Más Bebés* (2015)

Anupama Arora (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth)

Laura K. Muñoz (Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi)

Sandrine Sanos (Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi)

## **Articles**

- 28** I Will Tell Your Story: New Media Activism and the Indian “Rape Crisis”

Rukmini Pande, University of Western Australia

Samira Nadkarni, University of Aberdeen

- 46** Female Perceptions of Islam in Today’s Morocco

Fatima Sadiqi, University of Fez

- 61** “Strong Women Make Strong Nations”: Women, Literature, and Sovereignty in Paula Gunn Allen and Virginia Woolf

Kristin Czarnecki, Georgetown College

## FROM THE EDITORS

With this issue, we are pleased to present a special section of “Chicana Conversations” that features interviews with Vicki L. Ruiz and Virginia Espino (conducted by Anupama Arora, Laura K. Muñoz, and Sandrine Sanos) with an introduction by Lori Flores. This multivoiced intergenerational dialogue ranges widely, addressing the past, present, and future of Chicana studies, promises and challenges of public scholarship, and intersectional feminist politics of academia and beyond. Ruiz, a trailblazing and award-winning historian, is the author of many books, beginning with the first historical monograph to focus on a community of Mexican women in the United States, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives* (1987), a study of Chicana women workers in Southern California’s canning and packing industries during the 1930s and 1940s. Ruiz’s work opened the doors for many who came after her, including her student and PhD advisee Espino. The main focus of the conversation with Espino is her recent documentary *No Más Bebés* (2015), which revisits the 1978 *Madrigal v. Quilligan* case about the coercive sterilization of ethnic Mexican women in Los Angeles in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a project that arose from Espino’s dissertation work with Ruiz at Arizona State University.

Our regular article section brings together three feminist inquiries from across the globe, investigating issues of media representation, religion and identity, and the potential of bringing diverse voices together in conversation. Rukmini Pande and Samira Nadkarni’s “I Will Tell Your Story: New Media Activism and the Indian ‘Rape Crisis’” builds out of the 2012 gang rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey in New Delhi, which brought global attention to India’s so-called “rape crisis,” eliciting a broad range of political and cultural responses. Pande and Nadkarni offer a critical reading of two multimedia activist projects that address this issue, *We Are Angry* (2015) and *Priya’s Shakti* (2014), arguing that their positioning vis-à-vis India’s neoliberal economic transformation, nationalist ideology, and ongoing feminist debates leads them to “recreate structures of Hinduist Bhraminical patriarchy while purporting to advance the cause of gender equality in India.” However, while demonstrating that the texts ultimately fail as intersectional feminist interventions, the authors also assert the potentiality of cyberspace for postcolonial activism grounded in historical context and local knowledge to disrupt mainstream media narratives and entrenched political structures.

In “Female Perceptions of Islam in Today’s Morocco,” Fatima Sadiqi draws upon her field-research repository of 25 face-to-face interviews and 100 questionnaires to investigate religious, cultural, and political perceptions of Islam by Arabic- and Amazigh-speaking Moroccan women from Fez, Casablanca, Marrakesh, and their surrounding rural areas. Noting that perceptions of Islam in Morocco are predominately male-oriented and that existing academic research has largely replicated this powerful bias, Sadiqi’s investigation seeks to fill the research gap and open avenues for further studies. As the author concludes, not only are Moroccan women’s perceptions of Islam “plural, versatile, and complex”—mirroring their “varied lives and experiences and their importance in shaping [their] perceptions”—but there also exists a nuanced fluidity between Islamic culture, the self, and agency that is revealed and illuminated by detailed subjective testimonies.

Last but not least, Karen Czarnecki’s article, “‘Strong Women Make Strong Nations’: Women, Literature, and Sovereignty in Paula Gunn Allen and Virginia Woolf,” places Woolf’s foundational essays, *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*, in conversation with Allen’s landmark text *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Through a close reading of both their differences and their similarities—such as Woolf’s and Allen’s shared objective to recuperate women’s history and literature and highlight female-centric social structures—Czarnecki seeks to draw out the potential for feminist analyses

that may yield “fresh insights into the intersections of race, class, gender, and nation in women’s writing.” Her meticulous discussion demonstrates the value of bringing together seemingly opposing voices, such as those of white Western women and Native American women, into shared “sites of contestation” that “become opportunity for fruitful, broad-ranging discourse in keeping with third-wave feminist sensibilities.”

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# Chicana Conversations

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## INTRODUCTION

# The Future of Chicana Studies: An Intergenerational Conversation with Historian Vicki L. Ruiz and Filmmaker Virginia Espino

Lori A. Flores, Stony Brook University

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During the 1960s, many politically engaged Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants who were demanding racial, socioeconomic, and educational equality in the US were self-identifying as “Chicanas” and “Chicanos.” In the words of feminist theorist Paula Moya, what distinguished a “Chicana” from a Mexican American or Mexican woman was “her political awareness; her recognition of her disadvantaged positions in a hierarchically organized society arranged according to categories of class, race, gender, and sexuality; and her propensity to engage in political struggle aimed at subverting and changing those structures” (Moya 2000, 85). Those structures included the patriarchy and sexism found within the Chicano civil rights movement itself, which often relegated women to administrative tasks while men occupied public positions of leadership within organizations. If Chicana members voiced concern for women’s issues, they were accused of being divisive and subverting the movement’s larger ethnic nationalist goals. Simultaneously, within the second-wave feminist movement, Chicanas—like other women of color—often felt alienated by white women who did not address issues of race or class in their critiques of sexism.

In response, Chicanas created their own movement that sought to illuminate and confront the intertwined oppressions of racism and sexism. From the late 1960s through the 1980s, they founded their own organizations, held conferences and workshops, published newspapers and magazines, and fought for the implementation of Chicana Studies courses. By 1968, a small number of universities in the Southwest offered these classes, taught by scholars like Anna NietoGomez in California and Martha Cotera in Texas. Cotera’s book *Diosa y Hembra* (1976), an attempt to synthesize Mexican American women’s “multitudinous histories” (4) and political activism from the pre-Columbian era to the contemporary period, was one of the first pieces of scholarship on ethnic Mexican women in the United States. Soon to follow was Magdalena Mora’s and Adelaida del Castillo’s volume of essays on Mexican women and unionization. Then, the landmark volume *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga and Anzaldúa’s later work *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) made the nation and academy take particular notice of Chicana-produced literature.

The 1980s were also the decade in which Vicki L. Ruiz—a trailblazing Chicana historian featured in this issue—became the fourth Chicana history PhD in the country and published her first book *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives* (1987), a study of Mexican American women workers in Southern California’s canning and packing industries during the 1930s and 1940s. The first historical monograph to focus on a community of Mexican women in the United States, it examined how Mexican and Euro-American women’s social networks on the shop floor translated into labor activism and a brand of working-class feminism. That year, Ruiz’s work was accompanied by other scholarship that focused on the late nineteenth and

twentieth centuries and sought to give Chicanas their rightful place in American labor history. Debunking the stereotype of the passive, homebound Mexican woman, anthropologists and historians documented Chicanas' longtime work outside of the home (including migratory labor) and the particular challenges they experienced while trying to preserve their cultures and communities in the face of an increasingly dominant white population settling in the US Southwest (Zavella 1987; Deutsch 1987).

Conversing about the topic of agency, most Chicana writers in the 1980s and 1990s decried any easy categorization of their subjects into a victim/resister binary. Chicanas' responses to multiple systems of dominance (along lines of gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, and citizenship) were varied, ranging from accommodation (intermarriage) to survival strategies (bringing divorce and land cases before courts) to other forms of rebellion (wearing a zoot suit or joining a political organization) (González 1999; Chavez-Garcia 2004; Oropeza 2005; Escobedo 2015).

As they chronicled these stories, Chicana scholars continued demanding that broader fields of study better incorporate women of color as historical subjects *and* as historiographical contributors. For example, in her 1992 essay, "Women of Color and the Rewriting of Western History: The Discourse, Politics, and Decolonization of History," Antonia I. Castañeda called for more histories of the US West to be produced by women of color, as most by that point had been written by white women. Offering an important reminder that hierarchies between women were not just part of the past but also the present, Castañeda asked historians to be conscious of the ways in which the academy itself could reproduce colonial structures.

Indeed, fields such as American labor, political, religious, and feminist history—just to name a few—become entirely new narratives when Chicanas are fully noticed and integrated. Whether it was in Cold War-era labor strikes, interracial civil rights coalitions, global gatherings of feminists, or the anti-pesticide and environmental movements, Chicanas were often at the forefront. Today's scholars continue to flesh out these moments, and exploration of the many strands of Chicana feminism is ongoing (Rose 1990; Ledesma 1995; Blea 1997; Chávez 2005; Pulido 2006; Esquibel 2006; Flores 2009; Perales 2010; Blackwell 2011).

With more existing syntheses and anthologies on Mexican American and Mexican immigrant women, the field of Chicana studies is much stronger but still hungry for new, bridge-building work (Schlissel, Monk and Ruiz 1988; Ruiz and DuBois 1994; Garcia 1997; Ruiz 1998; Arredondo and Hurtado 2003; Martinez 2008). The recent documentary film *No Más Bebés* (2015), created by Virginia Espino (a former student of Ruiz), is the other focus of this cluster, and rightly so. Based on her dissertation research on the forced sterilizations of ethnic Mexican women in 1970s Los Angeles, *No Más Bebés* is a powerful piece that addresses historically and presently important issues of feminism, racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, reproductive justice, and the pressing need to keep recovering and attending to Chicana lives and stories. As many victims of sterilization abuse in US history were women of color and undocumented women, Espino's film is a cinematic accompaniment to modern written work on the anxiety, isolation, and trauma suffered by marginalized and migrant populations (Rosas 2012).

Though Chicana studies emerged from a lack of felt coalition between men and women (and among women themselves), the field has matured and deepened its reach into other disciplines, including postcolonial, disability, sexuality, borderlands, and immigration studies. Yet the field must keep traveling in new directions. Temporally, we need to know more about predecessor and successor figures of the Chicana movement. Geographically, we need more work on Chicana activism in other regions of the US and on a transnational and international scale. Ideologically, engaging with the emerging scholarship on Latinos' relationships to conservatism might allow us to further tease out the diverse strains of Chicana religious and political thought.



Despite their generational divide, Ruiz and Espino hold the common mission of making Chicanas' stories visible and affirming their complexity and usefulness to other fields of study. Both are scholars who care deeply about testimony, intersectionality, social justice, and producing knowledge that is accessible to their students and the general public. Their respective work has made their audiences more curious, informed, and invested in Chicanas' and Latinas' continuing struggles for rights and inclusion.

The engagement with multiple publics that Ruiz and Espino exhibit and call for is so essential in our current moment. The virulent opposition to—or wholesale elimination of—Mexican American studies curriculum from US schools and textbooks today has required constant vigilance from the scholars who have developed this knowledge and the learners whose identities have been validated by being exposed to it. The field of Chicana/o studies needs more allies; it deserves protection and future development as more affronts to the rights of women, people of color, and migrants threaten, as Ruiz puts it in her interview, “basic human decency and dignity.” The inclusivity and border-crossing modeled in the following conversations should spark new energy in those of us striving to become more dynamic intellectuals, storytellers, and builders of community.

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# A History of Their Own: A Conversation with Vicki L. Ruiz

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Vicki Lynn Ruiz

Vicki Lynn Ruiz—the granddaughter of a unionized, immigrant coal miner—grew up listening to stories told by her mother Erminia Pablita Ruiz Mercer and her grandmother María de la Nieves Moya. Her understanding of Mexican American women’s history emerged from their kitchen-table remembrances. In her book, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (1998), Ruiz recounts, “My mother and grandmother would regale me with tales of their Colorado girlhoods, stories of village life, coal mines, strikes, discrimination, and family lore.” Similarly, Ruiz’s first book, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives* (1987), emanated from the stories of union leader and civil rights activist Luisa Moreno, who invited Ruiz into her Guadalajara, Jalisco, home one summer while Ruiz was completing her graduate coursework. The bonds that grew between Ruiz and all three women, whom she describes as her first mentors, set her on a pathbreaking journey that made invaluable contributions to the fields of Chicana studies and Latina history.

To say that Ruiz’s work centers these academic fields and that her intellectual impact extends broadly across academia, nationally and internationally, is no overstatement. Awarded a 2014 National Humanities Medal by President Barack Obama, Ruiz served as the elected president of the American Historical Association (AHA), the American Studies Association (ASA), the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, the Organization of American Historians (OAH), and the Pacific Coast Branch of the AHA. She is also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Such accolades, commitment, and service to the profession have been built earnestly and painstakingly over four decades and at five universities in the American borderlands, where she has taught and provided administrative leadership since 1987. Over the decades, Ruiz has made invaluable interventions in a variety of disciplines—such as social history, American history, Chicana history, women’s studies, and labor history—and notably by directing 25 PhD dissertations and bringing new cohorts of scholars into the profession, including the filmmaker Virginia Espino.

Ruiz has made it her life’s work to recuperate stories that tell the rich history of Chicanas in the making of America. In the introduction to *From Out of the Shadows*, Ruiz writes, “As farm workers, flappers, labor

activists, barrio volunteers, civic leaders, and feminists, Mexican women have made history. Their stories, however, have remained in the shadows” (xiii). Making Chicanas visible as part of the United States, and writing them indelibly into the nation, has been Ruiz’s ongoing political project, one that—through placing colonialism, migration, and gender as central—seeks to decolonize history and higher education. Drawing on a variety of sources—primarily oral and personal narratives, but also pamphlets, popular culture (including advertisements), newsletters, songs, poems, and even missionary reports—she brings “out of the shadows” the stories of Chicana and Chicano arrival, settlement, and survival in the United States, and most importantly their various contributions—as historical actors, as resistant subjects—to the social and cultural landscape of the US, whether through their unionizing work for good working conditions and better wages, their intra- and interethnic networks and coalitions, or their protests against racism. For instance, through focusing on the cannery workers in southern California, Ruiz’s first book *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives* (1987) provides a rich portrait of women’s work culture and Mexican women as leaders in labor activism in the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA).

Ruiz’s important article, “Nuestra América: Latino History as United States History” (2006), exemplifies the kind of penetrating inquiry she demands of historians and academia writ large. She provides a different chronicle of three canonical moments of American history: 1848 (the end of the Mexican–American war), 1898 (the Filipino–Cuban–Spanish–American war), and 1948 (post–World War II and an important moment in the desegregation of US Latinos). She suggests that we disrupt conventional narratives by examining what happens to US history when we tell it as a story of US imperialism. The narrative threads of imperialism, decolonization, and transnationalism are woven across Ruiz’s scholarship. Her coedited anthology (with Ellen Carol DuBois), *Unequal Sisters* (1990)—a collection of thirty essays—is now required reading in many history and women’s studies courses; and it uses a multicultural framework, “one in which many pasts can be explored simultaneously to organize a genuinely national, a truly inclusive, history of women” (xiii). Other projects too accomplish Ruiz’s career-long goals. Works such as the collection *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia* and the digital *Latinas in History: An Interactive Project* (with biographies, timelines, and lesson plans) provide rich and invaluable resources for educators and the larger community.

Thus, whether it is her scholarship on Mexican women and their unionization in the California food processing industry in the 1930s and 1940s, or her initiatives within institutions and professional organizations (such as Humanities Out There), all of Ruiz’s work provides a model of civic engagement, one that is governed by an ethical impulse toward social justice and change.

In the interview that follows, Ruiz offers her thoughts on a variety of topics such as race and activism in the academy, the importance of collaborations and conversations, and feminism.

## **The Politics of the University**

**Anupama Arora, Laura K. Muñoz, and Sandrine Sanos (JFS):** We want to begin with what has been on our minds and part of many discussions across the academe: the challenge a lot of us faculty face to do what we want to do, and keep true to what we want to do, but also learn to preserve ourselves.

**Vicki Ruiz (VR):** You want to do good work. And also things that *you* want to do. Sometimes you feel you have to be on committees to try to move the needle forward, to make the academy a more humane and accessible place. I feel great when I’m able to contribute and help a junior scholar or a student, to watch them grow into themselves. When I was dean, one of the things I am most proud of was making sure that

embattled women assistant professors, who were facing tenure battles that shouldn't have been battles as they had clear-cut cases, got tenure. And, as dean, that was incredibly gratifying to me. But some battles that I participated in thirty years ago that I thought, by now, would be gone—they're still there! That's what's so frustrating.

**JFS:** Why do you think that is? Many of us are committed to the work. It reminds us of a theme in your work: the idea of “fictive kin.” To think of transgenerational communities is also a feminist principle, like you were saying; for example, supporting those who are junior to us, the mentoring of students. And yet, institutionally, that is still such a fraught space. We still have to battle so hard.

**VR:** I think that some of the issues are the same, but I also think that, in a way, it's harder today because of the increasing corporatization of the university, the increasingly private public university. And the headlong rush into STEM, particularly in public universities, troubles me as it frequently means a devaluation of the humanities. The proposals that float—higher tuition for students in engineering, in the physical and biological sciences, as opposed to the humanities or the social sciences (what are we—the cheap degrees?)—to me, run counter to the mission of the university. I feel very strongly our mission in state schools is to reflect the demographic realities of our country. We need funding to make activities and resources available for underrepresented students, for faculty of color. But, for example, if you're some sort of administrator of diversity, then you are seen as the diversity police, rather than seeing a commitment to diversity as a collective responsibility.

And then there is the issue of funneling of money into STEM, into centers of innovation to help faculty commercialize their research, particularly for colleagues in engineering, biosciences, physical sciences. How about putting these resources into undergraduate and graduate education writ large? And then, for me, it's not just dividing the campus but [promoting] a growing chasm of inequality.

**JFS:** And maybe even reproducing inequality for underrepresented students, for first-generation students, first-generation faculty.

**VR:** Absolutely. Why is the University of California Irvine's Student Outreach and Retention center (called SOAR) also the site of the food pantry? Shouldn't a food pantry and issues of food security be center stage? Shouldn't [the pantry] have its own office? Shouldn't we have more social workers? I do understand the priorities at a Research 1 university, an AAU university—the emphasis on research—but we can't forget our educational mission, and our educational mission to *all* students. Speaking about research universities, we often have not been good neighbors.

**JFS:** What do you mean?

**VR:** At times, universities are very isolated; they're not an integral part of the community. People don't see the institution as a place for partnerships. I also think in terms of community partnerships rather than community engagement. What is the difference? We have to differentiate between initiatives that really partner with neighborhood groups, associations, constituencies, and the programs that are based on a charity model, which say, look, we are here; our students are going to do this and that. Not that I think there's something wrong with that, but it's more of making our students feel good. Instead we need to think about how we can leverage the resources of the university, and how we can leverage our networks to improve the lives of people in our neighborhoods, of our neighbors.

**JFS:** And this sort of emphasis on community partnerships has been a theme in your work. We noted that in your article “Citizen Restaurant” you said that “our obligations as agents of change do not end at the campus parking lot” (Ruiz 2008, 2). You emphasize the meaning of what we do in the classroom and

how it must expand beyond the classroom. How do you think we could reimagine that especially for first-generation students in the university?

**VR:** Well, I think that, often, first-generation students are certainly closer to the ground on these issues. We have two very dynamic and active undocumented student groups on campus; and undergraduates are working one or two jobs, but their advocacy, activism, and their community projects are integral to what they do and who they are. However, unlike students of my generation or an earlier generation where people majored in social movements to the detriment of their studies [laughs], these students have a really good sense of balance. The students that I have met and worked with here, at Irvine, over the last 15–16 years, have a really good sense of that balance of trying to negotiate all the demands on their time.

Last quarter, I had a young Armenian American woman who commuted on Metrolink from Glendale (about fifty miles away), switched trains at Union Station in downtown LA, taking the Orange Line to Irvine (about a two-hour train trip), and then had to wait for a bus to take her on a twenty-minute ride to campus. That is a lot of coordination, and she was doing it! The day she had classes, she was up at 5:30! She's an A student who wants to be an attorney and go into family law. I had another student (white male) who was driving in from Redlands, which is at least an hour and a half away. There's a sense of appreciation of their education; it's not just a goal or, I'm going to get a degree and that's it. They really value the undergraduate experience.

### **Race, Politics, and the Public**

**JFS:** Continuing in the same vein, in June 2015, you sent a letter in the name of the American Historical Association (AHA) to the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia to protest their decision to deny undocumented students access to top-tier universities in the state (AHA 2015). This policy by the Board of Regents is an example of the “renewed politics of exclusion” that you have discussed in your writing.

**VR:** Yes, and I never received a reply, by the way. They never acknowledged it. They don't have to.

**JFS:** Was it covered by the local news?

**VR:** Not that I know of. In fact, at the AHA's annual meeting in Atlanta, one of my presidential plenaries, “Students on the Front Lines: The Fight to Desegregate Public Higher Education in Georgia from the 1960s Atlanta Student Movement to the Undocumented Student Movement Today,” featured the [Executive] Director of Freedom University, Laura Emiko Soltis; Charles A. Black, former chair of the Atlanta Student Movement; and current [Freedom University] student Melissa Rivas-Triana (Ruiz 2015). And while our session was well attended, there was no media coverage.

**JFS:** That's very symptomatic of the unwillingness to address those issues. So then, what do we do? How do we continue to further decolonize higher education?

**VR:** We need to continue to try to heighten the consciousness of students and colleagues. I haven't been successful at op-eds, but I know people who are really successful. To me, Héctor Tobar is a wonderful public intellectual. He's a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist; he's a PEN [award] winner and now an assistant professor at the University of Oregon after a long career at the *Los Angeles Times*. He's educating through the way he writes, particularly [by] placing materials on Latinos in East Coast publications like *The New Yorker* or *The New York Times*.<sup>1</sup> Not everyone has that talent, but we should nurture and get people to try. To me, learning to write for a larger public should be part of a graduate seminar that all students in the humanities and social sciences should take.



**JFS:** Yes, it is important to learn to imagine different publics and to think about the different constituencies of people one is speaking to.

**VR:** A couple of years ago, I gave a talk at the Rotary Club here at Irvine, and then this year I gave a talk at the Santa Ana Kiwanis Club. I was able to engage people in conversation. No one person was hostile; it wasn't the sort of poisonous environment of anonymous comments on the Internet. We had a really nice discussion. Not everybody agreed, and that was OK. It gives me hope for civility. Making those connections is important. We can only change the kind of things we can and always encourage conversations. And bring injustices out into the open that many people don't acknowledge. For example, one of my mentees, Julian Bugarin, is a born organizer. With earnestness and a touch of charisma, he, as the student government labor liaison, has made his peers much more aware of the differentials in wages and benefits between custodial workers and gardeners employed by our campus and those employed by subcontractors. He has done so by organizing events that bring workers and students in conversations with one another. He is one among many social justice-minded undergraduates seeking to raise awareness as well as [promote] actions on campus. These are undergraduates and *their* initiatives.

**JFS:** What you're saying also echoes what's been in your work all the way through. It's not just working at the national level, it's also taking seriously what's local, what are our immediate local communities or those micro-level narratives that rarely get heard but that you should make your business to know.

## **Feminism(s) Today**

**VR:** I feel extraordinarily privileged to have interviewed the women I have interviewed, to have worked with undergraduate and graduate students. I owe a tremendous intellectual debt to my graduate students. It's a collective effort. [In fact], there are so many feminisms. But, also, when you decouple gender from the social justice train, it's no longer feminism. Feminism and social justice are intertwined; and social justice is the core of feminist thinking. It's not about leaning in, out, or sideways; it's collective. You have scholars who will pronounce themselves as feminists and yet, in their daily interactions with colleagues and students, they're not practicing what they preach. They don't see the contradiction.

**JFS:** We agree that practice is really important; what we think about also has to be what we live. Do you see an awareness of feminism, or Chicana feminism, in your undergraduate students?

**VR:** It's disturbing. With some I do, with some I don't. There is no historical memory. When I took women's history in 1976, it changed my life, and I had a mentor who changed my life; it was Jean Gould Bryant who encouraged me to go to graduate school. There are still students who not only have no knowledge of Latino history, they have no knowledge of US women's history. I know that there is variation, depending on the teacher and the state-mandated curriculum, but it can be very unsettling.

However, I should say that last week I was interviewed by this incredible young Latina eighth grader, Emerson Orozco, for National History Day. She was talking about Chicanas in the movement for her National History Day project. And she had won her school competition, and wanted to interview me and get an idea where she can go for more sources, and I thought, this is great! I thought, here's someone who gets it. This is someone who has a consciousness. When I asked her if she had a knowledge of this history, she asked me if I had watched the film *No Más Bebés* and [said] that her grandmother had been one of the women who had been sterilized and one of the plaintiffs. I told her that it was made by my former student, Virginia Espino, and was based on her dissertation about this topic. So, through the project, this eighth grader was honoring her grandmother's legacy, a grandmother that she never met since she died in 1992.

But her father knew the stories. This was an important part of her personal legacy, and she was doing the project to honor her grandmother.

**JFS:** It shows the importance of transmitting that memory, of why we do women's history, gender history, Chicana history. We never cease to return to these topics and principles. Our work is so much more important because students don't always have that political awareness or consciousness.

**VR:** It is important. I want students to be *curious*. For instance, I want all students, whether they are history majors or not, to be able to go to a public history site and be able to evaluate it, to be able to weigh evidence, and think critically.

## Conversations and Collaborations

**JFS:** In your article on Latino history as US history, you write about the ways in which we have to think of Latino borderlands history as something that unsettles the narrative (Ruiz 2006, 2011). In the same way, women's historians have said that it's not just about adding women to the narrative, but that putting women into the picture changes the narrative. You've done that work, but it still needs to be done institutionally and politically. And we wonder if you have any thoughts about how we need to keep on doing that.

**VR:** I think we should talk more to our colleagues about what we do, and talk about our research and our teaching and not get so involved with some of the petty politics. We spend so much time with the campus politics (the important struggles and the unimportant) that we don't really get a chance to discuss each other's work. And it's sad to say that it's often only the colleagues who are responsible for your merit who actually read your materials.

I feel this is the last department I will chair. The Department of Chicano and Latino Studies at the University of California Irvine is incredibly special. Not counting emeriti, the department is predominantly women, eight women and two men. I appreciate this sense of interconnectivity among the women. And a sense of listening to each other and collaborating, and [that] we will disagree with each other.

There's this common collaboration and talking with one another. At meetings, we disagree, but afterwards we'll have a cup of coffee, or have lunch. Once there was a fairly hot meeting, and I was not happy, and everybody filed out and I stayed there, trying to compose myself, and Ana Rosas came back about five minutes later, and asked me if I was OK. And I said, I will be, give me ten minutes, and I will be. But it's that sort of that level of collaboration that is rare and something that should be nurtured.

**JFS:** And I think it's especially urgent to foster this in the climate of corporatization of the university that puts so many more demands on faculty.

**VR:** You're so scared that somebody is going to take something from you that you begin to, sort of, pick on each other rather than join forces. It's not productive. We have to reach out in terms of commonalities [but] respect differences, respect our disciplinary differences.

**JFS:** That's why interdisciplinary programs such as women's and gender studies have a place because they try to always think in terms of intersectionality.

**VR:** Yes, it's both intersectionality and the idea of respect. We have to respect each other, and we also have to begin these kinds of conversations. Often the university is, in a sense, like graduate school all over again because we are competing. We should be mentoring each other, and not competing.

**JFS:** Absolutely, but it's hard to remember this, you know, when in Arizona ethnic studies are cut or when women's and gender studies departments have their resources curbed. That is the hardest to remember when there's a feeling of being embattled.



**VR:** Being embattled, it sets up, temporarily, a sense of us against the world. But you can't maintain that; it has to be something deeper than that. It's not about retreating, it's about amplifying your visibility. I am the biggest cheerleader for the department. If a colleague or student gets an award, I immediately send it to the communications office in the School of Social Sciences because I want my colleagues to know.

**JFS:** In part, explaining to others what *we* do is a way to build bridges. At the same time, the mood is so bleak. What do you think are the challenges and possibilities? For instance, we are thinking of the collection, *Presumed Incompetent*, on female faculty of color in the academy (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012).<sup>2</sup>

**VR:** Yes, we are presumed incompetent. I'm actually on this committee right now for the Vice Chancellor for Advancement, basically a fancy name for the chief fundraiser. I was in a meeting, and a donor who I had never met was sitting next to me, and he was talking about the candidate's desired attributes for the job description. And he kept going, *he* should do this, *he* needs to be that. And I kept going, *she*, *she*. And he just sat glaring at me, and he said, well, *the person*. And it's one of those things where I hate doing this, but I made a point of announcing that "well, not all of you know me, but some may know that I'm a recovering dean. I was dean of the School of Humanities." I just felt that I had to let him know, and I felt bad that I had to do that. I also felt bad that I was the only woman faculty member in the room, and none of the women staff members and certainly none of my male colleagues said anything, and I thought that I had to do what I had to do myself. It's not going to be a fun committee! I came back home afterwards, and my husband asked me, "How'd it go?" I said, "Oh, I just played feminist bitch for the last hour," and he said, "Oh, I bet you enjoyed it." I'm sorry, but this is 2016, and you just don't say "he" to refer to a candidate. Then, the donor also said *this person* has to have gravitas. I said, excuse me, but "gravitas" reeks white male privilege. He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "It reeks white male privilege. Period." I said, "I've known a number of women and men from underrepresented groups who have applied for higher education jobs and have been told that they didn't get positions because they were perceived as lacking gravitas!" The donor asked me, "What would you use instead of gravitas?" I said that we could use a variety of words such as "stature," "respect," "poise," "confidence."

**JFS:** Yes, one has to constantly push back against this coded language that makes the unspoken culture.

**VR:** And there's an increasing allowance for this type of intolerance, to say exactly what you mean, in the public culture. You see it in actions all over the country—against women's rights, against people of color, against religious minorities. When did we become the 1920s? It is a scary time, and it's what I try to tell my students, that you have to be involved; you can't retreat into your own private social media world.

### **Activism, Social Justice, and the Academe**

**JFS:** Continuing in this same vein of activism, the news has recently (and rightly) focused on the work of Black Lives Matter. Thinking about the ways in which state violence manifests itself, how might we broaden the political critique of Black Lives Matter?

**VR:** Black Lives Matter is exceptionally important. And important for undocumented students. "Black Lives" is not only a political issue for me but also a personal issue. It's about basic human decency and dignity; and the stripping of people's humanity, whether it's by the authority of the state—whether it's ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] or a cop on the beat.<sup>3</sup> It's this authorial exercise of power. It's dehumanization of people of color. I've been asked, "So, why don't you say Latino Lives Matter?" To me, that's an appropriation, but certainly there can be coalitions that develop. I mean, that's part of what I've

done as a historian, to look for and find those moments of coalition. I would not want Latino Lives Matter to be perceived as appropriation, not that it necessarily would be, but that might be the perception.

**JFS:** So it's not so much that we need to hashtag Latino Lives Matter but to build coalitions that are the hardest to build, especially in politically difficult times.

**VR:** Yes, and these coalitions have to emerge at the grassroots level; [they're] not going to emerge from the top down. And these coalitions are fragile. Mary Wolford, who works on the rural land rights movement in Brazil, talks about coalitions and how it's the banalities that undermine coalitions, not really state authority (Wolford 2010). It is the petty tensions that bubble up, and the problem of what she refers to as the banalities, the day-to-day stuff that takes away from the larger common goals.

**JFS:** It's the hardest to build transnational coalitions. The discourse over undocumented students echoes the discourse on refugees that is both European and American; and for those who are subject to violence and vulnerable, for them to nonetheless try to organize is the most challenging.

**VR:** It's historical memory. Cherríe Moraga said it best: "The right to remember is a political act, one that counters our erasure from historical records."

**JFS:** Well, thank you so much for your time. And congratulations on getting the National Humanities Medal from President Obama.<sup>4</sup>

**VR:** Thank you. When I stepped on the stage, I thought about my mother and all of my students. In fact, Daniel, my youngest son, who was there, said to me, "You were thinking of Grandma up there, weren't you?" And I said, "Yes, I was!" And her spirit was certainly present.

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## Notes

1. Two examples of Tobar's recent pieces are "Latinos' Slow-Burn Anger" (*The New York Times*, March 9, 2016) and "The Trump Affront to Latinos" (*The New York Times*, July 20, 2016).

2. See also the Facebook page for *Presumed Incompetent*, which is followed by over 14,000 people.

3. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is a federal law enforcement agency under the Department of Homeland Security, which is charged with detaining and deporting immigrants.

4. Vicky Ruiz was one of ten recipients of the 2014 National Humanities Medal, which was conferred in a White House ceremony on September 10, 2015.

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**Excerpt from Vicki L. Ruiz’s *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (1998)**

When I was a child, I learned two types of history—the one at home and the one at school. My mother and grandmother would regale me with tales of their Colorado girlhoods, stores of village life, coal mines, strikes, discrimination, and family lore. At school, scattered references were made to Coronado, Ponce de León, the Alamo, and Pancho Villa. That was the extent of Latino history. Bridging the memories told at the table with printed historical narratives fueled my decision to become a historian.

*From Out of the Shadows* focuses on the claiming of personal and public spaces across generations. As farm workers, flappers, labor activists, barrio volunteers, civic leaders, and feminists, Mexican woman have made history. Their stories, however, have remained in the shadows.

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Race, class, and gender have become familiar watchwords, maybe even a mantra, for social historians, but few get beneath the surface to explore their intersections in a manner that sheds light on power and

powerlessness, boundaries and voice, hegemony and agency. This book addresses issues of interpreting voice and locating power between and within communities, families, and individuals. Women's lives, dreams, and decisions take center stage.

Women of Mexican birth or descent refer to themselves by many names—Mexicana, Mexican American, and Chicana (to name just three). Self-identification speaks volumes about regional, generational, and even political orientations. The term Mexicana typically refers to immigrant women, with Mexican American signifying US birth. Chicana reflects a political consciousness borne out of the Chicano Student Movement, often a generational marker for those of us coming of age during the 1960s and 1970s. Chicana/o has also been embraced by our elders and our children who share in the political ideals of the movement. Some prefer regional identification, such as Tejana (Texan) or Hispana (New Mexican). Spanish American is also popular in New Mexico and Colorado. Latina emphasizes a common bond with all women of Latin American origin in the United States, a politicized Pan American identity. Even racial location can be discerned by whether one favors an Iberian connection (Hispanic) or an indigenous past (Mestiza or Xicana).

As part of her stand-up routine, lesbian writer and comic Monica Palacios articulates her multiple identities as follows:

When I was born  
I was of Mexican-American persuasion  
Then I became Chicana  
Then I was Hispanic  
Then I was a Third World Member  
(my mom loved that)  
Then I was a woman of color  
Now I'm just an Amway dealer  
And my life is happening.

Literary critic Alicia Arrizón refers to Palacios's work as "one of challenge where humor becomes the tool of reconstructing ways of understanding the self." Poet and novelist Alicia Gaspar de Alba conveys the image of the Chicana writer as "the *curandera* (medicine woman) or the *bruja* (witch) ... the keeper or culture, the keeper of memories." The exploration of identities, the conservation and creation of cultural practices and traditions, and the reconstruction of historical narratives are not without political intent. In the words of Sonia Saldívar-Hull, "The Chicana feminist looks to her history ... to learn how to transform the present."

Focusing on the twentieth century and the Southwest, this book surveys women's border journeys not solely in terms of travel, but of internal migration—creating, accommodating, resisting, and transforming the physical and psychological environs of their "new" lives in the United States. These are journeys of survival, resiliency, and community. They reveal, to quote Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "the material politics of everyday life, especially the daily life struggles of poor people—those written out of history."

# Creating Consciousness, Creating a Legend: A Conversation with Virginia Espino, Historian and Producer of *No Más Bebés* (2015)

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Virginia Espino

“Inside I feel pain, remembering,” says Carolina “Maria” Hurtado, in Spanish. Consuelo Hermosillo echoes her in English, “It’s like when you bury somebody, you’re always going to carry it in your head.” Whether they speak in Spanish or English, the pain and anger felt by these Mexicanas, who were coercively sterilized in the Los Angeles County–University of Southern California Medical Center in the late 1960s and early 1970s, is palpable. While traumatized, they were not, however, silenced by their pain and spoke up with courage against this injustice as part of a group of ten plaintiffs in the 1978 *Madrigal v. Quilligan* case, a federal class-action lawsuit filed against E. J. Quilligan, MD, and other hospital obstetricians. The voices of Dolores Madrigal, the lead plaintiff, and other Latina women who participated in the lawsuit are at the center of a recent documentary, *No Más Bebés* (*No More Babies*) (2015) by Virginia Espino and Renee Tajima-Peña. Told in a moving manner, interspersed with interviews and a variety of archival material, the documentary shows these women’s little-known story

that resonates with intersectionality across issues—of gender, race, immigration, class, and reproductive choice—of enduring and urgent relevance.

Espino and Tajima-Peña have been friends for more than a decade; their mutual interests and their children coincidentally brought them together. Espino, who calls herself a “daughter of California,” grew up in her hometown of Los Angeles. She is a historian by training (taught by Vicki L. Ruiz) and earned her PhD in American History from Arizona State University, where she specialized in Latina and Latino history, as well as public history. From 2008 until recently, she worked as an oral historian for the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Center for Oral History Research. She is now dedicated full time to Moon Canyon Films, the company she and Tajima-Peña created to coproduce *No Más Bebés*. While *No Más Bebés* is Espino’s first film, Tajima-Peña has been making films since the 1980s. A professor, writer, filmmaker, and Asian American activist, Tajima-Peña’s corpus revolves around issues of race, immigration, injustice, and the legal system. Currently a professor at UCLA, Tajima-Peña is an Academy Award-winning filmmaker and a Guggenheim Fellow (2011) who, in addition to her best-known work, *Who Killed Vincent*

*Chin?* (1987), has made many other films, among them *Calavera Highway* (2008), *Skate Manzanar* (2001), *Labor Women* (2002), and *My America... Or Honk If You Love Buddha* (1997). She is currently at work on an interactive historical documentary and video-game-based learning project on the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans, *Building History 3.0*.

At the fortieth anniversary of the filing of the *Madrigal v. Quilligan* court case, Tajima-Peña and Espino reassemble and reconstruct the story to remind viewers of a tragic, shocking, and buried episode in our nation's past and history. The film interviews both the women who were sterilized under duress and the doctors who worked in the hospital. It also focuses on another central figure, one of the attorneys who represented these women, Antonia Hernández, then a recent graduate of the UCLA law school; she, along with Anna Nieto Gomez, another member of the Chicana feminist organization *Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional*, offered legal assistance to the women.<sup>1</sup> In the trial, they argued that under *Roe v. Wade* (1973) a woman's right to bear a child was constitutionally protected just as much as her right to abortion. As the film's director writes, the documentary "attempts to navigate the gulf between accountability, as it is legally defined, and justice—the muddy waters through which policy, gender, race, and ethics travel from the public sphere to the maternity floor and which structure an intimate moment of a woman's life: birth" (Tajima-Peña 2013).

The documentary situates this episode within a broad historical and social milieu, and illuminates how the contexts of Chicano nationalism and white mainstream feminism came to bear on the events. It also directs our attention to how reproduction was racialized by the eugenics and anti-immigration movements in California. It is not surprising, then, to see how, within this environment, the federal government sponsored and supported population-control measures and how family planning programs were abused, leaving racial minority, immigrant, and poor white women most vulnerable. Thus, while the film focuses on Latina women, their story echoes the experiences of Puerto Rican, African American, and Native American women who have all been subjected to sterilization abuse.

Emotionally powerful and aesthetically savvy, the documentary tells a story of the politics of reproductive control, of reproductive rights and justice, of tragedy and survival. It is a salute to the courage of the "Madrigal 10": Guadalupe Acosta, Estella Benavides, Maria Figueroa, Rebecca Figueroa, Maria Hurtado, Consuelo Hermosillo, Georgina Hernandez, Dolores Madrigal, Helena Orozco, and Jovita Rivera.

In the following interview, Virginia Espino, historian and producer of the film, speaks about her research on this marginalized episode in history, the challenges and rewards of collaboration, intersectionality, and the story's importance for Chicana history and reproductive justice.

### **Hidden Histories and the Making of a Film**

**Anupama Arora, Laura Muñoz, and Sandrine Sanos (JFS):** We wanted for you to talk a little bit about how you came to the topic of your film, why it became so important, and if there were any difficulties when you were doing the writing, and during the filming as well.

**Virginia Espino (VE):** I learned about this history through Dr. Vicki Ruiz in one of her courses; she was my graduate school mentor, and one of the things she tries to do in her classes is to bring out these histories, these unknown histories, these untold histories, these histories that have been what she calls "hidden in the shadows." She tries to bring them out of obscurity, so in her lectures she talks about things that generally haven't been discussed.

At that time, in the mid 1990s, it was primarily Chicano historiography. There weren't a lot of books written about Chicana feminism. Maylei Blackwell's *iChicana Power!* only came out in 2013.<sup>2</sup> Vicki mentioned the



history [of sterilization] in a class, and she mentioned it from the perspective of the activism, the fact that there was a lawsuit. She didn't talk about it in terms of racism only, but how these women fought back during the Chicano movement, these Chicana activists. I [wound up] in the neighborhood I grew up in, very close to my home, like ten minutes away. But not only that, it was part of my whole surroundings because of the county hospital towers. I don't know if you've been to Los Angeles, but if you've ever driven on the 5 freeway or the 10 freeway, you see the hospital looming large across that part of LA. If you stay primarily on the West Side, you're never going to see it. So it was like a fixture, in my childhood and my youth, and to hear that these sterilizations were taking place at the time when I was growing up, in the 1970s, and I never learned about it, never heard about it, never read about it, I was shocked. I was angry.

But at the same time, that is why I was in graduate school and I wanted to do my PhD in history, to learn about these stories, to uncover these stories. So I made it my project, to write my first paper. I think I wrote my very first paper on this issue and Vicki published that later on in *Las Obreras* journal through UCLA (Espino 2002). So it started there, and became a bigger project with my dissertation. I wanted to tie it into questions and issues of population control. [I looked at] Thomas Malthus and the principle of overpopulation [that] started with him. Some of the ideas that he talks about in regards to Europe and the peasant class, you could see some parallels in the discussions of overpopulation in the 1970s, and some of the ideas that Paul Ehrlich talks about go back to Malthus and Malthusianism; so that's what I looked at in my dissertation.<sup>3</sup> But Vicki is very much interested in how we can write history for the public good, such as public history, museum studies, etc. When we started, she was teaching out of Claremont Graduate School. And that's where I first learned about the history of sterilization abuse in LA. But she took a position at Arizona State University, and I followed her out there. So, that year that I was there at Arizona, I got a full potpourri of the different ways history can be used, because they have a pretty strong public history program there: oral history, museum studies, museum collecting. She encouraged me to apply to a fantastic summer internship where you can apply your historical knowledge to a larger, broader audience.

Documentary film wasn't part of my education, but I knew it was a good way to bring history alive; and just by coincidence, around the time that I was working on my dissertation, I met Renee [Tajima-Peña]. We have a mutual friend here in Los Angeles who thought we would be great friends because of our similar interests and also the fact that we both had kids that were about a year old at the time. She was a new mom; and I had my second child. We would have play dates and talk about our work and our research, and ideas about how we wanted to apply the information we were gathering. I think she was working on a project called *The New Americans* for PBS.<sup>4</sup> She thought this would make an amazing film, to document this history of sterilization abuse—especially because we're both from Los Angeles, both women of color, and we were both new moms. And it was something we both found so outrageous and so appalling. Also, the idea of allowing people to tell their own stories, that's very important to both of us. Instead of me theorizing about how they could feel based on newspapers and court records, I really wanted to hear their own words. I wasn't able to find them when I was writing my dissertation, but we really knew we had to do [this] for the film, to find the plaintiffs and get them, hopefully, to talk to us.

**JFS:** And how difficult was it to find them and convince them to speak on camera, which is a whole different dimension? And to have them revisit the story as well?

**VE:** Well, it's not something that you would do for a book or a dissertation; you would not go to a private investigator and pay them to find people. People would consider that unethical and just crossing the line as far as what you do for your research! But for a documentary film, you have a different set of ethics. The other strange coincidence is that Renee and I both have a mutual friend who is a private investigator; her name

is Angelica Garza and usually she works with lawyers, in trying to find information for the defendants and lawyers. And she found a couple of the people. She found Dolores Madrigal first. My husband is a journalist; he was a journalist for the *Los Angeles Times* for many years. And he wasn't able to find any of the women just by their name and by their birthdate through his databases; that's when we decided to take it to the next level.

Although, I should add, before we decided to consult a private investigator, I had some information about Dolores Madrigal, who was the lead plaintiff in the case. I was able to find her previous residence, and I was able to find people who knew her and they gave me a trail, where she might have gone after she left that residence. They gave me a trail of the churches she attended and some of the places where she lived. So we were able to find people who knew her, but she had left the state. And that's when we decided to consult the next level of researcher, that is, a private investigator. And that's when we found her.

**JFS:** Was the PI collaborating with you, working for free, doing this pro bono? Did the investigator have a feminist investment in this?

**VE:** The thing is that when you're an intellectual woman of color, interested in these kinds of stories, you have a small community of people. And so we all kind of know each other. Angelica was actually somebody we would hang out together with, we would end up at the same political events, we shared the same political views, and I think she calls herself a feminist. But we weren't necessarily just focusing on women's issues, because we have an intersectional approach in how we address our politics. I think I met her at a labor strike, I can't remember, but she's definitely a politically minded person and was on board right away to help us find these women.

Also, whenever Renee could pay somebody, she would. She got a grant through the California Council for the Humanities, so that was our seed money. It's a wonderful program in California that allows for these kinds of storytelling. After that, we won a grant through Independent Television Service (ITVS) and PBS to continue the project. So everybody that we deal with is usually somebody who is sympathetic to the issues that are being addressed and has a strong sense of social justice and purpose. The next person that we contacted to help us find people, her name is Clara Solis. She's a mom where my kids went to school, and that's how I met her. She's also a PI and she's very good friends with Angelica. She's also part of the same community: she worked for UFW [United Farm Workers], worked for political campaigns here in Los Angeles.<sup>5</sup> We all kind of knew each other somehow. Six degrees of separation! I think that everybody feels so strongly when you grow up in LA—Angelica is from LA, Clara's from LA, I'm from LA, Renee's from LA—that our histories never get told on that broad, big scale of a PBS broadcast. Usually, it's not even mentioned in certain circles—unless it's the Brown Berets, that's a narrative you get to hear a lot about, but not reproductive justice and how we were involved in that struggle.<sup>6</sup>

**JFS:** Would you say that you see your work as contributing to building an archive of women of color?

**VE:** Absolutely. We donated some of our records so far to the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.<sup>7</sup> The CSRC has one of two archives on sterilization in Los Angeles and their focus is on what the professor Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez donated.<sup>8</sup> He was the doctor and anthropologist who testified on behalf of the plaintiffs. He donated all of his records to the CSRC, and we complemented that with our records; and we hope to have a digital archive with all of these items that we collected. Many of the interviews didn't make it into the film, and we hope to make them available as well. So a component of the documentary film project is that we hope to have a digital archive of the resources, so the researchers can move the research forward and find new information, ask new questions, take it to different angles, maybe from the legal angle, from the medical perspective. I think there's a lot of ways you can look at this issue and further the research.



## Speaking to the Plaintiffs, Women Speaking

**JFS:** And was it difficult once you found the women and met them, to convince them to speak?

**VE:** It was hard. At first, they were willing and then they got cold feet. Well, not all of them. Certainly Dolores Madrigal: She got cold feet after we planned our trip to go out to see her, and we were able to continue with our plan, and our trip, and our interview because her son was a very strong advocate for participating. He did not know she had been involved in this lawsuit and he thought it would be a good idea for her to talk to us. So it was really because of him that we were allowed to follow through with the interview. This [was] before I actually met her.

When I met her, the bond was instantaneous because she reminded me of someone I knew in my family, like an aunt or a grandma—and also, someone who had so much knowledge that isn't quantifiable. She doesn't have a degree, but she had all of this healing knowledge, all this folk wisdom, and so it was a beautiful meeting. And I'm still very close with her. She calls me regularly, she tells me to pray for her, she says she's praying for me because I have my own problems [laughter], and that's I think another thing that made it easy for her to open up to me because my life is not perfect. I was very honest about my own struggles in my life, about raising my kids, and even though I have an education, and I have more economic privilege, you don't get off scot-free. So we share things about our own struggle: being moms, being daughters—well, she hasn't been a daughter for a while—but my mother had cancer, and Dolores Madrigal was somebody that I would go to because she was so connected to the Catholic Church and my mom's very Catholic. So she helped me a lot through that, ironically enough.

But she didn't want to interview again. We just brought up the painful memories, and she wasn't comfortable having them come to the surface. She wanted to keep [them] repressed. She hasn't seen any of the screenings. She's not interested in actually seeing, viewing the film. There was a moment when she said, "Well, maybe..." and then she said, "No I can't, I don't want to go back there, I want to leave that in the past," in the closet, so to speak. So she was hard to convince, but we were able to convince her, but then she did not want to keep participating. And there was one woman who said, "I don't even want to go back there. Please don't come back here. That's not something I want to recall. I appreciate what you're doing, but I don't want to be a part of it." Some we could not even find, no matter what the PIs were able to dig up. We couldn't locate them.

And then you have people like Carolina Hurtado. Mrs. Hurtado, who plays a big part in the film, who was just so open, who had a completely different perspective. Probably because her husband was so supportive. A powerful daughter and a husband to take her lead, insofar as to what did *she* want to do, how did *she* want to handle it. So that was a very different kind of film experience, where she would let us come back every day if we wanted to. She tries to come to all of the different screenings. The problem is she lives in San Diego, and a lot of the screenings are up here in Los Angeles, so it's hard to get her up here. But they're really enjoying the whole ride. It's painful, it's a painful history, but she feels like she's been elevated to this level of respect that she didn't have before. This anonymous person who participated in this great important legal battle is not anonymous anymore, and she likes that celebrity and that fame.

**JFS:** That makes sense, because, in some way, it's a way of recreating a different form of community, years after this particular project. Do you think the women you interviewed see this as contributing to Chicano history in the same way as you do?

**VE:** Probably, once they've actually gone to some of the college screenings, because they can witness it; they can witness the student population who is in the audience and [who are] mostly Latinos. I don't know if they're Chicanos or Chicanas, but they're certainly Latinos and Latinas. So they can see that they're

educating a whole new generation about this history, and how these students are embracing this history, how professors at UC Santa Barbara, professors at California State Fullerton, professors within all these universities within the California system are filling up their auditoriums, can hear them speak and can hear their stories on the screen. So I haven't asked them that question, but I think it would be hard not to see your impact when you've got 500 kids in the audience who are captivated by what you have to say. It's pretty incredible.

And then, they ask them to take pictures with them. It's like Beyoncé! They're celebrities but not because of their dancing, their singing, but because of the role they played in this important legal battle. It's pretty awesome to witness that and to experience that. I told my mom today that I made history. I made historical figures. In the sense [that] I didn't create this narrative but, through this film process, we created these legends who are going to be part of the historiography of not just Chicano/a history but also women's studies, ethnic studies. They're going to be central figures for the next... maybe forever, part of the canon. They are part of this canon, and their stories of who they are and how they each understood it. Some people identify with Dolores Madrigal and they cry. They're so upset after the screening, they're like, "I can't believe she had to go through this horrible thing and then be abused at home." And then other people identify with Mrs. Hurtado: "Oh, she's so funny, she's so lovely, it was so wonderful to get to know her, to meet her. What a strong woman. We're fighters, we fight back." So the audience members have these different women to look to, to understand their own experiences, and possibly their own pains, or their own struggles.

### **Feminism, Race, Class, and Reproductive Justice**

**JFS:** It's fascinating to hear you talk about this reception. One of the things that was striking to us (some of us not knowing that history) was how the film touches on feminism, civil rights, immigration, reproductive justice, the stories of those who are invisible. And the story of these women in LA in the 1960s and 1970s reminded us of what we know about African American women in the early twentieth century. So there's actually a longer history of these forced sterilizations, which shows us how reproductive justice is always racialized and is always a political issue. We were wondering whether you had any thoughts on whether the plaintiffs, at the time, conceived of it in those terms. Because there's a clash between the Chicano movement, which was male-dominated, and white mainstream feminism, which didn't have a place for these women; and how we could think about reproductive justice now, especially in this moment when it is under attack.

**VE:** Those words weren't being used back then, not even by the Chicana activists. I think African American activists or Chicana activists were not talking about reproductive justice. That came later, with their own understanding and interpretation of their role. You can hear the women in the film talking about "well, that's my own personal right," so internally, they have this notion of bodily autonomy, of my own right to determine if I want to have twenty kids, if I want to have any kids. They understood that. But they did not have that term, reproductive justice. We're not really sure how they feel about issues like abortion. Because some of them are very religious. We never talked about that whole idea—how they understood reproductive justice, as far as the ability to receive a safe and legal abortion. But they certainly understand what it means to raise your kid in a free and healthy environment, with a quality education. They were all interested in their kids' education, in their kids' role in school and healthcare. You know this was something that changed the way they viewed the healthcare system. All those things that are part of reproductive justice [and] are part of their everyday lives. Later on, terms such as intersectionality and reproductive justice would help make sense of this period, but they themselves didn't use that kind of language.

They didn't talk about feminism, although you can see how Mrs. Hurtado was a strong powerful woman who advocated for her right to sexuality. She talks about the difference between "mansa" and "mensa": that's to me a way of looking at women's power.<sup>9</sup> I'd never even heard these terms. I was the one who did the interviews and I probably didn't understand what she meant at the time. In terms of understanding women's behavior, it was really interesting [that] she articulated it that way. I think Consuelo Eduncio says about her granddaughter [that] she wants her to have liberty and to decide for herself if she wants to have kids, if she wants to get married, if she doesn't want to get married. What if she wants to go to college? Those kinds of things are definitely part of their ideological thinking. Whenever I bring any of the plaintiffs to a screening, they always say, "We're here because we don't want this history to repeat" and "When you go to a doctor, don't go alone, make sure you go with somebody." So they always have advice for students in the audience.

**JFS:** There's a way in which this history shows the limits of feminist coalitions and, speaking about intersectionality, [exposes] the very issues on which, in the 1970s, those that talked about reproductive justice would not find common ground. That's why the story is powerful because it speaks to the possibilities and limits of feminist coalitions.

**VE:** I think that, for me, personally, as a historian, the white feminist movement needed to grow up a bit, as far as their politics. They needed to be educated just as we, I, needed to be educated on what reproductive justice really means to those who are in that fight. To think of including teen moms, teen parents, into that discourse just wasn't something I had considered. And when I was educated on that, it just opened my eyes on how we throw away teen pregnant girls; they're tossed-away people because, in our view, they've ruined their life. You know, they're not married, they're sixteen, and they're pregnant. Instead of finding ways to help them finish school, finding ways to help them raise their kids in a healthy environment free of violence, we just toss them aside like trash or like damaged goods, so to speak. I was really interested in what other people were saying, in what the other experiences were in relation to African American and Chicana experience. Just like today, we always need to have the white majority be willing to listen to what is *our* perspective, what is *our* viewpoint. That was the case then. There were some who did understand, but they were primarily from more of the leftist organizations, more of the socialist feminist groups who were looking at the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. And that's how they interpreted these abuses. So they weren't strictly feminists, so to speak. They had a class analysis that allowed them to be more accepting of this 72-hour wait period that the white feminists from the mainstream did not want to sign off on.

### **The Afterlives of *No Más Bebés*, the Meanings of Collaboration**

**JFS:** Do you see your film in light of what you just said, of also reminding people of the need to think about that, because the issue of restrictions to reproductive health is a big debate topic right now? It's happening in Texas and elsewhere in the United States. Do you see your film as contributing to hopefully more effective mobilization on the part of feminists, with that intersectional frame? Was that on your mind when you made the film or since then?

**VE:** We definitely wanted the film to be a tool for social justice advocates, for reproductive justice advocates, and how they use that is really dependent on the community that they're in. So, we are working very closely with the California Latinas for Reproductive Justice, and they're being asked now to screen the film, and host screenings and host discussions, because they're able to frame it within that reproductive justice dialogue that Renee and I aren't really immersed in. We are definitely advocates of it. We try to encourage

discussion of it, but we're not on the ground in the grassroots like some of these other organizations. And so, we're so happy when people from those movements want to screen our film and want to host a discussion.

Last night, I Skyped in an interview with some folks in Pennsylvania, reproductive justice advocates. They have a "herstory" celebration in February where they have different film screenings that focus on women of color and their roles in history. So for instance, [consider] the fact that this film is being shown in Pittsburgh, where I don't think there were any Latinos or Latinas in the audience or not very many; the organizer told me that it's always a black/white narrative. It's because of the geographies of where we are. So it's wonderful to be able to have this conversation with other groups.

I think that our film is doing work that we only are beginning to understand. We don't really have a strong sense of how it's being used in different settings. But the fact [is] that we have people at the grassroots or just basic community organizers, and then we have people at these prominent universities, Yale, Brown, and so on. It's pretty exciting that we have created a product that is of interest to this wide spectrum of people. It's just so rewarding.

**JFS:** Yes, it really is. It resonates because it's such a moving film. It's moving, it's political, it's a real story. It's all of that at the same time.

**VE:** Yes, I have to give credit to Renee. Renee really had the vision of just the visual elements. You know, like the idea of Mrs. Hurtado pulling out her wedding dress, or Mr. and Mrs. Hurtado dancing, or Mr. Hurtado singing. You know, it's like all of these little elements that would really get a window into who they were as people.

**JFS:** And that's the distinctive feature of your film, the collaboration between you and Renee, but also your friends you were talking about who were PIs. There's always been a strong tradition of collaboration in feminism. Could you say more about that, and how that really shaped the process and the film itself?

**VE:** I think it definitely means being an advocate for people of color in film, and I'm certainly interested in making sure that if someone is going to get a gig, that they are at least a person of color. In this case, with this film, it was important that they were Spanish-speaking and hopefully Latina, and if not, at least they should be Spanish-speaking because the women were Spanish-speaking, and I wanted to make sure that they felt comfortable with a room full of individuals who are basically strangers. Also, when you are thinking about "miking" a person, you really have to go through their clothes, and I wanted to make sure that whoever was going to do that was going to have a vibe that the women would be comfortable with. So, making sure that there were people of color on the crew was a big priority for me.

I don't know if you were following our Twitter memes that we started posting around the time of the broadcasts. We [Renee and I] got some young Latino graphic artists, undergraduates (we are meeting a lot of undergraduates on our tour). I asked them, "What was this like for you, what was this process, what did it mean to you?" And one of them said, "I never imagined that I could use my creative talent for social justice or to create consciousness."

I told Renee, "We're creating this whole world through this film of people who are understanding an ideology differently, even down to the graphic artists." I just thought that was really cool. And those memes are amazing! They're very strong. They're very powerful in their own right. I think, in some regards, they're feminist, they're activist, and they celebrate our community, our culture, and the role that everybody played in this documentary, including Dr. Rosenfeld.<sup>10</sup>

**JFS:** What has it meant for you as an academic to do the documentary as opposed to a book monograph?

**VE:** Well, I when I finished my dissertation, I had children. I had three kids, eleven and under, so I was not going to write. It was just going to be too difficult to carve out that time. I came back from living abroad

with my family. Renee and I began to work on the documentary right away, but I also had a full-time job. Trying to balance between the full-time job, kids, and the documentary, it just would have been impossible to write, and especially because I am just a queen of procrastination when it comes to writing. I felt that once the documentary was done, I would get back to the writing, and I still might because there is so much that is not in the film that I learned through this process. I think that the monograph is very important. It also lives a long time and becomes part of the canon, but I'm fairly certain that there are people who are seeing this story in film form that would have never picked up a book, would have never come across it. So that's rewarding in and of itself. With this documentary, what I get as far as making an impact socially is very rewarding.

**JFS:** So how transformative has this moment been for you?

**VE:** It's not. For me, it's more of an honor; it's more rewarding; it's just this feeling of incredible satisfaction when you do things that help other people. I can't even explain how good that feels. If I die tomorrow, I have really made a big impact, and I've given back to all the people who have made Chicana and Chicano history, to all the people who challenged racism so that I didn't have to experience that same kind of racism as an adult. I definitely was there during the heyday of the hate of Mexicans in the 1970s, but to see people fight back gave me back my culture in a sense.

Because when I was growing up, my parents didn't speak to me and my sisters in Spanish, and they were very much into us assimilating because they had experienced so much racism [that] they didn't want us to have to jump those same kinds of hurdles. So, no Spanish. They moved us into a neighborhood that was mostly Anglo, and so I felt like I was stripped from all of that richness of my culture, and to get it back because of the Chicano movement was... that was transformative. I feel I'm giving back to that same movement of celebrating our culture, of celebrating who we are, honoring our stories, honoring our differences, our uniqueness, and to watch other people have a transformative experience is very rewarding. I wouldn't change anything. If I never write the book, I'll be happy with this project!

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## Notes

1. Both Antonia Hernández and Anna NietoGomez are major figures in the Chicano movement. Hernández earned her JD at the UCLA School of Law in 1974. From 1985 to 2004, she was the president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), a national nonprofit litigation and advocacy organization dedicated to protecting the civil rights of the nation's Latinos through the legal system, community education, and research and policy initiatives. She is currently the president and CEO of the California Community Foundation.

NietoGomez is one of the central figures in Chicana feminism and labor activism. In 1968, she cofounded the Chicana student group Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc (The Daughters of Cuauhtémoc, the Aztec emperor) at California State University, Long Beach. Las Hijas is considered one of the earliest Chicana feminist organizations in the nation; it published two critical outlets that defined and shaped Chicana feminism, the short-lived newspaper *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*, and the journal *Encuentro Femenil*. Las Hijas formed originally within the nationalist organizations of United Mexican American Students (UMAS) and its later iteration, still known as the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MECHA). The male leadership of UMAS and MECHA perceived women as secondary in the movement; Las Hijas responded with demands for accountability and a political education campaign that challenged the discrimination and sexism they experienced in the movement. For a full history of Las Hijas, see Blackwell 2013.

2. Maylei Blackwell's *iChicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*, published in 2013 by the University of Texas Press, was the first monograph on Chicanas in the Chicano movement published in the United States.

3. Espino refers here to Paul R. Ehrlich's book *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969).

4. The documentary mentioned by Espino, an episode in the PBS series *The New Americans*, was *The Mexican Laborer*, directed and produced by Renee Tajima-Peña and produced by Evangeline Griego.

5. The United Farm Workers (UFW) is a labor union that represents agriculture and farm laborers in the United States. Because of its mostly Filipino and Mexican-origin membership, who united under the UFW banner in 1966, and its political leaders including Larry Itliong, Cesar Chavez, and Dolores Huerta, the UFW is associated with the emergence of the Chicano movement. See Matthew Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (University of California Press, 2014) and Mario T. García, ed., *A Dolores Huerta Reader* (University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

6. The Brown Berets (so named because of the brown berets they wore, with the color referencing people of Mexican and indigenous descent) are a militant Chicano nationalist organization that grew out of a Los Angeles-based student organization called the Young Citizens for Community Action. Its members were closely associated with the Los Angeles high school walkouts in 1968 and charged themselves with providing protection for participants at Chicano movement's political events. Because of their stances on self-defense and police brutality, the Brown Berets were subject to state and federal police infiltration, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO).

7. "Virgina Espino and Renee Tajima-Peña Collection of Sterilization Records" at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

8. "Carlos G. Vélez-Ibáñez Sterilization Papers ca. 1972-1979" at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library. See also Vélez-Ibáñez 1980, 239-40.

9. "Mansa" in Spanish means meek or tame, while "mensa" means stupid or foolish.

10. Dr. Bernard Rosenfeld, who at the time of the lawsuit was a medical student in residence at the Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center, shared the confidential hospital records with the plaintiffs' attorney Hernández.

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# Articles

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# I Will Tell Your Story: New Media Activism and the Indian “Rape Crisis”

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the mediatized representations of the Indian “rape crisis” that gained global attention in the aftermath of the brutal gang rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey in New Delhi in 2012. While much attention was given to Leslie Udwin’s documentary on the incident, *India’s Daughter* (2015), which was subsequently banned by the Indian government, there were several other creative responses that attempted to negotiate with the meaning of the event. This article examines two such texts—the multimedia short story *We Are Angry* (2015) and the augmented-reality comic *Priya’s Shakti* (2014). Both these texts declare their intention to function as “activist” multimedia pieces that leverage the power of Internet-mediated platforms to raise awareness about the condition of the “Indian woman” in the contemporary moment. This article argues that these texts, in their attempts to portray an essentialized and universalized image of the “Indian woman,” reenact certain violent historical erasures along the lines of caste, sexuality, class, and religion. The article undertakes a medium-specific examination of the works, considering their presumed audiences, language, content, and most notably their (failed) attempts at locating themselves within both historical and contemporary Indian feminist landscapes. In doing so, this discussion situates itself within ongoing Indian social justice debates, specifically those pertaining to mediatized narratives of rape, in order to critique the production of “feminism” in *We Are Angry* and *Priya’s Shakti*. By considering these texts alongside other, more inclusive online narrative spaces, we underline the importance of multiple feminist voices being heard on the issues in question, as well as the need to question any seemingly universal “we” of these narratives, their audience, or the women they claim to represent.

**Keywords:** rape narratives, Internet activism, digital humanities, Indian feminisms, transnational feminism, intersectional feminism, multimedia narratives

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## Introduction

In the aftermath of the 2012 rape and subsequent death of Jyoti Singh Pandey (also known as Nirbhaya) in New Delhi, the Indian “rape crisis” became the focus of global media narratives regarding India, and more specifically New Delhi. One event that attracted worldwide attention was the ban on *India’s Daughter* (2015), a documentary about the incident directed by British filmmaker Leslie Udwin. While the film was criticized by Indian feminists on many counts, from oversimplifying the issue to enacting white saviorism, the ban itself was seen as an overreaction by the Indian state, which, considering that the Nirbhaya case had already drawn spontaneous and widespread protests in 2012, was fearful of the reaction the film might incite (Durham 2015; Kohli 2015).

As a result of this focus, Indian feminist activism's reaction to sexual assault was brought to the forefront of local and global consciousness. At different times, sensationalized media focus on this issue has resulted in the forced in/visibility of historical feminist struggles with regard to the condition of women of different castes and class (as will be discussed in more detail below). In addition, media coverage of the event created the presumption of a universalized "Indian woman," eliding the higher incidence of sexual assault against those marginalized by caste, and thereby repeating Brahminical patriarchy under the guise of contemporary feminism. This assumption of a large-scale attempt at feminist redress while continuing to leave the caste system unquestioned suggests that this redress has been largely sought only within the bounds of Brahminical patriarchy. Caste-based limitations of feminist representation have been acknowledged and challenged by works such as Sharmila Rege's *Writing Caste/Writing Gender* (2006), which articulates Dalit-Bahujan women's testimonials on the realities of their lives and feminist struggles (often in counternarrative to mainstream assumptions regarding feminisms within India), and Uma Chakravarti's *Gendering Caste* (2003), which looks at historical responses to rape (such as the Mathura case in 1972 and the rape of Phoolan Devi by upper-caste men) as well as brutal responses to intercaste unions (such as the Mehrana killings in 1991).<sup>1</sup> As Chakravarti asserts,

The tragedy of our times is that this exploitation is so routinized that when incidents of violation of the rights and personhood of Dalit women, including sexual assaults, make it to our newspapers, they do not evoke the reaction that they should in any civilized society. Only a few incidents make it to our newspapers and get taken up by activists—when they do they expose the reality of caste. (2003, 160–61)

In addition to these intersections of gender and caste, the category of the "universal Indian woman" and the concomitant ideals of nationhood, religion, and family also have disparate implications for individual experiences of cultural policing, sexual harassment, and assault. Along with caste, religion, and class, it is also vital to acknowledge the high risk for LGBT individuals within discussions of gendered violence in India and to bring those matters into the scope of "mainstream feminism." Queer issues have rarely featured in discussions of gendered and sexualized violence in an Indian context, despite the fact that communities that identify outside the gender binary, such as Hijras, face extremely high levels of risk. The institutionalized sexual harassment faced by queer individuals, backed by Indian law, has also been largely absent in these considerations (Narain 2004; Menon 2009). These intersections of identity were also invisible in feminist discourse directly after the Nirbhaya case, as well as in the creative cultural responses that appeared across various multimedia texts (Dutta and Sircar 2013).

Given the local and global scope of this ongoing debate, this paper will analyze two such texts—the multimedia short story *We Are Angry* (2015) and the augmented-reality comic *Priya's Shakti* (2014)—as examples of issue-driven activism within the new media landscape. Here, "new media" stands for digital works that often require the mediation of a computer, being online, dense, interactive, multisensory, and networked. Both works are primarily concerned with the nature of the Indian "rape crisis," suggesting that the content is intended to create, within this digital sphere, a global feminist community that will lead to real-world changes in India with regard to social justice. However, in the debate that arises as a result of these two attempts to intervene in the discourse surrounding the crisis, the digital cannot be held as simply synonymous with the universal because of the specific contextual localization of the cultural production of this cyberspace. Instead, this cultural contextuality suggests the need for a media-specific analysis that places itself within ongoing Indian feminist debates and representations of the state and its people, reflecting the complex production of discourses of sexual assault in India, which are developed within and both reinforced and undermined by multiple institutions spanning the private and the public

spheres. These institutions include but are not limited to caste, class, religion, region, language, sex, and gender, and function within frameworks such as the family, the nation-state, the Indian historical subject, and the media.

This article attempts to situate these works as new media activism within a feminist digital sphere, which, while produced as a global narrative and created largely in English to be accessible to the presumed universal subject, have specific connotations when viewed within their intended sphere of influence. Therefore, we first provide a brief outline of the historicity of Indian feminist and postcolonial debates in cyberspace as context for the works in question.<sup>2</sup> We contrast them with other activist projects within the localized Indian context in order to demonstrate the problematic manner in which these works recreate structures of Hinduist Brahminical patriarchy while purporting to advance the cause of gender equality in India.

### **Examining Indian Feminist Debates in the 1990s**

Before analyzing any artifacts that intervene in or reflect on the “condition of women in India,” it is necessary to locate them within the broader terrain of the Indian feminist movement in order to link the themes they explore back to key historical processes and social debates. *We Are Angry* and *Priya’s Shakti* mobilize specific narratives related to religion, region, language, caste, and class that have been discussed extensively by Indian feminist activists and scholars. It is, of course, not within the scope of this overview to encompass the entire history of the Indian feminist movement, so it will concentrate on the threads most salient to our argument, from pre-Independence to the 1970s and then focusing on the 1990s. During this period, through a number of socioeconomic shifts, the category of the “universal Indian woman” was simultaneously contested and consolidated. The liberalization of the Indian economy, the strengthening of Hindu right-wing discourse in public life, and the introduction of digital technologies into the mediascape were all key influences in this process, the effects of which are also seen in the texts under consideration here.

The history of the Indian feminist movement as conceived of within the independence struggle meant that a largely unified “woman subject” was created as part of that nationalist discourse, and that this subject’s interests were framed as parallel to that of the newly formed Indian nation-state. This also meant that the movement’s foundations were informed, as Suresht Renjen Bald notes, by “the biases of its urban male, upper-caste, upper-class advocates” (1983, 1). Given its association with mainstream nationalism, this early feminist movement focused on legal mechanisms for redressing gender inequality rather than on more broad-based structural change in society. This focus meant that important steps, such as the inclusion of gender equality in the new Indian constitution, were accomplished, but larger institutional inequities were left in place. Additionally, as Kalpana Misra points out, for political leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, the “post-colonial Indian state [was] the central institution for promoting development and alleviating socioeconomic inequities which precluded women and other similarly disadvantaged groups from their exercise of political and civil rights” (1997, 29). However, this focus on “development” through the state as the key building block for gender equity did not adequately take into account the interstices of identity *within* that construction, which resulted in the post-independence Indian feminist movement being dominated by Hindu, middle-class, upper-caste (Brahminical) women who left their own privilege largely unexamined.

In the 1970s, a new wave of feminist activism arose that focused on the failures of the nation-state, from radical groups like Samta, which has published the feminist magazine *Manushi* (1978–present), to Dalit-Bhahujan women’s organizations, which pointed to the systemic biases within the larger women’s

movement that did not acknowledge their specific axes of oppression (Liddle and Joshi 1986). Despite these interventions, Mary E. John could still point to the “split subject” of the Indian feminist movement in the 1990s, commenting that “feminists eager to represent India’s women—in the villages, at the wrong end of development, suffering the injustices of the state or the limitations of leftist politics or so on—have been doing so while rendering their own identities within the dominant culture largely *transparent*” (1996, 137; original emphasis). That is to say, for example, that when analyses of violence against women—including harassment stemming from dowry demands, rape, and domestic violence—were undertaken, the category of the “victim” was still constructed as universal, undifferentiated by markers of class, caste, region, language, and religion. This emphasis on the “universal Indian woman” ensured that stable positions of societal power from which challenges to patriarchal hegemony could be issued—such as education, political governance, and legal reform—remained unavailable to those most disenfranchised by this hegemony (Agnes 1994).

Within this analytical frame, *all* Indian women were understood to suffer equally under patriarchy. Anupama Rao points out that this construction upheld “the possibility of occupying a feminist position outside caste: *the possibility of denying caste as a problem for gender*” (2009, 55; original emphasis). Nivedita Menon notes that the very category of women in India is fraught because “woman” may not be the basis or default marker of a significant identity when communities, ethnicity, caste, and class play a more central role in the process of self-definition of an evolving performative identity. The creation of a hegemonic feminist identity of “Indian women” in the global landscape, then, inevitably privileges representations of upper-caste urban Hindu feminist preoccupations, distinct from the concerns of groups such as Dalit-Bahujan rights activists, Muslim rights activists, groups working in rural areas, and others (Menon 2015, 38–42).

The 1990s saw this dominant framework challenged again by Dalit-Bahujan feminist organizations, which underlined the erasure of the consistent privileging of upper-caste Hindu womanhood and drew attention to the violence these denials were effecting on the very women mainstream movements claimed to represent (Rege 2003; Rao 2009). This erasure was also reflected in the Indian government’s suppression of the reality of caste-based violence in international forums such as the 2001 Durban Conference (Human Rights Watch 2009). Dalit-Bahujan women formulate the “three-way oppression” they face as consisting of specific caste-based discrimination, class-based oppression (since many are employed as manual laborers), and patriarchal regulation by men from all castes, including their own (Chakravarti 2006, 142–43). Caste as a major factor in Indian politics also came to the fore in 1990, when the Mandal Commission recommended the increase of reservations (hiring quotas as affirmative action) in the public sector for employees from lower-caste communities. The nationwide upper-caste protests against the implementation of these recommendations saw a large number of female participants, which made very visible the schisms within any notion of a uniform Indian women’s movement.

The 1990s were also a watershed decade for the Indian economy, as Finance Minister Manmohan Singh green-lighted a series of deregulation reforms in 1991, ending the long-standing system of governmental control over most sectors of industry and commerce.<sup>3</sup> Trishima Mitra-Kahn comments on the parallel rise of neoliberalism and right-wing Hindu fundamentalism in this period, wherein the “new Indian woman,” who was invariably urban, Hindu, middle-class, and had access to a college education, was also placed under considerable pressure not to be “corrupted” by the West. Mitra-Kahn notes:

Propelled by the idea of gender chaos, dystopic visions of what would happen to Indian culture and Indian women as India “opened up” to the West promoted a further normative discourse on womanhood. Appropriating the IWM’s (Indian Women’s Movement) lingua franca of agency and autonomy, right-wing

discourses invoked the power of various Hindu goddesses and called upon Indian women to embody the Hindu ideal of the chaste, devoted, perfect wife (i.e., *pativrata*) to resist Westernized modernity. (2012, 112)

Lastly, the 1990s also saw the rise of Internet use in India, particularly in urban centers. While the explosion of connectivity that would come with mobile-based devices was still some time away, young, middle-class, urban India was getting increasingly comfortable with cybercultural technology. The IT sector gained prominence in this period, and the skilled, cheap workforce with a proficiency in English encouraged companies from the United States in particular to set up back-office operations in India. Indian companies also took advantage of these factors, and the sector was positioned as a key player in India's emergence as a "global power" because it was perceived as driving the economy's high growth rate (8–9%) during that time (Sachs, Varshney and Bajpai 1999; Greenspan 2004). Technological proficiency was linked to higher paying jobs domestically and as a way of migrating to the West (the United States in particular). This led to a steady stream of IT graduates forming an economically stable diaspora with strong links back to India, which was facilitated by the use of the Internet. Rohit Chopra traces the rise in the use of digital technologies as interlinked with the use of these privileged virtual spaces to articulate a Hindu right-wing notion of what it means to be "Indian." He notes that

the possessors of technological skills have historically been vested with the authority to speak for the nation. The associations between technology and nationalism have condensed in ideas about self and other, they have been incorporated in imaginings of the state and the nation, and they have materialized as claims about identity, community, and society. In the present historical moment, this relationship manifests itself, in one form, as an online Hindu nationalism that combines cultural majoritarian claims with technological triumphalism. (Chopra 2008, 5)

Any framing, then, of either the Indian feminist movement or cybercultural technologies as unproblematically or predominantly inclusive, subversive, or secular is on shaky ground from the outset. However, it is these very presumptions that underscore the production, content, and circulation of both *We Are Angry* and *Priya's Shakti*.

### **The Possibilities of a Postcolonial Cyberculture**

The move to relatively new multimodal and multimedia platforms has led to a surge in social participation and interactivity, because such platforms enable different sorts of discussions under the presumed banner of equality within and outside of India. Initiatives like "Digital India" promoted by the current Indian government, which encourage the use of technology to participate in governance, are also motivated by the large numbers (143 million) of Indian users currently on social-media networks like Twitter and Facebook (Dutta 2014; ETTelecom Team 2015). The presumption of equal access subsumes the reality of cyberculture, which is inextricably linked to neo/colonialism—capitalism, language use, and technology functioning within global networks to retain the status quo in favor of the global North (Nayar 2008; Fernández 1999). Interactivity within this sphere is thus dependent upon access to technology, capital, literacy, use of the English language, and media literacy, which indicates that a significant portion of the Indian population may have little to no access to this arena in its current form. Even setting aside the fact that the number of social-media users, while impressive, represents only a fraction of the Indian population, as Nishant Shah (2015) points out, mere access to digital platforms does not mean a dissolution of institutional inequalities.

Yet, as Pramod Nayar (2008) argues, these multimodal interactive digital spaces can be "postcolonialized," if they are used with a view to significant political purposes, as their heterogeneity, contestability, and

contingency create spaces that are polyphonic and open-ended. María Fernández (1999) suggests something similar in her argument, proposing that although the presumed erasure of the body constructs a supposedly egalitarian online sphere, such spaces remain raced and sexed in different ways, indicating that these systemic oppressions can be produced purposefully. The development of an activist digital sphere where the retention of the effects of race, nationality, and sex disrupts any presentation of the universal, creating localized specificities that themselves may open to cross-cultural engagements, could perhaps allow for global activism to be considered respectful of the postcolonial. For instance, the recent digitization of the rural Dalit-Bahujan feminist newspaper *Khabar Lahariya* in partnership with the urban-based digital zine *The Ladies Finger* exemplifies one way of bringing marginalized voices into the cybercultural sphere on their own terms.

As previously stated, both *We Are Angry* and *Priya's Shakti* situate themselves within the Indian “rape crisis,” therefore circling issues of sexism, sexual assault, bodily autonomy, class and caste structures, language, Indian cultures, and different feminisms within India, whether or not these are explicitly made present in the works themselves. The use of new media—the augmented-reality image-text production of *Priya's Shakti* and the interactive multimedia mélange of text, images, videos, and sound bites in *We Are Angry*—suggests that the online format contributes to the manner in which this content is framed. As such, these works are positioned to distribute their content widely and to seek amplification through global activist networks. Yet the works themselves reveal problematic biases regarding the authors' own feminisms and privilege. They fail to situate themselves in a manner that truly engages with the historical and cultural context of Indian feminisms.

### ***We Are Angry***

*We Are Angry* is a multimedia short story by Lyndee Prickitt that undertakes issue-based storytelling in a format it terms “360 degree digital fiction” as an alternative to traditional linear narratives. The mixed-media story describes, in retrospect, the fictional abduction and gang rape of a middle-class woman in New Delhi. In full view of various passersby, the male attackers, pretending to be relatives or friends upset at the woman for ignoring her family's needs and being a “wayward wife and mother” who is out late, force her into a car. She is then gang-raped in the car and ultimately abandoned by the side of the road. The text shifts between the intimacy of the victim's first-person account and the distanced third-person accounts of the discovery of her unconscious body, her treatment by doctors, the police investigation, media activism on her behalf, and the reactions of her family. These multiple viewpoints work as narrative nodes to which hyperlinks with additional information, images, sound files, and real-world and fictional news articles are affixed. Although the rape is revealed to be an attempt by a business competitor to force the protagonist to sign papers in their favor, the police wrongly accuse a contentious ex-employee of the victim (implied to be of a lower class) and beat him violently in an attempt to obtain a confession, despite evidence of his innocence.

The victim as narrator is simultaneously voiceless—as a head injury, sustained when she was thrown from the car following the rape, left her in a coma and presumably dying by the end of the piece—and the work's primary voice. Because the coma prevents the victim from speaking for herself externally, the user's access to her internal monologue elicits not only the events of the rape but also the sociocultural sexism inherent in contemporary Indian society, which has shaped her experience of family and her workplace, producing as well the threat of sexual assault as a means by which to discipline and control women. This fictional act of rape is tied in the narrative to the issue of women in the workplace and specifically to the



term “Emerging India,” which touts the country as an emerging global economy. In this manner, the digital mixed-media space of the text is joined not only to the woman’s narrative and to her abused body, but also to her country. These spaces are interconnected so that her rape is distinctly linked with sexism and globalized Indian power in a capitalist landscape.

The contents can be viewed in two ways: either “read” as a book in paged format, with hyperlinks present, or “experienced” as a series of Internet pages with the same hyperlinks to scroll through. In this manner, the viewer is led to believe they may experience the contents in different ways: the implied distance of reading about the victim’s narrative in a book, where the media content is only accessible by the viewer’s control of the hyperlinks, or the seeming immediacy of experiencing it in a space where the mixed-media text incorporates and activates embedded files automatically. The narrative thus seemingly begins with the user’s own choice of the manner in which they will experience the aftermath of the fictional rape, navigating the text’s single plotline as it spirals outwards through the hyperlinks into related topics. While the creation of this agency on the part of the user appears intended to recreate the immediacy of the fictional assault and its aftermath, it does so by problematically acting in counterpoint to the violently disregarded agency of the victim, positioning the event as spectacle.

The choice of a multimedia text for the short story is clearly tied to its concerns, which are those of educated middle-class women pursuing a livelihood within the sexism of different industries and patriarchal Indian society at large. New Delhi, the seat of political power that has also been dubbed “India’s rape capital,” forms the backdrop to these concerns. At various points, the narrative indicates the woman’s own systemic privilege and oppression in accordance with her education, her ability to travel and be educated abroad, her position as “modern” yet restricted by her own family, her running of her own business, and her choice to speak English rather than a local Indian language. The precarity of her failing health is repeatedly underscored by the soundtrack of a jazz piano, which additionally, within India, is indicative of cosmopolitanism. Her own privilege is reflected in her eventual pleas for her life when she states, “And I promise, God, I will speak out not just about my case—who cares if no one marries me—but I will help other women too. And not just those in the privileged class. I promise, God, I will campaign till the end. Just let me live” (Prickett 2015, 19).

The nameless protagonist, who speaks in the first person, is generalized in the additional third-person account voiced by her family, in which, despite the details provided by the story, she remains a “beti” (female child), a “behen” (sister), or “chhoti” (younger female). The reasons for this lack of naming may be twofold. On the one hand, the first-person narration may be seen as an invitation to invest in the conversation with a dying protagonist so that the user remains privy to her last thoughts; on the other hand, the victim’s namelessness is possibly a nod to the existing Indian law that forbids disclosure of the names of rape victims, so as to encourage them to come forward and to prevent harassment by the media. Additionally, the anonymity of victims of sexual assault is tied, within the Indian context, to the supposed shame felt by the family of the victim and the possibility of social ostracism if the event becomes public, as the notion of family honor is still strongly associated with the “purity” of its female members.

Although the narrator of the story remains anonymous, the content itself sets up a system wherein middle-class privilege defines the feminist experience of *We Are Angry*. The universal “we” of this angered collective (either the media company that produced the work, Digital Fables, or the people they interviewed) remains a fallacy because the constructed narrative ignores the classist, casteist, and linguistic privilege that remains implicit in its contents. The universalizing “I” of the narrative or the seemingly open “we” of the producers and users implies a shared anger. Yet this construct of citizenship, which the narrator connects to

India's role as an emerging global power, is specifically linked in the narrative to capitalism's privileging of a particular subset of Indian women within upper-caste feminisms or Bhraminical patriarchy. The default position in the text is that of an upper middle-class urban Hindu female subject, which marks out bounds of exclusion for those who do not fall within this worldview.<sup>4</sup>

The connections between the themes of India's emergence as a global power, the default "I" within this narrative representing itself as a subject of middle-class urban Hindu privilege, and the issue of rape play out in a worldwide arena through the use of multimedia technology. Both Partha Chatterjee (1993, 120–21) and Sangeeta Ray (2000, 3) note that as India emerges as a global economic power, prevailing gender binaries and nationalist fault lines shape distinctions between respective meanings of inside and outside, India and the world, and women and men. Men are allowed to function as citizens of the world while women are to remain as a safe, homely embodiment of Indian culture and its traditions. Women are socially positioned as inherently chaste and pure and thus representative of an uncontaminated national culture that is preserved by this segregation. Given the convergent relationship between India's patriarchy and the country's economic progress, and the traditional casting of women as representative of the nation, the rape in *We Are Angry* is a consequence of resource appropriation that ties the universalized Indian woman's body to her role in global capitalism. That is, her sexual assault is intended not only to police her presence in the "masculine" business sphere but also to benefit her competitor by forcing her to accept his business deal.

As such, this narrative frames sexual violence as policing women's agency within capitalist frameworks, while also locating itself within a global landscape that sees capitalism as a means of potential feminist progress. In the narrative, the rape results in the protagonist specifically locating herself as a female worker no longer capable of working in the global marketplace, and therefore, logically, hampering India's chances for economic growth. The identification of women's agency with what Kumkum Sangari terms "direct or conscious political action ... with direct participation in the capitalist labor process" (1993, 867) and the celebration of this agency as reformative work to obscure the means by which ostensive progress is used consensually to perpetuate patriarchal hierarchies. This notion of female agency works alongside consistent reformulations of patriarchal structures (as patriarchies themselves are not static) to produce social stratification that is, at least partially, based on the role one holds in the capitalist enterprise and that factors in caste, class, and potential disability. *We Are Angry's* concern regarding the loss of a female worker's agency is thus intermeshed with capitalism's patriarchal structures, even as it presents itself more broadly as advocating women's agency.

The manner in which the narrative links feminist progress with female agency in capitalism divorces it utterly from capitalism's own historicity wherein postcolonial nations such as India have experienced systemic cultural and economic inequalities (resource appropriation in particular) at the hands of colonizing nations. The text's neoliberal refusal to engage with the fact that India's role in the global marketplace is reliant on its cheap labor and rapid industrialization elides genuine engagement with the problems engendered by capitalist feminism itself. For example, it ignores the manner in which the developmental process for this global emergence has been undertaken by the Indian state by forcefully reallocating agricultural land from already deprived communities to private national and international corporations. These communities have no voice in "Emerging India" and their women would likely find no space within the middle-class urban feminist concerns of *We Are Angry*. Capitalist feminism by itself can hardly be used as an approach to empowerment in an Indian context, given that issues of structural inequality in India are not divided purely along gendered or sexed lines, and global capitalist concerns are unlikely to benefit those who are already systemically disadvantaged and disenfranchised.



The manner in which the plot is centered around a heavily stylized account of a middle-class woman's potential death echoes recent choices within the Indian media to co-opt the mantle of "feminism" through heavily sponsored, publicized, and market-driven initiatives that incorporate the concerns of the middle-class mainstream consumer into their marketing strategies. For example, the recent campaign by Unilever for its Dove brand of soap encourages Indian women to "Break the Rules of Beauty" by rejecting standards of attractiveness that emphasize conventionally valued attributes like fair skin. However, the same brand also, ironically, owns the "Fair and Lovely" line of skin-lightening products that espouse an entirely different worldview. *We Are Angry* reflects a similar clash between the neoliberal capitalism of its narrative and a projected concern for a universalized Indian woman.

One of the ways in which this clash is exemplified in the text is in its reproduction of current media representations of rape-as-spectacle, the additional multimedia content doing more to bolster the story's fictional rape account than to mobilize the user's investment in effective change. The protagonist reinforces her connection to capitalist India by stating that she would have been the face of an "Emerging India," yet her focus on her current "soiled" state leads her to question her marital prospects; her question is hyperlinked to the comments section of the work where a written response is invited. This question, while likely intended to emphasize the traditional concerns of a woman in Indian society, seems problematic at best. Tradition as marriage is mobilized against the protagonist in the process of her staged abduction and again in her consequent fears of shaming and social ostracism, yet the role of traditional marriage in the reinforcement of exclusionary structures remains unquestioned in the discourse of the work. The narrator's potential for marriage is one of only two attempts at the "conversation" that *We Are Angry* claims to want to continue. That this is being asked of the user right after the events of a brutal sexual assault and while the narrator is still barely conscious is jarring and ill-considered.

The only other comment thread on the piece invites general discussion, and neither of the two threads appears to have resulted in sustained conversation with either the author or other respondents. As such, it is hard to see how *We Are Angry* contributes anything new to the ongoing conversations about rape in different Indian contexts, outside of its unusual format as a multimedia text. The awards and reviews displayed on the site, with larger quotes privileging international coverage outside of India, and the use of cyberspace in general suggest that its content, far from educating middle-class Indian youth, who are exposed to much of the same information through ongoing, sustained and sensationalized media narratives, is intended largely for an international audience. Despite its claim of intervening as an Indian feminist narrative, *We Are Angry* provides no suggestions regarding local aims to change existing laws, potential campaigns for awareness, links to local organizations for volunteer work or donations, or any other concrete real-world action. By failing to connect to local initiatives for action, it confers upon itself a mantle of exceptionalism, exacerbated by its "universalized" feminist and digital form.

The Indian urban experience is produced as universal in *We Are Angry*, and local issues are subsumed in favor of a uniting middle-class female voice, employing cyberspace as the arena for conversations about feminist anger. The hyperlinks in the narrative often acknowledge certain localized Indian concerns, such as the high percentage of female infanticide and feticide, rape statistics, marches for women's empowerment in New Delhi, and ongoing problems with the Indian police force.<sup>5</sup> Yet all of these issues, while interconnected, are distinct in their effects upon different factions of the population. The urge to universalize them in *We Are Angry* aligns with the agendas of transnational feminisms, and this is not without merit as it suggests the vastness of the concerns and their global scale. However, the outcome remains representative of only a fraction of the Indian population.

The universalized “we” of its title materializes at the conclusion of the piece, but only as the roar of a privileged middle class that itself is a focused and pre-existing concern for the corporatized Indian media. The finale depicts multiple women and a few men speaking about their anger, and most are educated, middle class, and expressing themselves in English, with a token number of lower-class women speaking in local Indian languages—however, theirs are not the faces we close on. The promise of support for the less privileged is offered in the narrative, yet they are already excluded and made invisible within the activist storytelling of the project. Those less privileged rarely have mainstream representation, and consequently no media voice to contribute as a contrasting narrative to the fictional narrator’s own. The lack of coverage, by the mainstream media, of the issues faced by those not within the purview of Brahminical capitalist feminisms works to assure that systemic hierarchies are reinforced by this marginalization. However, the less privileged voices are present within the larger Indian activist cybersphere and therefore could easily have been included among *We Are Angry’s* hotlinks. The choice not to include them undercuts any claim of promised solidarity made in the work.

### ***Priya’s Shakti***

*Priya’s Shakti* is a digital project in the form of a comic that functions as a standard text-and-image-based narrative (available in open access on the website <http://www.priyashakti.com/>), and as an augmented-reality text in which pages may be scanned with a free smartphone app, Blippar. The app provides access to additional content such as comics, videos, and anonymized testimony from rape survivors. In a section of the website titled “motivation,” the site is described as an “innovative social impact multimedia project” that “helps illuminate attitudes” towards violence against women in India. Further, the website’s text explains that

The project centers on the Goddess Parvati and Priya, a mortal woman devotee and survivor of rape, and is rooted in ancient matriarchal traditions that have been displaced in modern representations of Hindu culture. It creates an alternative narrative and voice against GBV [Gender-Based Violence] in popular culture through the Hindu mythological canon. Through its message, this project can reach wide audiences in India and around the world—anywhere GBV is an issue.

This description mobilizes a number of presumptions about the nature of violence against women in India, chief among them an understanding of the matriarchal traditions of Hindu India as somehow inhibiting gender-based violence, a modern misrepresentation of a liberal religious and philosophical tradition. In response to this assessment, it then moves on to conceptualize forms of effective intervention in public and private discourses on gender-based violence. Finally, it articulates the makeup of its target audience, imagining “Indian” and “Hindu” as belonging to the same demographic, which can then be universalized.

To summarize briefly, the plot follows a girl, Priya, who lives in an unidentified village somewhere in India. She faces sexual harassment from the other villagers and is ultimately attacked and raped by a group of them. As a result, she is ostracized by her family members, who see her rape as having shamed them, and is hounded out of the village into the forest. Destitute, Priya prays to the Hindu goddess Parvati for Shakti. In the Hindu mythos, the concept of Shakti, or strength, is seen as intimately connected to the divine feminine energy of the cosmos. Parvati hears the girl and decides to intercede, descending to the earth and becoming incarnated in Priya’s mind and body. She then seeks justice through appeals to village institutions like the *panchayat* (village council), which advocates marriage to her attacker as a form of redressal. In a confrontation with one of the attackers, she reveals herself to him as the goddess Parvati.

Just as she is about to curse him, her husband, the Lord Shiva, learns of her experiences and in a divine rage curses the human race so they are “no longer able to procreate.”

This punishment is seen as unjust by both Parvati and the other gods, but Shiva is resolute and soon the earth is beset by war on both the human and astral planes. The destruction ends only when Parvati summons Kali (the aspect of Shakti that symbolizes divine rage), who manages to stop Shiva’s rampage. Parvati returns to a devastated earth where Priya is still hiding in the forest and tells her that she has been chosen to spread a message of change. She gives the girl a mantra (a Hindu sacred invocation) to help her in her quest, exhorting people to “Speak without shame, and stand with me ... bring about the change we want to see.” Priya gains strength from this and returns to the village.

As is evident from this summary, *Priya’s Shakti* is overwhelmingly Hindu. But it is necessary to be more specific about what this identification means for the text, because the term “Hindu” functions as a descriptor for a remarkable number of polytheistic practices. These differ radically from each other across region, language, community, and caste, not only in India but also in the other countries these practices have spread to over the centuries. The comic does not spell out its notion of Hinduism in its immediately visible text (seemingly presuming a basic knowledge of the Hindu pantheon), but when it is viewed through the augmented reality app, a definition is supplied. Through the centering of the Sanskrit epics and the focus on the male trinity of gods, one can infer that the text is following a mainstream interpretation of the Hindu pantheon, codified in part, at the behest of the East India Company in the early colonial period, by upper-caste Brahmins. The British colonial powers felt the need to streamline pluralistic practices that resisted any central authority for their legitimation in order to expand their political control (Chakravarti 2003, 114–38; Sangari and Vaid 1990).

As Romila Thapar notes, this process was also given impetus by the activities of Christian missionaries in the colonial period who regarded polytheistic religions as “primitive.” It was further buttressed by the Orientalist scholarship in the same period, which attempted to fit the theology into a “comprehensible whole” (Thapar 1989, 218), leading also to an artificial privileging of certain texts as sources of religious authority. These “standardized” versions of the mythos have been mobilized repeatedly to form a notion of Hindu nationalism that retroactively posits the Indian nation as Hindu in *origin*. Moreover, the standardization has had the effect of both naturalizing the superiority of the higher castes and framing the adherents of all other religions as “outsiders” (Hansen 1999). The marginalization of non-Hindu affiliations has particular resonances for any discussion of the modern Indian nation-state that is declaratively “secular”—purporting to treat all its citizens equally regardless of religion, caste, etc.—but whose functioning is increasingly influenced by the Hindu right-wing forces that believe in their primacy based on the aforementioned texts.

*Priya’s Shakti* may simply be using the most popularized form of the Sanskrit narratives to tell a story, but their historical conditions and effects persist when mobilized in this manner. Rather than problematize the codification of the Hindu belief system, the text unquestioningly expands it, and explicitly names the site of its intervention as the modern nation-state of India. For instance, in one panel, Priya’s act of returning to the village and beginning her campaign is connected to other events deemed to be significant in order to formulate the image of an “ideal” Indian woman. The events blend the mythological (the story of Savitri) the historical (the contribution of women to the Independence movement), and the contemporary (the Gulabi gang).<sup>6</sup> The juxtaposition of all these events in a single panel has the effect of creating a false sense of historicity, a rhetorical flourish that reproduces the machinations of Hindu nationalism.

The manner in which *Priya’s Shakti* centers this Hindu nationalism by conflating different axes of the mythology, history, and the contemporary reality of India echoes the ideology of the popular mainstream

comic series *Amar Chitra Katha*. As Nandini Chandra notes in *The Classic Popular: Amar Chitra Katha, 1967-2007* (2008), the comic series visibly pursued Hindu communalism, anti-Muslim and anti-Dalit sentiments, and pro-Bhraminist ideologies. Indeed, the choice to employ the graphic-novel format and a central Hinduist narrative for *Priya's Shakti* (even with a dark-skinned protagonist, in seeming contradiction with *Amar Chitra Katha's* more racist delineations, which almost always equate darker skin with likely villainy) suggests an awareness, if not direct invocation of, the ethos of *Amar Chitra Katha* and, consequently, an appeal to its associated readership. Indeed, while Priya's dark skin is an interruption of dominant beauty standards for women in India (coded specifically along upper-caste and class lines, with fairness as aspirational), it is not sufficiently contextualized as such, leaving this aspect of the text rather free-floating. As we explicate below, this lack of contextualization also undercuts *Priya's Shakti's* other moments of potential subversion.

The text's protagonist is, then, posited as representative of the "Indian woman" and becomes part of that totalizing narrative, in effect dismissing the need for the modern Indian nation-state to take into account non-Hindu women in debates about gender violence at all. In addition, Priya's placelessness adds to her probable identification as upper-caste: we are not told her last name or the region of India she is from, and she is dressed in generic clothing and has no linguistic markers in her speech that would code her as belonging to a specific caste or region.<sup>7</sup> As discussed earlier, this universalization of a privileged subject position only serves to reify discursive blind spots in activist movements to the detriment of those most vulnerable to gender-based violence.

The two elements that complicate this formulation are Priya's location in a rural and forested setting and one of the anonymized testimonies of rape survivors that can be accessed through the app. In a rural setting, Priya's interactions with local institutional bodies, like the panchayats, accurately portray their often violently patriarchal nature. However, in the real world, these interactions are also heavily influenced by caste affiliations, and so again Priya's "universal" status becomes an obstacle to situated and sustained critique. One of the recorded testimonies, however, is specific about the narrator's caste as central to her experience, not only of the attack itself but also its effect on police action, media coverage, and help given by mainstream feminist organizations. It is here that the text comes closest to Nayar's formulation of how a postcolonialized, polyphonic, and interruptible digital space may function. However, the relegation of this recording to the margins of the text limits its efficacy considerably. It is placed on the last panel of the comic, with nothing to differentiate it from other links, and is made accessible only through the specialized app.

The text's collapsing of sex into something only associated with procreation is also a dangerous rhetorical moment, which not only delegitimizes any nonreproductive heterosexual contact but also excludes all nonheterosexual sexualities. While Parvati's objection to Shiva's decree attempts to engage with its problematic assumptions, the basic linkage of violence against women to only heterosexual activity is not questioned, and neither is another effect of the mediatized Indian "rape crisis," i.e., the utter disregard of any violence suffered by women that is not sexual in nature. Limiting the discussion of rape to heteronormative procreation also brings up the ways in which caste affiliation is policed on the site of the female body in modern India. As the testimony about caste-based retributive sexual and social violence referenced above shows, revenge for any perceived slight by Dalit-Bahujan men is invariably exacted on the bodies of the women of that community. Vasanth and Kalpana Kannabiran cite several such cases, pointing out that any intimacy between Dalit men and upper-caste women becomes an incendiary event "only when the caste norms are openly flouted by elopement, pregnancy, or discovery" (1991, 2133).

The authorial claim that the text “centers” the experiences of women and attempts to revive Hinduism’s “matrilineal roots” also fails to hold up to scrutiny. The concept of Shakti (divine feminine power) is a key part of Hindu religious practice in many communities, often cutting across caste affiliations. The trope of women drawing power from that connection is also a common one in popular cultural productions, like Bollywood films. Parvati’s direct response to Priya’s prayer could be seen as a subversive act in view of the fact that access to temples is often heavily policed by patriarchal and casteist regulations. However, Priya’s implied positioning as upper-caste nullifies part of this subversive potential, which is also undercut by the comic’s other narrative choices.

Firstly, goddess Parvati is an aspect of Shakti most closely associated with the domestic space of the home and the figure of the ideal wife.<sup>8</sup> Within the text, she is introduced as the “wife of Shiva” and that remains her primary affiliation. If the purpose of the narrative is indeed to recenter female deities as a response to their displacement in modern Hindu practices, Parvati is an odd choice. Shakti manifests in a number of other forms, most notably those of the goddesses Durga and Kali, both of whom function without deferring to male authority. Durga and Kali do appear in the narrative—Durga is represented by the tiger that Priya rides in her triumphant return to the village, while Parvati prays to Kali to stop Shiva’s carnage—but both are prefigured as secondary to Parvati. The primacy of Parvati clearly sets up a hierarchy of appropriate divine feminine qualities, even within Shakti. Secondly, far from centering Parvati, the narrative shifts focus extremely fast from her actions to the effects of Shiva’s rage. It is ironic that a text supposedly about female aspects of divine power devotes most of its narrative to the effects of male rage. While the intent of this shift may have been to show the destructive nature of patriarchal structures, the female goddesses are, in effect, once more relegated to the margins (in this case, literally to the margins of the comic’s page). Thirdly, even when Parvati takes the form of Kali (the most fearsome aspect of Shakti), it is only to stop Shiva, which once more frames her actions as responses to his. When seen in the context of previously discussed societal processes in which Hindu middle-class women are conscripted into embodying ideal womanhood, this framing becomes more intelligible as a reification of Hindu nationalism.

With respect to the comic’s intended readership, the introductory blurb claims that the aim of the project is to provide an “alternative narrative and voice” that can reach “wide audiences” in India and around the world. As pointed out in the discussion of its website, “social impact” is the key metric that the project attempts to leverage. The site buttresses its claims of accessibility and reach in several ways. The comic itself is freely available in open access, as is the augmented-reality app (though the use of the latter presumes a high degree of comfort with technology). Theoretically, the embedded content interrupts the single-author model of the comic, opening it up to polyphonic voices and experiences. It also locates the project in physical spaces; for instance, one video follows the painting of a mural of Priya in Dharavi, a slum neighborhood in Mumbai. As an attempt to show the impact of the comic on the “ordinary Indian,” this illustration fails, as we only see passersby stare at the installation in curiosity. They are not asked for their opinions on the project, nor is there any explanation of what the art has achieved in being placed there. There are no other videos of the artwork displayed in public spaces, the other display venues being special exhibits in art galleries. Indeed, the only public space named specifically is Dharavi. This specificity, then, is suspect as it locates the artwork within a particular notion of the “real India” and as a specularization of poverty that does not go beyond a surface engagement. This specularization is also linked to the marketing of such locales to wealthy foreign (mainly white) tourists as an opportunity for “slum tourism,” especially following the popularity of the Oscar-winning film, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008).



The site also links to over three hundred news and commentary pieces that the comic has generated since its launch, presumably to prove the “worldwide” aspect of its impact. A scan of the articles indicates that it has been framed most often as a “comic book with a rape survivor as hero/heroine/superhero,” with an occasional reference to the fact that she “rides a tiger.” As we have shown here, however, most of the comic is not about Priya at all, and the narrative reinforces patriarchal structures at almost every instance.

## Conclusion

The unproblematized amplification of texts such as *We Are Angry* and *Priya's Shakti* by global media networks and private international funding bodies with no access to local knowledge only serves to further entrench Hindu nationalist ideology within Indian activist spaces. This entrenchment weaponizes both the language of feminist movements and the technologies of their dissemination against those sections of society that suffer the most under oppressive structures. Both activist projects create a specific conceptualization of sexual assault in an Indian context through their choice to reinforce heterosexuality as a precondition, either by linking sex to procreation (as in *Priya's Shakti*) or by privileging the traditions of marriage in their discourse (as in *We Are Angry*). Moreover, these aspects are implicated in the texts as a means through which their narrative is “Indianized.” This centering of heteronormativity sits in contrast to graphic novels such as *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back* (Bertonasco, Bartscht and Kuriyan 2012) and *The Gaysi Zine: Queer Graphic Anthology* (Gangwani, Biswas and Sur 2015), which have sought to address urban heteropatriarchal practices in India that have arisen since discussions of the 2012 “rape crisis.”

Problematic constructions of rape-as-spectacle lie at the forefront of both these projects, and, as we have shown, the nebulous outlines of their goals leave open little chance of effective real-world change. It is worth pointing out, however, that this is not always the case. Pinki Virani's 1998 book (though not a graphic novel) *Aruna's Story* used interviews conducted by Virani to recreate a biographical account of the 1973 rape and subsequent coma of Aruna Shanbaug. The return of this narrative to the public's consciousness incited public support for Shanbaug's care following her lapse into a persistent vegetative state and drew attention to the implicit shaming evident in the choice to withhold information regarding the rape from the police by order of the Dean of King Edward Memorial Hospital (where Shanbaug worked and was attacked). Additionally, Shanbaug's vegetative state and Virani's active campaigning led to a law in favor of passive euthanasia being passed in 2011. Virani's second book, *Bitter Chocolate* (2000), provided anonymized transcripts of cases of child sexual abuse in India and suggested means by which to combat the issue. Against the background of sexual abuse of children being regarded as a particularly taboo subject in India, Virani's mobilization of the media through sensationalist reactions to the book led to The Protection of Children Against Sexual Offenses Act being passed in 2012. While Virani remains a singular example, her interventions do indicate that mediatizing sexual abuse narratives in ways that are cognizant of the sociocultural issues at hand and espouse clear, localized goals can result in genuine real-world effects despite (or even through) the use of rape-as-spectacle.

While the focus of this analysis has been the failure of *Priya's Shakti* and *We Are Angry* to create effective feminist digital texts and spaces, our critique is not meant to foreclose the possibility of postcolonial uses of cyberspace. There are many instances where cybercultural platforms, especially social-media tools, have made significant interventions that interrupt mainstream media narratives. Nayar (2008) posits that “a democracy of registers” is required to create a truly new public space. Twitter is one platform that seems to have the potential to be polyphonic: it is currently being used by a large number of local Indian feminist

organizations to amplify the specific issues that affect them, as well as to create networks of solidarity. For instance, Rekha Raj, a Dalit feminist and poet, affirms that, “In Kerala, the voices of subaltern groups are very prominent on social media, especially sexual minorities and Dalit groups. On social media, all of us are publishers. Only some communities get the space to get published in mainstream media. Social media allows marginalized voices the possibility of being heard in the public sphere” (Subramanian 2014).

While hierarchies of visibility still remain in place, organizations like Round Table India (<http://roundtableindia.co.in>) and The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (<http://www.ncdhr.org.in>) use Twitter to boost their analysis of mainstream events from a Dalit-Bahujan perspective. There are also multimodal cyber projects underway like Dalit Camera (<http://twitter.com/dalitcamera>), a collective of students and activists who upload videos of panel discussions, protest meetings, and performances on Dalit-Bahujan issues. While there is a tendency to disregard the power of cybercultural spaces for rural activism, projects like *Khabar Lahariya*, which is a rural newspaper written, produced, and distributed by local Dalit-Bahujan women (<http://khabarlahariya.in>), are leveraging the exposure they get from their presence on the Internet quite skillfully.

There is a continued proliferation of projects that stress the need for a multisited and multivocal analysis of structural inequality and patriarchal structures in various locations and registers. This provides hope for a vibrant and truly postcolonial cyberculture that can create a viable alternative public sphere where these concerns are voiced and can be engaged with on their own terms. However, these spaces are precarious and in flux, and it is vital for global activist networks to recognize specific local concerns so that their efforts towards solidarity are not subsumed within oppressive ideological frameworks. The complex uses of new media to approach the Indian “rape crisis” suggest that the creators of these activist projects intend to effect knowledge production in new ways, yet the content they produce must remain attentive to their own historicity and pluralities even within these new landscapes. To do otherwise would be to end up telling the same old story.

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## Notes

1. It is worth noting here that while Rege’s and Chakravarti’s works remain important, Dalit-Bahujan theorists, such as the writers at Savari, have noted that these books still function within the privilege afforded to upper-caste feminists in India. As such, Chakravarti’s and Rege’s names are cited and the names of the Dalit-Bahujan women whose narratives form the basis of the books continue to be elided. For further reading on this, see Savari Editorial Team 2015.

2. The continued relevance of postcolonial critique to intervene effectively in issues affecting marginalized populations within nation states, like India, that continue to perpetuate neocolonial hegemonies in concert with globalist financial organizations has been questioned by theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Critiquing the Fourth World Conference on Women (held in Beijing in 1995), Spivak argued that in this event the category of “Woman” became “global theatre, staged to show participation between the North and the South, the latter constituted by Northern discursive mechanisms” (1996, 2). What is left out of this performance is any acknowledgement of the women thus represented as critical agents able to articulate their own material conditions. We believe that a self-reflexive and dynamic cybercultural sphere might offer postcolonial theorization one way of navigating this particular construction.



3. In 1991, the longstanding policy of protectionism that had governed the Indian economy since independence was put aside. A process of liberalization, which included a reduction in import tariffs, deregulation of markets, reduction of taxes, and greater foreign investment, was initiated and continues to the present day. Proponents of liberalization policies credit them with driving the Indian economy's high growth rate in the 1990s and the 2000s. However, the process has also been seen as exploitative, as the benefits of those growth rates have not been adequately distributed throughout society.

4. Jyoti Puri notes that sexual violence against Indian Muslim women is policed differently in India, particularly in the Hinduized national state (2004, 147). Similar issues are also present with regard to other religions present in India, but given that the narrator self-identifies as an "apsara," the reference to Hindu mythology suggests Hinduism.

5. Notably, the text's use of the term "female infanticide and feticide" is itself indicative of the author's lack of familiarity with ongoing feminist activism in India, as recent years have seen sustained campaigns to clarify this term to "sex-selective abortion." These campaigns have attempted to dislocate the issue from more generalized abortion debates, as well as from larger contextual frameworks of inheritance, dowry, and the like, so that all of these issues can be considered in their individual specificity even while their interconnectedness is recognized.

6. The tale of Savitri is found in the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*. Savitri is seen as the ultimate devoted wife as she manages to reclaim her husband's life from the clutches of Yama (the god of death).

The Gulabi Gang is a rural women's collective, with a significant presence of Dalit-Bahujan women, located in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It was formed by Sampat Pal Devi in response to the widespread domestic violence in the villages of the area. Dressed in pink saris (as "gulab" means pink in Hindi) and armed with sticks, the women intervene in cases of domestic abuse using a variety of strategies, including public shaming.

7. The lack of a last name may in some cases indicate an act of protest, as this is the primary method by which caste affiliations are identified. *Priya's Shakti*, however, does not seem to fall into this category.

8. The story of Sati recounts how Shiva's first wife won his approval and interest through acts of meditation. Sati's father, Daksha, was against the match, but she did not pay him any heed. However, because of the bad relations between them, Shiva was not invited to a grand *yagya* (religious celebration) that Daksha organized. Sati was very upset at this insult to her husband and immolated herself on the ceremonial pyre. This led to great devastation as Shiva's rage ran amok, and he ultimately retreated from worldly affairs. Sati is reborn as Parvati and, once again through acts of meditation and penance, wins Shiva's favor, and they are married. The practice of Sati, which was followed in some parts of India up till the nineteenth century, requires that widows commit suicide by immolating themselves on their husband's funeral pyre and is patterned on this myth as well.

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# Female Perceptions of Islam in Today's Morocco

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**Abstract:** This paper is based on a survey, 25 interviews, and observation. According to the results so far, Islam means three things for women in today's Morocco: faith, culture, and politics. Islam as faith is generally perceived as a personal relationship with God. Such a relationship is seen as both rewarding and empowering, but also private. Women who perceive Islam as faith observe the Islamic rituals and may or may not wear the veil. Women's perception of Islam as faith is a rather poorly understood topic in research in a heavily space-based patriarchy, probably because of its intimate relationship with the private sphere. However, for many women, Islam as faith constitutes a genuine locus of agency involving identity and the self. Islam as culture is mainly viewed by women as an inherent part of who they are and what sociocultural background they belong to. Unlike faith, which is often considered personal, culture is generally viewed as part of a "package" that includes community and society. A large proportion of the women who view Islam as culture do not necessarily practice the Islamic rituals, and may not wear the veil, but would feel insulted if they were called "non-Muslim." This view of Islam does not necessarily attach Islam to cultural traditions; on the contrary, culture is often perceived in this context as a lively, flexible, and dynamic concept. Women who perceive Islam as politics observe the rituals, wear the veil, and are keen on making their voice heard in the public sphere. The three meanings that women give to Islam nowadays may interact, but for methodological reasons I will deal with each separately. While the three perceptions are dictated by the conditions of a space-based patriarchy, they are differentiated by a number of variables pertaining to the overall sociopolitical contexts, as well as by women's level of education, economic status, and social status.

**Keywords:** Islam, women, Islamic practice, perceptions of Islam

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## Introduction

Introduced in Morocco in the year 712, Islam has ever since been deeply intertwined with the country's politics, culture, and identity.<sup>1</sup> Politically, Islam came hand in hand with monarchy, making the latter the highest political and religious authority (the king is both the head of the executive power and *amir a-lmu'minin*—Commander of the Believers).<sup>2</sup> Culturally, Islam has been a pillar of Moroccan cultures (Arab and Amayigh) and the core of social and family power relations, including relations based on gender. At the level of identity, Islam defines both Morocco (whose successive constitutions identify it as an Islamic monarchy) and Moroccans, who generally define themselves as Muslim.<sup>3</sup> As such, Islam has become part and parcel of religion, culture, and politics in today's Morocco.

Perceptions of Islam in today's Morocco may be qualified as overwhelmingly articulated from a male perspective, given the dominance of men in national and local religious councils, as well as in mosques and practically all public instances related to jurisprudence, such as courts of law. This male omnipresence in key religious institutions is historically constructed and sanctioned, as practically all the schools of Islamic jurisprudence were created by and named after the male imams or religious scholars who initiated them.

Thus, the four Sunni schools—Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali—were named, respectively, after Hanifa al-Nu'man, Anas Ibn Malik, Muhammad Ibn Idris al'Shafi'i, and Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, while the two Shi'a schools, Ja'fari and Zaydi, were named after Ja'far al'Sadiq and Zayd Ibn Ali, and the Ibadi school after Abdullah Ibn Ibad. These schools have therefore been imbued with the perceptions of their creators, the male *fuqaha* (male religious scholars who implement *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence or legal Islam), and as legal Islam is part of the Moroccans' way of life, these male perceptions have served patriarchy in and outside the family and infiltrated the social and cultural beliefs of the Moroccans in spite of the fact that notable *faqihat* (female religious scholars), such as Aisha and Um Salama (Prophet Muhammad's wives), are recognized and respected (Mernissi 1991). Male perceptions of Islam have resulted in male-biased laws and thoughts that still plague Islamic jurisprudence (Mir-Hosseini 2003). The relatively recent literature on Islamic feminism may be seen as a reaction to these dominant male perceptions.<sup>4</sup>

The central question of this article is to investigate the missing Moroccan women's individual perceptions of the three functions of Islam—religious, cultural, and political—in order to fill a gap in the academic research on women and Islam in Morocco and to open avenues for further studies. The argument on which the article is based is that there are distinct female perceptions of Islam in today's Morocco and that these perceptions defy the hitherto assumed idea that when it comes to Islam perceptions need to be male. The term "perception" is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses." As such, perception is related to both thinking and understanding, hence its association with cognitive psychology. However, in this article perception is limited to "understanding" in a broad sense.

This article is based on 25 interviews with Arabic- and Amazigh-speaking Moroccan women living in Fez, Casablanca, Marrakesh, and their surrounding rural areas, as well as on 100 questionnaires distributed or read to women from the same regions. The interviewed women varied between ages 21 and 85, and were selected according to six interacting social variables: geographical origin (rural/urban), class (upper/middle/poor), level of education (literate/illiterate), job opportunities (with or without a salary), linguistic skills (the number of languages spoken), and marital status (married, widowed, divorced, single). These social variables are deemed to allow for a high degree of representativity, as they were tested in my book study of the intersection between women, gender and language in Morocco (Sadiqi 2003). The variables were obtained on the basis of social oppositions and have a direct influence on gender perception, political awareness, self-awareness, independence, critical assessment, and fashioning of modes of resistance. They were also meant to investigate Moroccan women's social heterogeneity. Women are allowed specific social choices according to their positioning within each social variable; hence, for example, an urban, rich, educated, working, married woman has more social choices than a rural, poor, nonworking, illiterate, and unmarried woman.

### **A Preliminary Note on Gender Power Dynamics in Morocco**

Gender power dynamics in Morocco are dictated by a historically shaped space-based patriarchy, where the public sphere is constructed as not only male but authority-laden and the private sphere as not only female but non-authoritative.<sup>5</sup> Although present in almost all of contemporary societies and cultures, patriarchy manifests itself differently in distinct contexts and uses different tools that fit specific sociocultural conditions. In Morocco, salient among the instruments that patriarchy uses to seat itself in society is *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence or legal Islam), which institutionalizes a gender hierarchy where women are subordinated to men in and outside home (Mir-Hosseini 2003). The authority of legal Islam has been carefully maintained

and transmitted throughout the political history of Islamic politics, and remains strong today (Mernissi 1991). It is most clearly visible in the family law, which, notwithstanding significant reforms, still falls short of equality between the sexes, especially in such matters as custody, inheritance, domestic violence (unmentioned in the family law), etc. (Zvan 2007; Lamrabet 2014). The space-based patriarchy and legal Islam underpin the sociocultural behavior of Moroccans, which not only fails to implement the reforms but sanctions various types of gender-based violence, such as public intimidation and sexual harassment. At the political level, the state and the political parties have used women in two ways. While the state, which self-identifies as the modernizing force in the country (Moghadam 2003), has been investing in the education and recruitment of urban women, and while the modernist political parties have followed suit, the emergence of political Islam and the Islamist parties' need for voters have unintentionally afforded more visibility to Islamist women. These strategies have resulted in the construction of a deeply ingrained ambiguous relationship between religion and culture in anything related to women, hence further fragilizing the relationship between women and the public expression of religion. On the other hand, this ambiguity has strengthened the relationship between men and public religion, having mainly served patriarchy and the maintenance of the status quo. Hence, in spite of significant progress in urban areas, where women today are more educated, earning salaries, etc., problems do persist—with illiteracy, for example, still standing at more than 60 per cent—making the overall improvement since independence in 1956 minimal. Furthermore, even as spectacular technological advances are allowing more and more women to be aware of how Islam may be used to improve their lot, satellite TV is bringing the voices of fundamentalist Islam into urban and rural homes on a daily basis.

All in all, although women in the Moroccan rural areas have traditionally worked outside of the home, tending sheep, working in the fields, fetching water, etc. (Sadiqi et al. 2009), gender power dynamics in the country can be understood only within the space-based Moroccan patriarchal system, whereby women have largely been circumscribed to the private sphere (home) as the keepers of traditional norms and values, with religion intermingling with both. It is against these gender power dynamics that the female perceptions of Islam in today's Morocco need to be understood and appreciated.

### **Women's Perceptions of Islam as Faith**

Faith is generally understood as either absolute confidence in a person or thing, or absolute belief that is not based on tangible or verifiable proof. In the Qur'an, faith is associated with the following verse (Surat 16:3+4,+5–8), which expresses the superiority of Allah:

He has created the heavens and the earth with truth.... He has created man from a sperm-drop.... And cattle He has created for you (men): from them ye derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) ye eat. And ye have a sense of pride and beauty in them as ye drive them home in the evening and as ye lead them forth to pasture in the morning. And they carry your heavy loads to lands that ye could not (otherwise) reach except with souls distressed: for your Lord is indeed Most Kind, Most Merciful. And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and as an adornment; and He has created (other) things of which ye have no knowledge.

For believers to embrace the superiority of Allah they need *al-taqwa* or *al-iman* (the Arabic words for faith), meaning an acknowledgement of the superiority of Allah and the individual's position as Allah's servant who owes Him gratitude for His mercy. Only faith allows this total surrender to Allah. This type of faith seems to be very liberating for many women believers in today's Morocco because in the Islamic



tradition only Allah gives al-taqwa and al-iman to men and women. Here is a testimony of Charafa, a 61-year-old urban middle-class medical doctor:<sup>6</sup>

My faith in Allah is total and it is not dictated by another man, not by my father, my husband or my son; it is not dictated by any other woman either, even my mother; it is a pure relationship between me and Allah because only Allah knows me the way I know myself: He created me just as he created my father, husband or son. Allah is above us all and only He gives al-taqwa to men and women He chooses to give al-taqwa to. No man can do what Allah can.

Izza, an 85-year-old rural poor housewife expressed the same idea but positioned it in a different context:

Allah is my *'win* (provider); I lost all males of my family, but I don't feel alone because Allah and my taqwa are with me. I am not alone...

These and similar testimonies associate faith with women's inner well-being and solace and link this association with their personal lived experiences. While Charafa's statement implies a certain independence from the control of men, Izza's seems to be more related to material provision. However, both women appear to be empowered as individuals by their faith, a relationship to Allah that transgresses the constructed social hierarchy between men and women. In general, women who perceive Islam as faith view this faith as something that transformed their lives positively and that made them proud of who they were. Some interviewees even expressed that they felt "superior" to other men and women in the sense that they were "chosen" by Allah as true believers and they thrived in this choice. They also felt superior to non-Muslims in general, as expressed in this statement by Faiza, a 26-year-old student:

*hamdullah* (thank God) I am a Muslim and hamdullah I was born Muslim and hamdullah I belong to a Muslim family that has al-taqwa. I cannot even start thinking about what would be the case were I born elsewhere with a different religion.

Women's conception of Islam as faith cuts across social class, level of education, and social status, but whereas it is associated with some kind of abstract spiritual conviction in the statements of educated upper- and middle-class women, it is more likely to be associated with fate and tangible experience by nonliterate lower-class women. Here is what Houria, a 40-year-old upper-class educated artist (musician), had to say when asked to express in specific terms what faith gave her:

My *iman bi llah* (faith in Allah) elevates me and gives me spiritual satisfaction; it is like being literally lost in a sophisticated piece of music and not wanting to share the moment with anyone, even your own children... It is like being alone in a guarded castle surrounded by water; you feel an immense lifting quietude that you wish you could keep forever and ever...

By contrast, Fattouma, a 45-year-old poor rural woman who helps her husband in gathering and selling fruits and vegetables they grow in a small field, answered the same question in the following way:

My iman fortifies me, and I find great joy in listening to the singing of other peasant women in the field... Land is our life and my taqwa brings me even closer to the land, to the beautiful fruit trees. When I die, I will be buried in the land, and I won't be estranged because I am filled with taqwa. I also feel total satisfaction when I gather the fruit and vegetables, what God gave us to survive before we join Him.

The subjective "I" and sophisticated ideas of Houria contrast sharply with the collective "we" and experience-linked ideas of Fattouma. But in both cases, faith seems to be drawn from the various influences that shape women's lives and is therefore very close to their emotions.



The interviews also revealed that through faith urban educated women get acquainted with things (both physical and metaphysical) they cannot explain. Dounia, a veiled 48-year-old owner of a gymnasium, said:

I am an aerobics teacher; I feel at ease with my body, but my soul I cannot control. I don't understand why people suffer and die; my taqwa helps me. I have no time and no mind to study these things, and I endeavor all the time to feel good because everyday life is nothing but problems: I worry about the future of my children, about the infidelity of my husband, the harshness of people.... Time is running, and I may die tomorrow; I don't know what will happen to me, to my body, to my soul, shall be with these children I am giving all my time to... I support my husband's infidelity because of them... I definitely need taqwa to survive...

Assia, a 53-year-old single university teacher, wrote:

With all my diplomas and experience, what I understand of life is very little compared to what I don't understand... I need faith and the certainty that I will meet my maker to survive. I think all religions are the same, not only Islam. Faith helps us survive whether we are Jew, Christian, or Muslim. I happen to be Muslim and I use my faith to enjoy life from the inside. It is fulfilling and soul-lifting.

As can be seen in these samples, women's perceptions of faith are uneven: One senses differing degrees of conviction across their expressions of faith, and a variety of experiences with faith and interpretations of its meaning. It seems that women give faith meanings that make them comfortable. I could glean this from the body languages that accompanied the interviews. Women with intense faith tended to cry or clench their fists when they spoke. For most educated women, faith pushes a person to pursue knowledge as a pious endeavor incumbent upon all Muslims, men and women. As such, these women relate their faith to some kind of hope and trust in a brighter future on earth and beyond death. Upper- and middle-class urban women stress modesty, are prone to charity, and do not readily link their faith to appearance or specific clothing styles; they generally interpret modesty as the wearing of the hijab and *djellabas*, or long garments, some of these being fashion-based and rather costly. For most rural women, modesty is associated with hospitality and helping the others; the majority cover their heads, although it is not clear whether this is based on religious conviction, convenience, or habit. Fancy hijabs, such as some women wear in the urban centers, are rarely seen in rural areas. When directly asked about the specific issue of hijab-wearing, both urban and rural women describe faith as a state of mind: *liman flqalb* (faith is in the heart) seems to be a leitmotiv in the interviewees' statements, as well as in the answers obtained to the oral or written questions.

Research on Moroccan women's perception of Islam as faith is rather scarce (Al-Hibri 1982; Afsaruddin 1999). Most of the works where women are presented as "people with faith" tend to take this faith for granted: Women are supposed to have it! However, women speak of their faith as something they had to work on and strive to pass on to their husbands, children, and other members of the family. Here is what Mounia, a 32-year-old urban pharmacist, told me:

I was born Muslim, but I was not born with faith. As a child, I prayed and fasted because I had to: My parents required it, and my father would not allow any of us to sit at the table and have a meal if we did not complete our daily prayers. It was only at the age of 20 that I felt some kind of satisfaction in praying and fasting. I worked hard to keep the feeling: I would wake up at night, look at the sky, and ask Allah to fill me with faith.

While women cherish their relationship with God, their religious expressions are generally considered part of a taken-for-granted, "popular" religion. I am not aware of any serious sociological, Islamist or modernist, studies that account for this particular perception of women in Morocco. I believe that only a linguistic and anthropological perspective on women's agency in Morocco can explain women's faith as a broad category. Such a perspective would not only include Islam as a framework, but go beyond it to

cover the pre-Islamic era and the Amazigh languages and cultures as an overarching framework. It would root Moroccan women's agency (religious and otherwise) in the 3000-year-old pre-Islamic era, and hence it would be more inclusive.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, in highlighting the complex and plural nature of the Amazigh languages and cultures, this perspective forces an unpacking of Moroccan women's agency beyond the usual paradigms and underlines the history of their religious expressions as cultural roots of present-day Moroccan women's perceptions of Islam.<sup>8</sup> Margaret Rausch (2009) analyzes didactic poetry composed in Amazigh and argues that such local poetry facilitated the proliferation of the knowledge of Islamic dogma, rules of practice, history, and lore among local illiterate inhabitants. Focusing on educational chanting sessions as a method of internalizing this didactic poetry, Rausch notes that such communal chanting sessions were frequently transformed into communal gatherings for ritual worship, in which education constituted a significant component. These ritual women's gatherings still constitute fora in which centuries-old Amazigh didactic poetry is chanted throughout southwestern Morocco. Tracing the roots of these educational ritual events back to an Amazigh religious literary tradition and educational campaign that lasted from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, the text quoted below underlines the significance of illiterate women's often-neglected participation in the transmission of Islamic knowledge and culture. This text was selected and analyzed by Rausch as a prototype of "popular didactic poetry," to be distinguished from the *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) manuals, Hadith collections, and *nasihah* (religious counseling), which were subject to metering and versification (Rausch 2009, 386). A good number of "popular didactic poems" have been transmitted orally from generation to generation and still circulate in various versions. Being often anonymous, such oral texts do not attract the attention of historians.<sup>9</sup> In her presentation, Rausch observes that, in the text, "the worship of God is inextricable from women's everyday chores" (387), a statement that interestingly echoes some of the testimonies presented above. This type of oral poetry escaped the hegemony of written Arabic and French in schools without losing touch with the expression of religion in a unique way. It also highlights the historical link between the south of Morocco and Sub-Saharan countries, where this type of poetry was immortalized by women like the Nigerian poet Nana Asma'u (1793–1864).

Peace be upon you O Master of Lights, O Flower of everyone who is born.  
 Peace be upon you O Master of Lights, O Flower of everyone who is born.  
 Peace be upon you. Heal us, O Lord, and grant us our due.  
 Peace be upon you. Heal us, O Lord, and grant us our due.  
 O Muhammad, you are the Master of Lights.  
 O Muhammad, you are the Master of Lights.  
 O Muhammad, we want to find you on the Day of Judgment.  
 O Muhammad, we want to find you on the Day of Judgment.  
 If only we could be your guests in the graveyard.  
 If only we could be your guests in the graveyard.  
 The houries of paradise, they are standing at the entrance.  
 The houries of paradise, they are standing at the entrance.  
 The women of this world, they are standing at the gate.  
 The women of this world, they are standing at the gate.  
 We are better than those who always have what they need.  
 We are better than those who always have what they need.  
 We are in this world, so our troubles and faults are many.<sup>10</sup>

Amazigh women's expressions of the sacred are generally couched in the form of inscriptions, oral and written texts, art motifs, carpet weaving, and rituals (Mernissi 1977; Dwyer 1978; Rausch 2004; Mack 2004; Becker 2006). These expressions combine daily concerns, faith, and spirituality; their appeal resides in their noninstitutional symbolism that has survived for millennia in the collective unconscious of North Africans and southern Mediterraneans.<sup>11</sup> The expressions and the ways in which they have been transmitted must have had a deep impact on the way Moroccan women perceive Islam today, which raises the interesting question of whether there are differences among today's Moroccan women's perceptions of Islam depending on their ethnicity, an open question whose answer is beyond the scope of this article.

### **Women's Perceptions of Islam as Culture**

The term "culture" is polysemous, multidimensional, and complex. The Oxford English Dictionary allocates no fewer than three broad clusters of meanings to the term: "the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively, for example the twentieth-century popular culture"; "a refined understanding or appreciation of culture, for example men of culture"; and "the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society; Afro-Caribbean culture." As such, culture is related to people's attitudes and behavior characteristics of a particular social group, as well the perception of these attitudes and behaviors. In Morocco, culture is referred to in Arabic as *thaqafa*, which is more akin to the last cluster of meanings in OED and which includes Islam. However, when dealing with women's perception of Islam through the lens of culture, it is important to distinguish culture (way of life, system of values, etc.) from traditions and customs, because whereas the latter are widely seen to function as hurdles for women's free expression of the self and emancipation, the former is more commonly viewed as empowering and bestowing a feeling of belonging to a larger community of like-minded. In this article and on the basis of the contents of the interviews and questionnaires, culture is understood in its broadest double sense of "way of life" and "system of values" that people are generally comfortable in taking for granted and use as support in addressing the challenges of their daily lives.

Islam as culture is the most widespread perception among Moroccan women. It is generally expressed from a social interactional or personal perspective, both of which are sensitive to the six social variables mentioned earlier. Two examples of the social interactional perspective are provided by Samira, a 41-year-old married dentist, and Shama, a divorced rural 33-year-old housewife. Samira links her culture-perception of Islam with her social identity in settings where this identity is important:

I am educated, I have a job and a family, I don't practice, but being Muslim is what really differentiates me from, say, a French or Spanish female (or male) dentist. It is usually when I am abroad, at a conference for example, that I have this feeling, the feeling that Islam represents how I live, eat, socialize, talk, and relate to others.

For Shama, her culture-perception of Islam is related to her belonging to a specific community with specific social habits:

As Muslims, we don't eat pork and we don't drink wine; our religion tells us how to behave and what to think; otherwise we are lost.

The urban/rural difference between these two women echoes the perceptions of faith by women illustrated in the previous section: rural women relate their Islam more to the group than to the individual.

With respect to the personal perspective, educated and noneducated women alike condemn traditions and customs such as forced marriage, forced seclusion, or instant divorce, and associate their culture with an Islam that liberates them from these customs and traditions. This is expressed by Lamia, a 40-year-old urban married beautician (first quote), and Saida, a 36-year-old rural housewife (second quote):

In these difficult times, what I like in our way of life is our blessed Islam, not what ignorant people state, like marrying off a girl as soon as she shows signs of puberty or allowing a man to divorce a woman just because he is fed up with her, or yet the virginity ceremony where blood is the honor of the family!

Islam is not forbidding girls' education or secluding women. It is not *tqaf* [a ritual where a young girl is made to step over the weaving loom to protect her virginity]. Islam is allowing girls to know how to read and write and [a woman to] have a job in case her husband dies and leaves her with children to feed. Otherwise she will have to sell her body as a prostitute in the town in order to feed her children.

Islam as culture is also attested in some women's statements such as, "Islam is like the color of my eyes or the color of my skin; it will go with me to the grave"; "I am born Muslim and I will die Muslim; it just cannot be otherwise"; "I don't even question my Islam, it is part of what I am, full stop." These statements carry the meaning of identity to a deeper level, which involves the body and the soul and is mingled with one's sense of being. Given that we cannot control, let alone question or judge such feelings, the culture-bound perceptions of Islam are strong. They are corroborated by everyday language use.<sup>12</sup> For example, the politeness register in Morocco abounds with words and expressions with a religious origin: "llah is'ad ssabah" (May Allah bless the morning!); "rabbi kbir" ("My God is great" as a reaction to any good news after sickness or any other misfortune); "llah 'alem" (God knows all), etc. In a way, language use in Morocco solidifies the link between women's perception of Islam as culture and their own sense of who they are.

At the sophisticated level of public-sphere expression of feminism, an example of women who view Islam as culture are the secular feminists who, although born Muslim and self-identifying as such, associate Islam and Islamic practices more with the private than with the public space and endeavor to keep their political views separate from their religious views in the public sphere. Here is what Amina, a 56-year-old single secular feminist who coordinates a women's rights NGO in Fez, told me:

My mission is to advocate for Moroccan women's civil rights. What does my religion have to do with this? My religion is part of what I am as a person and what I do at home to perform my religious duties: praying, fasting, etc. Why should I pray in public? To tell everybody that I am Muslim, so what? On the street, I should shout and demonstrate to change the miserable state we are in, I should talk about *ijtihad* [reform based on progressive interactions of legal Islam], but that's not religion, that's politics. My religion and my activism do not intersect so far as I am concerned, and why should they? I find it difficult enough to really concentrate on my prayers at home, let alone in public where I am self-conscious all the time because I feel like I am performing on a stage!

These feminists implicitly or explicitly advocate legal rights, education, job opportunities, financial independence, and reproductive health rights for women in urban and rural areas. They deal with Islam in public mainly in relation to the improvement of these rights. They are also concerned that only the family law (Moudawana) is based on *shari'a* law. Asma, another women's rights activist, 52 years old, married and educated, told me:

Why is the family law the only one based on shari'a? This is the question all of us should ponder. Legal Islam is man-made; maybe this type of Islam was good in the past, but now times have changed, and if the penal

code is based on civil law, why not the family law? Why not secularize this law? Patriarchs in and outside the home want to control us through the family law.

These feminists are conscious that they cannot, publicly at least, do without Islam because the latter is a state religion, so they choose to articulate their legal demands in terms of “liberalizing” society and avoid concentrating on religious texts. They advocate modernity and progress (Sadiqi 2003; Ennaji 2005) and do not see any clash with Islam on this front. It is interesting to note that secular feminists do not attack Islam as a religion; on the contrary, they attack patriarchy, and if they have to use a religious discourse, they highlight Islam’s ethical ideals where men and women enjoy the same rights. In other words, in order to espouse modernity, secular feminists seek to play down the narrowly religious aspect and seek in Islam a characterizing identity and a strategy of liberation that standard Western explanatory frameworks, often based on egalitarian and individualistic assumptions, do not include. Here is a statement by Maha, a 34-year-old married university professor who is a secular feminist:

Mind you, I like Islam, I have no problem with it, it is judging Muslims, especially women, I have issues with!  
[laughs]

Maha’s statement is typical of secular feminists’ awareness of the central role of Islam in public life. To carry their projects and avoid being excluded or sidelined as “unauthentic” or “sold out to the West,” they position themselves publicly as “Muslim women” and package their demands together with the right dose of Islamic intensity. Secular feminists do not perceive Islam as politics, but they are aware that political ideologies and practices in Morocco use cultural ideas to enforce their projects. For example, these ideologies and practices link women and their sexual purity to the honor of men and families and “legitimate” this discourse by connecting it with Islam. By so doing, they subject women to the control of men and their surrogates. With the emergence of political Islam, secular feminists are faced with a yet more conservative brand of patriarchy who perceive Islam as ideology. The main battles between the modernists/secularists and conservatives/Islamists are fought with women’s rights and issues in the background: Whereas the former advocate the understanding of women’s rights as civil rights, the latter reduce women’s rights to what legal Islam prescribes.<sup>13</sup> Fatima, a 29-year-old married journalist, told me:

Women the age of my mother were battling for rights, and they had to face conservatives who resented colonialism and used Islam as a preservation of the Moroccan way of life. But we have to face a fiercer enemy: the Islamists who, however moderate they can be, do not favor women’s freedom of action and individuality. They release all their hatred of the West on us!

With the spread of political Islam that accompanied the new century, many secular feminists wear the veil without adhering to the Islamist ideology. Roqaya, a 49-year-old successful lawyer, said in the interview:

I wear the veil because I am all the time with conservative men, some of whom refuse to shake hands with me. My veil facilitates my interaction with these men and with my clients, most of whom are conservative men or veiled women. Further, I sometimes come home late at night and my veiling lessens the anger of my husband and children. I use the veil to do what I want, but I must admit I sometimes feel the burden of guilt toward myself. The veil facilitates my life but creates guilt.

Roqaya’s sentiments were shared by a couple of other women I interviewed. Maha, the university professor, is also veiled and here is part of what she stated about her veil:

I am convinced that men do not understand the wearing of the veil in the same way that we do. We veil for a variety of reasons. My reason is to please my family and have peace of mind with my husband especially, but men in general associate the veil with convenient obedience.

This gender difference in the perception of the veil applies more in urban areas and to working women.

All in all, the main difference between women's perception of Islam as faith and their perception of Islam as culture resides in what may be termed the degree of religious intensity, but generally speaking, women who perceive Islam as culture do not feel obliged to perform the Islamic rituals such as praying and fasting. However, some of them expressed the desire to perform pilgrimage and one of them, Ilham, a 51-year-old wealthy married businesswoman, actually did. When I asked her why, she replied:

Well, having the title of *hajja* bestows on you more prestige, doesn't it? I bring a lot of material from Mecca and it sells well here!<sup>14</sup>

Performing *haj* is socially very prestigious in Morocco, so prestigious that the use of the corresponding title has become a way of addressing people from whom a favor is sought. Thus the title "hajja" boosts a woman's prestige considerably both in and outside the home. It elevates her self-confidence and in a way protects her from verbal and physical violence, as it is not considered socially decent to mistreat, let alone divorce or hit, a hajja. Many women, when asked, acknowledged this fact, as exemplified by Malika, a 58-year-old self-identified secular hajja:

I understand your question. When you come to think of it, when I came back from haj, I did notice that the male members of my close family, especially my husband, have become more deferential towards me; no one orders me about as before performing the haj; my husband consults me on religious things ... good feeling.  
[laughs]

Indeed, more and more middle-class, middle-aged secular women are performing haj and seem to enjoy their new identity not only for religious but also for personal reasons, as Malika's statement above implies.

What transpires from my discussions with secular women is their twin insistence on the necessity of securing women's civil rights and their refusal to "politicize" Islam; this is congruent with the argument that secularization in Morocco cannot be successful without securing women's civil rights (Ennaji, Sadiqi and Vintges 2016).

In sum, women's perception of Islam as culture is most impacted by their geographical origin and social class. In the case of urban middle-class women, ethnic belonging does not seem to have any impact; however, ethnicity appears to loom large in the case of poorer rural women, as the testimonies above show. This is linked to the fact that in Amazigh areas, mostly rural, tension between secular and nonsecular views is not as articulated as in urban areas. I have not attested this articulation in the interviews I conducted with rural women, whereas I did when interviewing educated urban women.

### **Women's Perceptions of Islam as Politics**

Women's perception of Islam as politics is a recent urban phenomenon in today's Morocco. It appeared around the mid-1980s, when political Islam reached Morocco in the aftermath of the success of the Iranian revolution in 1979. Since then, a Moroccan Islamist movement has developed into a full-fledged social movement.<sup>15</sup> Although complex and heterogeneous (ranging from charity organizations to associations, political parties, and individual actors), this movement exhibits two major trends, identified respectively with the Justice and Development Party (PJD) and the Justice and Spirituality Association (JS).<sup>16</sup> While both trends are pacifist, they differ as to their stance vis-à-vis the religious authority of the king: Whereas the PJD accepts this authority, the JS contests it, an attitude perceived by the monarchy as "destabilizing," hence its interdiction (Pruzan-Jørgensen 2010). Thus, while the PJD has been functioning within the Moroccan



political party system since the 1990s, participating in the elections and even heading the government since 2011, the JS has rejected the Moroccan constitution and boycotted the elections. With a focus on Arab-Islamic identity, the Arabic language, and a conservative lifestyle, the two trends of the Moroccan political Islam oppose secularization and espouse a rather ambiguous discourse with regard to the promotion of women's individual rights. For example, Bassima Hakkaoui, the Islamist Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family, and Social Development, was slow to condemn the 2012 rape of Amina Filali, the 16-year-old victim who committed suicide when she was forced to marry her rapist. It was the secular feminists who mobilized massively to repeal Article 475 of the Penal Code, which allowed a rapist to escape prosecution by marrying his victim. The mobilization garnered national and international support and put strong pressure on the government, leading to the repeal of Article 475 and replacing it with a law that condemns the rapist to 30 years in prison.

Both Islamist trends include female women's rights activists, but only the PJD counts female politicians. The demands of these activists and politicians share many characteristics, salient among which are a strong belief that Islam provides women with rights, an adherence to the veil, and total loyalty to the ideological tenets of the party/association they are affiliated with. For example, both camps promote complementarity (instead of equality) between men and women and between rights and obligations in the family, a tendency to position women's issues within larger family and social contexts, and a sidelining of the problems women face as individuals. However, there is a difference between the PJD and JS women: whereas the latter focus on wider intellectual issues, the former emphasize women's everyday problems (Pruzan-Jørgensen 2010).

In my sample of interviewees, I included a PJD member of parliament and a JS activist. When asked about her perception of women's rights, Fatima-Zahra, a 27-year-old PJD parliamentarian, responded:

I have always said in the parliament that Islam guarantees our rights as women and that we don't need to seek these rights elsewhere. Of course, we need to be aware of today's women's needs and see what can be appropriated from universal human rights, but our priority is to package these rights in the Islamic language that all women understand and are comfortable with.... First we need to strengthen the institution of the family and promote morality inside the family. If we do that, we will eradicate the social ills of prostitution and abandoned children. In this respect, women are more responsible than men. They are the hope.

She also said:

All Moroccan women need to know that men and women have different rights and obligations, we are not the same, and that Islam forbids violence against women and this is what my party, the PJD, is here for.

As for Wafa, a 29-year-old JS activist, she answered the same question in the following way:

I am not a politician and I don't aspire to be, but if I were, I would promote the idea that women's rights emanate from the spirit of Islam. We need to study hard to reach the spirit of Islam and then look for our rights using the language of law and the legal and intellectual proofs that will guarantee our rights. This is absolutely important, and I see it as the responsibility of both men and women.

When asked about polygamy, neither Fatima-Zahra nor Wafa condemned it; they both tried to justify it if the interests of the children and family are jeopardized. When asked about the hegemony of men within the party and association, Wafa was more critical than Fatima-Zahra. But in general, the two women often associated the ideological views of their party and association with their personal opinions on women, the family, and society at large. In so doing, they wanted to demarcate themselves from the secularist feminists who, according to both, are too influenced by Western views on women's rights and focus excessively on the individual. They also both approved the use of the term "Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights"



instead of “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”<sup>17</sup> Further, Fatima-Zahra’s and Wafa’s perceptions of Islam as politics were constantly cushioned with Islamic identity as “a point of departure and a point of arrival,” as Wafa stated. Between these points, family and society are highlighted as the only contexts where Moroccan women’s issues can be discussed and tackled. In their perceptions of Islam as politics, both interviewees considered the veil and a conservative lifestyle as part and parcel of their political projects.

But it is misleading to generalize here; some independent Islamist feminists are more aggressive in seeking political power. Najat, a 19-year-old student, said during the interview: “I want to use Islam in politics the way my male classmates do. Why not?” Other state-sponsored female Islamists, referred to as Murshidat (religious guides), hold secular views. Here is what Amal, a 31-year-old married and working Murshida, expressed in the questionnaire:

I am trained to spread a moderate and inclusive type of Islam. I preach to women in the mosque of my neighborhood, answer their questions, etc. I don’t use Islam for political reasons; I even prefer that Islam and politics are kept separate in debates about everything including women rights.

Amal also wrote, “Women’s rights are to be found in our religion but not exclusively. I believe in universal human rights.” She is aware that the success of her project to “spread a moderate type of Islam” depends on a clear definition of the roles of women and men in society, and she uses her status as a representative of the state’s official views and the religious sanction of Islam to pass on her messages.

Although they do not share the perceptions of Islam as politics, whatever its dose of moderation, secular feminists consider the very presence of female voices in the field of public religion, a hitherto male-dominated sphere, as a challenge to the male religious establishment. But what they really support is having women engage in new interpretations of the Qur’an in collaboration with the Ulama (religious authorities). It is important to note that this aim is not brought about by the emergence of female Islamist activists and politicians, as the secular unveiled feminist jurists Farida Bennani and Zineb Maadi advocated female interpretations of the Qur’an well before the emergence of feminist Islamist voices (Bennani and Maadi 2000), a view continued by Asma Lamrabet, a veiled secular feminist. It is knowledge production that many secular feminists support when they say they support Islamist feminists, because it is knowledge production on the female interpretation of the Qur’an that is lacking. Neither the PJD nor the JS have added to knowledge production of new interpretations of Islam: Nadia Yassine, leader of the women’s section of the JS, has not been heard from since her father’s passing; she has made attempts at reinterpreting Islam, but her voice has been silenced since 2013.

As with secular feminists, the women who perceive Islam as politics are urban, educated, and savvy, and some of them use the Amazigh issue to score political gains, as the PJD interviewee who states: “When I say all women, I mean Arabs and Amazigh: we all belong to one Islam.” This statement reflects the linguistic and ideological hegemony of political Islam, in which ethnicity and other categories are blurred.

## **Conclusion**

This article set out to investigate and analyze women’s individual perceptions of Islam in today’s Morocco. Four major conclusions may be drawn from my investigation and analysis. First, women’s perceptions of Islam in today’s Morocco are plural, versatile, and complex. Second, the plurality, versatility, and complexity of these perceptions mirror women’s varied lives and experiences and their importance in shaping the perceptions of Islam. Third, if this proves anything, it proves the fluidity of the connection between religion, the self, and politics when it comes to women. Finally, women’s perceptions of Islam in today’s Morocco not

only refute the idea of a uniform Islam in the country; they also inform our understanding of the relationship between individual women and Islam in a dominant male-centric context and attest to women's individual agency—a still poorly researched topic and an interesting avenue of scholarly inquiry that can inform the larger narrative of women and Islam in modern Morocco.

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## Notes

I register with gratitude the help of two anonymous readers whose comments helped me improve an earlier version of this article.

1. Throughout Morocco's history, Islam was the official religion of both Arab and Berber royal dynasties (Abun-Nasr 1987).

2. The official Islamic school in Morocco is the Sunni Maliki school, itself based on *shari'a* (Islamic law). Shari'a is the sum of judicial "rules" elaborated during the first three centuries of the existence of Islam. These rules are based on a number of Qur'anic prescriptions and on the Hadiths, norms inspired by the behavior and recommendations attributed to Prophet Muhammad, which constitute the Sunna—the path to follow.

3. Christian and Jewish Moroccans have always been present but as minorities whose numbers have gradually been shrinking.

4. For an account of Islamic feminism, see Badran 2005 and 2008.

5. Authority here is understood as power sanctioned by society. For an account of the nature and workings of this type of authority in today's space-based patriarchy in Morocco, see chapter three in Sadiqi 2014.

6. For the sake of protecting the identities of my interviewees, I gave them fictional names. The translations from Arabic or Amazigh into English are mine.

7. I develop this idea in Sadiqi 2014.

8. The major reason for the hitherto absence of the language-and-culture perspective in modern mainstream research on Moroccan women's issues in general may be due to two reasons. First, the official history of Morocco begins with the coming of Islam and, as such, glosses over more than 3000 years of pre-Islamic recorded history. Second, Ibn Kahldun, the medieval father of sociology in North Africa, produced work that forced the polarizing dichotomy "urban vs. rural" (with negative connotations associated to the latter) on subsequent research in the country. The impact of these two circumstances within a heavily patriarchal context makes oral expressions of Amazigh rural women the most disadvantaged category of research. With the advent of colonization and state-building in the middle of the last century, oral languages, especially Amazigh, and women (the great majority of whom use only oral languages) were completely sidelined under the pretext of building a state that belonged to the larger Arab *umma* (nation). But, ironically, rural Amazigh women's orality/orature, didactic or otherwise, escaped both colonial and state censures and managed to survive through oral transmission, thus sustaining a link to both the pre-Islamic era and Sub-Saharan Africa. This orality/orature embodies women's multiple expressions of the sacred, their spirituality, and invocation of the divine, as well as artistic ways of transmitting and perpetuating these expressions, in whose various and complex forms the teaching and possibility of solace go hand in hand with everyday chores. These expressions and interpretations of the divide between spirituality and actual lives are a poorly understood area of research in Morocco and the Arab-Islamic world at large.

9. In Rausch's words, "the scholar of Berber culture Arsène Roux ... described the chanting or recitation of these poems as appropriate for 'little celebrations or parties,' and the Moroccan scholar Mohamed Al-Mokhtar Soussi rarely mentioned such chanting sessions" (2009, 386). The survival of this feminine genre is mainly due to the popularity of poetry in Amazigh culture.

10. The poem was translated from Amazigh by Rausch.

11. After the tragic destruction of most of the southern Mediterranean's rural life in World War II, these expressions may well be the only remaining link between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

12. Four main languages are used in Morocco—Moroccan Arabic, Amazigh, Standard or written Arabic, and French—but only the first two are mother tongues.

13. See Sadiqi 2016 for a deconstruction and discussion of these two political pairings in today's Morocco.

14. The titles "haj" (masculine) and "hajja" (feminine) are generally acquired by the people who have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five pillars of Islam that applies to people who can afford it (affordability being contained as a proviso in the designation of the pilgrimage as one of the five pillars of Islam).

15. For an account of the context in which political Islam developed in Morocco, see Tozy 1999.

16. The PJD was founded by Abdelkrim al-Khatib, initially under the name Popular Democratic and Constitutional Movement. This party remained inoperative until members of Chabiba Islamiyya, a clandestine association, created the Unity and Reform Movement and joined the party, which became PJD in 1998. Justice and Spirituality was founded by Cheikh Abdeslam Yassine in 1981.

17. The Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights was created by Islamic Councils in Paris and London; it uses the language of Islamic jurisprudence in its restatement of basic human rights.

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# “Strong Women Make Strong Nations”: Women, Literature, and Sovereignty in Paula Gunn Allen and Virginia Woolf

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**Abstract:** This essay places Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas* alongside Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Reading these landmark texts together helps establish a transnational dialogue essential to twenty-first-century literary and feminist studies. *A Room of One’s Own* and *The Sacred Hoop* resonate with each other in striving to recuperate women’s history and literature, long denied or suppressed by patriarchal tenets and texts. A fruitful dialogic also emerges between *Three Guineas* and *The Sacred Hoop*, both of which argue for the eradication of patriarchy in favor of female-centric social structures in order to achieve individual and collective social and cultural equity. In examining the similarities as well as differences among these works, this essay also discusses the complementarities and conflicts among Indigenous and white/Western feminisms. Studying Woolf and Allen together builds a shared platform for intersectional analysis, vital to third-wave feminist concerns.

**Keywords:** feminism, transnationalism, intersectionality, Indigenous feminism, Native American women, coalition, Woolf (Virginia), Gunn Allen (Paula)

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In my research and teaching, I find great value in placing works together that might not immediately seem compatible but whose affinities as well as differences lead to fruitful comparative study. This essay, then, considers Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) alongside Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986; 2nd. ed. 1992). While at first glance Woolf and Allen may seem an unlikely pairing, reading them together helps establish a transnational dialogue essential to twenty-first-century literary and feminist studies. The importance of each work has long been clear: *A Room of One’s Own* “has become a classic—if not *the* touchstone text—in the history of feminism” (Gubar xxxvi), *Three Guineas* “is generally recognized as a founding document in the history of gender studies” (Briggs 310), and *The Sacred Hoop* is “exceedingly influential” and “considered a foundation for the study not only of Native American gender but also of culture” (Van Dyke 69). Moreover, as third-wave feminism emphasizes “an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism” (Snyder 175) that “replaces attempts at unity with a dynamic and welcoming politics of coalition” (176), studying Allen and Woolf together, and the frissons between them, builds a shared platform for intersectional analysis.

*A Room of One’s Own* stems from Woolf’s 1928 lectures at Newnham and Girton, women’s colleges at Cambridge University. Her topic was women and fiction, and in *Room* she extrapolates upon such a deceptively simple-sounding issue. She strives to reconcile the powerful women of classical literature with the deplorable material conditions of women’s lives. She seeks literary foremothers and finds primarily

books written by men. She concludes that in order to write fiction, a woman must have 500 pounds annually and a room of her own, signifying the independence and privacy necessary for engaging in serious literary endeavor. Finally, she posits that women writers must attain the androgynous, incandescent mind of the unimpeded artist. *Three Guineas*, published on the cusp of the Second World War, assumes the form of a letter in response to a barrister's query asking how to prevent war. The only hope of doing so, Woolf argues, lies in the daughters of educated men refusing to participate in patriarchal society. While *A Room of One's Own* considers how women might attain the opportunities enjoyed by men, *Three Guineas* calls for radical societal overhaul. In *The Sacred Hoop*, Allen discusses American Indian traditions and the vital role women played, and continue to play, within them. Engaging the identity politics of second-wave feminism, a popular method of organization and activism in the mid- to late twentieth century, along with history, sociology, literature, orature, ritual, and personal experience, the essays comprising *The Sacred Hoop* establish the need for contemporary societies to model themselves upon woman-centered American Indian cultures—the only means, Allen argues, of achieving spiritual, social, and cultural health and equity.<sup>1</sup> All three works recuperate women's voices and construct counternarratives to patriarchal ideology.

Exploring the commonalities as well as the differences among *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, and *The Sacred Hoop* yields fresh insights into the intersections of race, class, gender, and nation in women's writing and chips away at boundaries still imposed upon literary and feminist studies—the West versus the rest—for, as First Nations scholar Emma LaRocque states, “there is in mainstream Canadian and American feminist writings a decided lack of inclusion of our experience, analysis or perspectives” (67). My essay places Indigenous women's experiences, analyses, and perspectives, based on my understanding of the Native American and First Nations scholarly sources I have consulted, alongside those of Woolf, demonstrating their intrinsic value while also fostering greater inclusivity and diversity in feminist literary studies. R. Claire Snyder finds third-wave feminism, like its first- and second-wave predecessors, harboring a “white, middle-class bias” (181)—even as it rejects the second wave's “category of women”—for neglecting to consider fully women's distinct experiences stemming from race, ethnicity, and social class (183). Bringing Woolf and Allen together demonstrates how Native American thought and theory complement and complicate white or mainstream feminism and also how Western feminism bears relevance to Native American concerns.

Such a stance is not without controversy. Cree/Métis scholar Verna St. Denis, for instance, was initially skeptical about achieving “universal sisterhood” (44) among women of different racial and class backgrounds, but came to believe in the importance of Western feminist theory due to patriarchy's negative impact upon all women (47). LaRocque concurs, stating that “we cannot remove Aboriginal women's concerns from other women's concerns for we too live under overarching male-dominated conditions.... Feminism provides us with theoretical tools with which we can analyze historical realities such as patriarchy” (57). Luana Ross similarly believes that “to reject feminism completely is dangerous. Our larger sovereignty movement cannot omit issues of gender” (50). Such statements reflect the importance of *The Sacred Hoop* to Native American studies today, given its pan-tribal discussion of female-centric values and cultures. These statements also point to the ongoing relevance of *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* due to third-wave feminism's insufficiently deep or coherent analyses of patriarchy (Snyder 185). My goals here align with those of Renya K. Ramirez, who advocates “for the development of *multiple* feminisms rather than a *singular* feminism” (304; original emphasis). Instead of deriving from all three works a single theory or definition of feminism, I examine how these works speak with each other, in agreement and dispute, while mindful of Valerie Reed Hickman's observation that a vital concern for transnational feminism is



“how to forge a kind of coalition across lines of difference without simply erasing difference in the name of unity or, at the other extreme, reifying difference so absolutely as to prevent encounter altogether” (53). This essay strives for such coalition.

*The Sacred Hoop* and *A Room of One's Own* resonate with each other in considering the historical and literary record of women's lives. Both Allen and Woolf contemplate the discrepancies between women in fiction and women in fact, albeit from different ends of the spectrum: Woolf finds women in literature imbued with strength and agency yet considered second-class citizens in real life, while Allen recounts egregious depictions of Native women in Western texts contrasting starkly with their actual lives. Allen writes of pre-contact Indian cultures, wherein women wielded significant influence in public and private matters, the interconnectedness of all life forms was recognized and cherished, and communal responsibility was paramount. Numerous accounts of traditional Native American and First Nations cultures corroborate Allen's summation. As M. A. Jaimes Guerrero writes, Native nationhood was “premised ... on the matrilineal lines of kinship and descent for most if not all Native peoples prior to the impact of US colonialism and patriarchy on their indigenous lifeways. These communal models of indigenous governance granted women respect and authority” (63). According to First Nations scholar Winona Wheeler, “Women were not dependent on men, their role was very much in balance with men” (quoted in Guerrero 64). Kim Anderson also discusses the sovereignty of women in traditional Native American cultures, noting “that divorce was common, that women deserted men in abusive marriages, that women acted as warriors and shamans, that widows could support themselves rather than remarrying” (42).

However, LaRocque believes notions of pre-contact gender equality have been greatly romanticized. “It is simply not true,” she says, “that there was any universalized Aboriginal understanding about ‘womanhood’” (65). Andrea Smith similarly cautions against “overgeneraliz[ing] or giv[ing] the impression that Native communities were utopian prior to colonization. Certainly gender violence occurred prior to colonization” (2005a, 19). Nevertheless, Smith states, before colonization, “Women served as spiritual, political, and military leaders, and many societies were matrilineal” (2005a, 18). Poet and scholar Denise Lajimodiere notes that “many tribal cultures are gynocratic” despite the impression created by negative depictions of Native women throughout Western media past and present (105). As she states, “the best information on what it was like to be a Native American woman in early America would be from Native American women themselves, yet, considering the widespread, long-term history of violence and oppression waged against Indian people by non-Indians” (105), it is understandable that Indian women resist divulging such information to Euro-Americans.

Western historical accounts paint a distorted picture of Native womanhood, which arises from a patriarchal standpoint capable of understanding woman-centered cultures only insofar as they are perceived to threaten white men. “Any original documentation that exists,” Allen writes, “is buried under the flood of readily available, published materials written from the colonizer's patriarchal perspective” (32). Ruth Spack notes that “the journals, diaries, and letters of Euro-American travelers and traders ... described American Indian women's work as ‘menial’ and viewed the women themselves as ‘beasts of burden,’ ‘slaves,’ and ‘brutes’ who were ‘sexually lax,’ ‘uncultivated,’ and ‘inferior’ and who lived a life of ‘barbarism’ and drudgery” (27). Lajimodiere, too, finds that the first “Euro-centric accounts portrayed American Indian women as ... being treated very much worse than an animal,” like an “abject slave and drudge of men in her tribe ... dragging a travois, trudging along a trail behind her swarthy warrior husband, who was riding a horse” (105).<sup>2</sup> Such distorted representations of Native American gender roles not only falsify historical record, Allen explains, but also fortify “patriarchal socialization among all Americans, who are thus led to

believe that there have never been any alternative structures” (36) and therefore that no models exist for establishing woman-centered cultures.<sup>3</sup>

Such patriarchal socialization appears to emerge in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, for in both texts Woolf, by and large, discusses patriarchy as if things had never been any other way. In *A Room of One's Own*, she muses that the turf at Oxbridge, emblematic of the university's exclusion of women, “has been rolled for 300 years in succession” (6), and, after her sumptuous lunch there, she ponders the founding of the university and conjures “a scene of masons on a high roof some five centuries ago” (19). With Allen's comment in mind, however, we see in *Room* Woolf's discernment that alternative modes of perception did indeed exist: Woolf laments that the woman novelist of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries “had altered her values in deference to the opinion of others” (73)—to the men who serve as arbiters of literary taste and who critique women's writing based on patriarchal values. A nineteenth-century woman's mind, she states, was “slightly pulled from the straight, and made to alter its clear vision in deference to external authority” (73). Woolf recognizes the imposition of male judgment upon uniquely female values and perceptions, marveling at the “genius” and “integrity it must have required in the face of all that criticism ... to hold fast to the thing as they saw it without shrinking” (73). As Laura Marcus finds, *A Room of One's Own* “calls for a new understanding and valorisation of specifically female values” (145).

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf dissects—and skewers—even further the misogyny pervasive in the professions, the church, and the universities, stating that although men and women “look at the same things, we see them differently” (7). She also recognizes women's lives historically as woman-centered, aligning with Allen's observation:

Much of women's culture bears marked resemblance to tribal culture. The perceptual modes that women, even those of us who are literate, industrialized, and reared within masculinist academic traditions, habitually engage in more closely resemble inclusive-field perception than excluding foreground-background perceptions. (243)

Allen explains that tribal culture and women's culture apprehend the world in a “unified-field fashion” (244), appreciating life's mutuality rather than insisting on fixed hierarchies. Reading *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, and *The Sacred Hoop* together highlights the “accretive and fluid” nature of life and literature as opposed to the “unidimensional, monolithic, excluding, and chronological” mode of being propagated by Western patriarchy (Allen 244).<sup>4</sup> This nonhierarchical “unified-field” vision becomes evident in *A Room of One's Own*'s discussion of androgyny, for example. Woolf acknowledges that myriad sociocultural pressures will always exert themselves upon the mind, but she envisions a potential psyche free of repression and narrowness, one in which the “man-womanly” (96) and “woman-manly” (97) aspects of the mind fuse harmoniously (96, 97). Citing Coleridge's proclamation that “a great mind is androgynous,” Woolf imagines that such a “mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided” (97).<sup>5</sup> She proffers Shakespeare's mind as an example—not unproblematically.

As Madelyn Detloff explains in *The Value of Virginia Woolf*, “Woolf's ‘epistemic insensitivity’ to Shakespeare's more partial perspectives shows that she was not immune to cultural biases, despite her feminist and socialist leanings” (30). Because Woolf sees Shakespeare as the pinnacle of the androgynous mind and literary incandescence, and because she is often assumed to conceive of “incandescence” and “objectivity” as one and the same, we could find her reifying patriarchal literary and cultural norms, for “literary value ... will be seen simply as ‘truths’ or observations about ‘human nature’ if the writer's interests

align neatly enough with dominant cultural perspectives” (Detloff 30). Yet Detloff offers an alternate interpretation of Woolf’s concept of incandescence. She sees Woolf suggesting “an epistemological shift from an egocentric way of knowing to a contextual way of knowing ... the potential to think from a perspective attuned to others and the world *in relation* to one’s self. Incandescence therefore offers the possibility of community formation that attends to the particularities of an individual within the community” (34). This epistemological shift resonates with third-wave feminism’s emphasis on coalition: on women coming together and “occupying female subject positions” (Snyder 177) while at the same time demonstrating that there is “no one way to be a woman” (185).

Allen also nods toward a contextual way of knowing, I would argue, when she draws broadly upon centuries of American Indian gynocracies as well as personal experiences in countering degrading portrayals of tribal women in texts by whites. *The Sacred Hoop*’s first section, “The Ways of Our Grandmothers,” sets the stage by delineating the female divinities in American Indian creation stories, such as the Keres Thought Woman, who thinks the world into creation, and the Hopi Spider Woman, “Grandmother of the sun and ... the great Medicine Power who sang the people into this fourth world we live in now” (19). Lajimodiere writes of “White Buffalo Woman, who brought the Sacred Pipe to the Lakota” and of “Changing Woman in Navajo belief ... a power creator-figure who is responsible for the growth of crops and the birth of all new life. The Ojibwe tell of Sky Woman with the help of turtle and muskrat, [who] created Turtle Island following the great flood” (106). Thus we find a rich lineage of female creators behind contemporary Native American women’s literature. In her work on transnational feminism, AnaLouise Keating notes that “some feminists see attempts to ‘recover’ woman-centered creation stories as extremely misguided” (94) for affirming patriarchal notions of an essential womanhood. Keating also cites Judith Butler’s concern that “focusing on a time supposedly prior to or beyond present socioeconomic and political conditions inhibits feminist analysis and action in the present” (94). Allen’s attention throughout *The Sacred Hoop* to present-day social, political, economic, and environmental concerns for Native Americans and for all of humanity, however, constitutes “a political act situated in the material present” (Keating 98). In addition, stories of “egalitarian communities of women ... offer a new teleological perspective” to women (Keating 93). Allen locates such perspectives in the work of contemporary Native American women writers. While acknowledging the terrible problems plaguing Indian country today, she notes with pride that American Indian women are taking control of their image in the poems, novels, and short stories they write. “[A] force is growing,” she states, “and it is helping Indian women reclaim their lives. Their power, their sense of direction and of self will soon be visible. It is the force of the women who speak and work and write, and it is formidable” (Allen 50).<sup>6</sup>

While Allen shapes *The Sacred Hoop* around matrilineal contours, including those of her own family, the narrator of *A Room of One’s Own* searches vainly for her foremothers. Scanning the shelves of the British Museum, the Woolfian narrator of *Room* sees numerous books about women by men: by “agreeable essayists, light-fingered novelists, young men who have taken the MA degree; men who have taken no degree; men who have no apparent qualification save that they are not women” (27). She also realizes that “nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century. I have no model in my mind to turn this way and that” (45). Aspiring women novelists overall “had no tradition behind them, or one so short and partial that it was of little help. For we think back through our mothers if we are women” (75). Using the plural, “mothers,” Woolf speaks not only of a biological mother but also of female ancestors who might guide women toward a greater understanding of self and society. Allen similarly states that in Laguna culture, “your mother’s identity is the key to your own identity” and that

your mother is not only that woman whose womb formed and released you—the term refers in every individual case to an entire generation of women whose psychic, and consequently physical, “shape” made the psychic existence of the following generation possible.... Failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society. (209)

Male-dominated societies, in their erasure of female forebears, not only stunt women’s literary endeavors but also circumscribe their entire lives, as demonstrated in *A Room of One’s Own* by the distinctions between the centuries-old wealthy men’s university, Oxbridge, and the underfunded new women’s college, Fernham. As Berenice A. Carroll notes, “Virginia Woolf recognized in the society around her a political and social system geared to the destruction and perversion of human life and creativity” (116). Woolf’s foray into the material conditions of women’s lives and their effects upon their artistic, intellectual, and financial well-being bring such devastation into stark relief.

Wishing to learn more about women, the narrator of *Room* is dismayed to find, at least until the nineteenth century, primarily books written by men. Intrigued by the Elizabethan era in particular, she wonders “why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet” (41). She then questions the material circumstances of women’s lives: “Fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground ... fiction is like a spider’s web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners” (41)—attached “to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in” (42). She learns a bit about women’s lives in Trevelyan’s *History of England*, reading that “wife beating” in the Elizabethan age, “was a recognised right of man, and was practised without shame by high as well as low.... the daughter who refused to marry the gentleman of her parents’ choice was liable to be locked up, beaten and flung about the room” (42). Woolf marvels at how the historical record belies the extraordinary women found throughout classical literature: Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Clytemnestra, Antigone, Cressida, Rosalind, and Desdemona, to name several. She comes to a realization about women:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (43)

Woolf then conceptualizes what life would have been like for a woman of Shakespeare’s genius living in the time of Shakespeare—a sister to the Bard named Judith. After such a woman tells her parents of her desire to be a playwright, they lock her in her room, and she runs away in the middle of the night. Arriving in London, she is barred from the theaters, scorned, seduced, becomes pregnant, and eventually commits suicide.

Paula Gunn Allen locates a similar dynamic in poems by nila northSun and Marnie Walsh. “shadow is / my cousin,” northSun writes, who

hated herself because  
others hated her  
whites hated her  
Indians hated her  
called shadow

apple Indian  
whites saw only INDIAN  
fat drunk greasy squaw.

(quoted in Allen 133)

Walsh's poem tells of Aunt Nettie, who "went to Catholic school and then to college for a while" and whose life eventually unravels (quoted in Allen 133). She tries to ease her anguish through poetry: "when aunt nettie got too drunk / she told poetry /... but all the people laughed" (134). "Aunt and cousin," Allen writes, "caught in the same ambiguity; unable to be Indian, unable *not* to be Indian, they go the same route: drunk, crazy, isolated, having no point of reference that is meaningful to all their experience" (134). Struggling to establish a sense of self amid sex, gender, and racial prejudice can drive women to ruin, whether a woman with literary aspirations in Renaissance England or twentieth-century American Indian women navigating dichotomous worlds.

"Yet genius of a sort must have existed among women" (48), Woolf writes. "When ... one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet.... Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman" (49). In the same vein, Allen calls for a shift from the male-oriented view of American Indian history to a female-centric one. "But let us suppose," she writes, "that among the true heroes were and are many women. Suppose the names of Molly Brant, Magnus, Pocahontas, Sacagawea, Malinalli, Nancy Ward, Sara Winnemucca, and scores of others were the names that came to mind when we thought of the noble and sacred past of the tribes" (263). Both Woolf and Allen seek to recover and augment women's lost voices, changing the way we conceive of women and men, past and present.

Accomplishing such a task is not easy, however, for the masculine values that prevail in patriarchy infiltrate fiction as well. "This is an important work, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room" (73), Woolf writes in *Room*. In "Red Roots of White Feminism," Allen similarly recounts the male establishment's dismissal of women's concerns, explaining that centuries ago, tribal women and white women "often shared food, information, child care, and health care" (215), but no one would know it since "the study of Indian-white relations ... has been almost entirely documented in terms of formal white Christian patriarchal impacts and assaults on Native Americans" (216). As Allen exhorts Native women writers to continue shaping and controlling their own image, Woolf calls upon the women of Newnham and Girton to pursue her inquiries and rectify falsified or missing accounts of women's lives.<sup>7</sup> Allen calls for "An Indian-Focused Version of American History" (218); Woolf solicits a female-centric rendition of Anglo history and literature.

Despite its brilliance in teasing out England's gender inequity, *A Room of One's Own* does not call for major social change as forthrightly as *The Sacred Hoop*. Rather, the narrator of *Room* argues for women's entitlement to the opportunities and amenities enjoyed by men. After a dissatisfying dinner at Fernham and a discussion of the underfunding of women's colleges, the narrator "thought of all the books that were assembled down there"—on the "domes and towers of the famous city"—and "of the admirable smoke and drink and the deep armchairs and the pleasant carpets: of the urbanity, the geniality, the dignity which are the offspring of luxury and privacy and space" (23), and she suspects that "in a hundred years" women "will take part in all the activities and exertions that were once denied them" (40). As a result, some regard "Woolf's quest for a 'room of one's own' ... [as] a quest for political power through economic strength" and



claim that “playing by the male rules of the game is very much what Woolf’s political program in *A Room* is all about” (Solomon 335).

Many years ago, Bette London warned of the dangers of establishing Woolf as an idol that would brook no disagreement—a move that scholars must avoid lest they reproduce the power structures they strive to disassemble (25). As early as 1988, pioneering Woolf scholar Jane Marcus observed that Woolf “has become uncritically sainted” (*Art & Anger* xv). Marcus also called *A Room of One’s Own* “our literary feminist bible” (quoted in London 13), but London believes that *Room* “promises little access to the dispossessed of other classes and races” (15) and that *Three Guineas*’s call to the daughters of educated men embraces only those women closely connected to the male literary establishment (19). Marcus’s introduction to the 2006 Harcourt edition of *Three Guineas*, however, notes Woolf’s “lifelong concern for working-class women” (Woolf 2006, xli), and Naomi Black finds that *Three Guineas* “certainly spoke to inequalities of class and race, and also imperialism” (156). Woolf tells the barrister, who is also the president of a peace society, that he may have the guinea “on condition that you help all properly qualified people, of whatever sex, class or colour, to enter your profession” (2006, 96). Marcus also deemed Woolf “as foremost among ‘our sainted literary mothers’” (London 13), yet, as London states, “the choice of literary mothers and sisters entails its own set of exclusions ... for which feminism must assume responsibility if ‘continuity’ is not to become a cover word for institutionalization” (18). London’s words resonate with Julie Robin Solomon’s view that *Room* seeks to join, not change, patriarchal institutions.

*A Room of One’s Own* and critiques thereof lend insights into Native American and First Nations resistance to mainstream feminism. Guerrero explains that early white feminists, aiming primarily to achieve the rights accorded to white men, “were not concerned with other ‘women of color’” or with “racialized oppression” (59). St. Denis notes that “some Aboriginal women ... reject a form of feminism they understand argues for adopting and imitating white male practices, traditions, and processes” (39); she quotes Pam Colorado’s observation that “nothing I’ve encountered in feminist theory addresses the fact of our colonization or the wrongness of white women’s stake in it” (St. Denis 41). Native American women scholars and activists find “that non-Native women’s participation in various forms of Western imperialism have often made them complicit in the oppression of Native peoples” (Udel 43). And Lata Mani states we must learn “how to argue for women’s rights in ways that are not complicit in any way with patriarchal, racist, or ethnocentrist formulations of the issues” (quoted in St. Denis 48). For example, proponents of women’s rights and of racial justice can find themselves at cross-purposes. In *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, Andrea Smith discusses reproductive policies that “sell out the interests of Native women, poor women, and women of color” (96). She explains that “some activists refuse to address racism in abortion policies, arguing that abortion access represents ‘genocide’ for communities of color” and “fail[ing] to consider that restrictions to abortion can become another strategy to coerce Native women or women of color to pursue sterilization” (97).<sup>8</sup> In addition, Native activist Justine Smith critiques the mainstream reproductive rights movement’s problematic rhetoric of “choice”:

The reproductive rights movement frames the issues around individual “choice”—does the woman have the choice to have or not to have an abortion. This analysis obscures all the social conditions that prevent women from having and making real choices—lack of health care, poverty, lack of social services, etc.... In the Native context, where women often find the only contraceptives available to them are dangerous ... where they live in communities in which unemployment rates can run as high as 80 percent, reproductive “choice” defined so narrowly is a meaningless concept. (quoted in Smith 2005a, 98; original ellipses)



Andrea Smith, too, rejects the “single-issue, pro-choice politics of the mainstream reproductive rights movement” for not only disregarding the particular concerns of women of color but also for “actually promot[ing] the structures of oppression which keep women of color from having real choices or healthy lives” (104–5).

The intersection of gender and race impacts Native American women in matters of sexual assault as well. Native American women are at a higher risk of sexual assault than any demographic in the nation. In *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*, Sarah Deer argues for a tribal-centered approach to sexual assault recovery for Native American women. Such an approach must consider racially charged federal laws, for instance, one of which prohibits the prosecution of non-Natives by tribal courts for crimes committed on tribal lands—a grave social justice issue, for as Louise Erdrich writes in a 2013 *New York Times* op-ed piece, “80 percent of sex crimes on reservations are committed by non-Indian men.”<sup>9</sup> Deer also examines the effect of rape upon Native communities. “Women play significant roles in tribal communities, culturally, spiritually, and politically,” she writes, “and have been referred to as the ‘backbone’ of tribal sovereignty. Sovereignty thus suffers when the women suffer” (13). According to the US Department of Justice, one in three Native American women will be raped in her lifetime, prompting the Native American Women’s Health Education Resource Center to publish *What To Do When You’re Raped: An ABC Handbook for Native Girls*. Sexual-assault advocacy programs, like reproductive rights programs, must take women’s racial and ethnic subject positions into account.

In the same vein, Lisa J. Udel cites Native American women’s valorization of procreation and motherhood as in conflict with issues promulgated by early Western feminism and, one could argue, by *A Room of One’s Own*, given its emphasis on women joining patriarchal institutions imbued with anti-female bias.<sup>10</sup> “Native women’s motherwork, in its range and variety, is one form of activism,” states Udel, “an approach that emphasizes Native traditions of ‘responsibilities’ as distinguished from Western feminism’s notion of ‘rights’” (43). As she also notes, some “Native women condemn Western feminism for what they perceive as a devaluation of motherhood and refutation of women’s traditional responsibilities” (44), while others “locate their activism not in feminist struggle, but in cultural survival” (49). Moreover, explains Ramirez, some Native American women find the issue of sexism “racially disruptive and divisive”: “Indeed, they sometimes assume that a feminist consciousness will automatically create tension between themselves and indigenous men” (303). Udel similarly observes that “Native women repeatedly fault white feminists for the devaluation of men in their revisionary tactics” (54)—tactics at play in the satirical, sarcastic tones of *Room’s* discussion of male privilege. Teresa Winterhalter notes the mocking tone used in *Three Guineas* as well, but finds it key to Woolf’s project of demonstrating through mimicry how patriarchal rhetorical modes perpetuate domination and control (242). And as Carolyn Heilbrun points out, Woolf’s recounting her thrill toward the end of *Room* upon seeing a man and a woman getting into a taxi together serves as her “metaphor for the conjoining of the two sexes rather than the separation of them into antagonistic forces” (1973, 154).

Allen’s work has come under fire as well, particularly from Italian scholar Elvira Pulitano in *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*. While Pulitano believes Allen’s work is important to Native American feminist studies, she finds Allen assuming “an overtly separatist stance” (16) and establishing a mode of “Indianness from the seemingly romantic, sentimentalized perspective of Eurocentric thinking” (21). Ultimately, Pulitano writes, Allen adapts Western binaries; “the only difference is that the terms are reversed and the Indian, operating as the ‘authoritative’ voice, is now granted a privileged position within the Eurocentric oppositional system” (26). Her remarks resemble London’s observation that Woolf criticism

has at times substituted one paradigm for another, “replacing brotherhood with sisterhood, fraternity with sorority,” for example, which fails to challenge established patriarchal norms (15). Furthermore, while scholars such as Kathleen M. Donovan (and myself) favor cross-cultural analyses of women’s writing, as evidenced in Donovan’s *Feminist Readings of Native American Literature: Coming to Voice*, Pulitano finds such attempts at bridge-building “in direct opposition to Allen’s separatist position” (38). Thus she disagrees with Keating’s assertion that Allen “attempts to enlist all US feminists—whatever their cultural backgrounds—in Native Americans’ ongoing political struggles” (Keating 101).

Native American scholar Jace Weaver offers a rejoinder to Pulitano in *American Indian Literary Nationalism*. Weaver sees an essentialist, nationalist strain in *The Sacred Hoop*, yet deems the work a “landmark” (2) and explains that “literary nationalism is not a confrontation, not a tearing down, but an upbuilding,” a commitment to explaining “specific Native values, readings, and knowledges and their relevance to our contemporary lives” (6). Such a commitment aligns closely with Allen’s project in *The Sacred Hoop*. Weaver finds Pulitano’s criticism of Allen characteristic of non-Native scholars’ propensity to dismiss or condescend to Native American writers and literary critics. “Even the title of [Pulitano’s] monograph,” Weaver writes, “probably one of the most misguided texts and one potentially most pernicious to indigenous agency published in Native American literary studies in a decade, bespeaks of ... [a] ‘barely concealed paternalism’” (19). Weaver furthermore finds Pulitano engaging in the same essentialism for which she faults Allen by insisting Native scholars embrace their hybridity—their non-Native ancestry, the multiplicity of their cultural experiences—while claiming that “Allen’s own strategic location within the discourse of the mainstream academy inevitably makes her complicit with the (Western) system from which she wants to be separated” (Pulitano 38), that is, in other words, makes her “less Indian.” Thus it is Pulitano, not Allen, who harbors misguided and romanticized notions of “the authentic Indian.”

Weaver’s concept of American Indian literary nationalism warrants further attention as well. Deeming “Native American literary output as separate and distinct from other national literatures,” Weaver calls for “a criticism of that literature that supports not only its distinct identity but also sees itself as attempting to serve the interests of indigenes and their communities” (15). He distinguishes between Native American criticism and criticism of Native American literature, stating that the former “must be in the hands of Native critics to define and articulate, from resources *we* choose. It must be simply a criticism of our own. This, it seems to me, is the essence of intellectual sovereignty” (17). I could not agree more, and I also attend to Craig S. Womack’s conviction that “Native literatures deserve to be judged by their own criteria, in their own terms, not merely in agreement with, or reaction against, European literature and theory” (quoted in Weaver 40)—thus my foregrounding of Native American and First Nations women throughout this essay as “speaking subject[s],” not “objects of discourse” (Donovan 9). I have no wish to subsume Native American women writers under the literary and cultural behemoth that is Woolf studies today. Rather, I agree with Donovan, also a white feminist scholar, that “[n]umerous parallels exist between Native American literature and feminist literary and cultural theories. Native American literature illumines feminisms, and feminisms help us to understand many of the issues raised by Native writers, especially Native women writers” (7). Donovan wrote her book, as she explains, to create a space in which Native women and white women might speak *to* each other, not *at* each other. I hope to enter and enlarge such a space, and I find Native American and First Nations women doing the same.

As indicated earlier, many find value in joining together American Indian and First Nations women’s activism with Euro-American feminism. In *Theorizing Native Studies*, Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith wish to “engage rather than reject conversation with schools of thought that may have compatible

intellectual and political goals” and they include feminist theory among fields with potential value for Native studies (12). Ross is among Native American women who self-identify as feminist and find solidarity in the “issues that all women encounter—for example, equal pay, children’s health and welfare, reproductive rights, and domestic violence” (40–41). She proudly identifies as feminist and cites Beatrice Medicine, Kate Shanley, and Paula Gunn Allen as major influences for their early, unapologetic public stance as Native American feminists. Similarly, Anderson writes of Cree/Métis educator Myra Laramée, who “has now come to a point where she can work with both Native and white grandmothers in her delineation of an enlightened womanhood” (30). Such comments reflect points of convergence for women despite their individual circumstances vis-à-vis race and ethnicity. Keeping the discourses of women of color and white women apart, on the other hand, forecloses dialogue and reifies for white feminists “the stereotype of the exotic and mysterious other” (Hickman 53).

Woolf’s understanding of how gender and race intersect emerges in *Three Guineas*’ no-holds-barred condemnation of imperialism, fascism, and war. “In naming her book for the coins minted with the proceeds from African slavery,” writes Jane Marcus, “Woolf invests her text with outrage at the exploits of English imperialists and makes the connection between race, capitalism, and patriarchy” (xliii).<sup>11</sup> St. Denis even cites *Three Guineas* while advocating for global feminism (36, 43–44). Andrea Smith’s “Native American Feminism, Sovereignty, and Social Change” provides a thorough account of the conflict between mainstream feminism and Native women’s activism, ultimately affirming that the two camps, so to speak, need not be antagonistic and reminding us that these highly complex issues “cannot simply be reduced to the dichotomy of feminist versus nonfeminist” (118).

Paula Gunn Allen self-identifies as feminist in *The Sacred Hoop*, stating that “[a] feminist approach to the study and teaching of American Indian life and thought is essential because the area has been dominated by paternalist, male-dominant modes of consciousness since the first writings about American Indians in the fifteenth century” (222). Allen develops “tribal-feminism or feminist-tribalism” as a corrective, explaining, “if I am dealing with feminism, I approach it from a strongly tribal posture, and when I am dealing with American Indian literature, history, culture, or philosophy, I approach it from a strongly feminist one” (222). As Allen combines tribal and feminist discernment for more sound literary and cultural analysis, so a joint reading of *A Room of One’s Own* and *The Sacred Hoop* can enhance our understanding of transnational, cross-cultural concerns regarding women’s lives. “Any ideas about transnational feminism must take into account the perseverance of colonialism for indigenous women,” states Ross (47), while Dian Million finds that “[t]o ‘decolonize’ means to understand as fully as possible the forms colonialism takes in our own times” (55). Read in the context of *The Sacred Hoop*, Woolf’s critiques of patriarchy, and, some avow, reproduction thereof can inform an understanding of how colonial paradigms function in the lives of Indigenous women today. “For Woolf,” Detloff explains,

the poet or artist teases open (and in some cases cracks open) the fissures in the hard shell of *habitus* (what we might call normativity or ideology) that deadens our perceptions and makes us susceptible to lockstep thinking—the dehumanization of others; the uncritical valorization of conquest, sacrifice, and violence; the insatiable desire to convert others to one’s preferred way of life; the premium on acquisitive rather than communal good. (11)

It is precisely such lockstep thinking that Woolf deconstructs in *Room* and *Three Guineas*. Reading her works attentively, Detloff contends, cultivates “habits of mind” conducive to personal and societal “openness and transformation” (13). Similarly, Keating regards Allen’s “transformational identity politics,” which “employs ... differences to generate new forms of commonality,” as “open[ing] up psychic spaces where

alterations in consciousness can occur” (5). Reading Woolf and Allen together may lead to even greater social change, as both writers delineate patriarchy’s means of wielding control and foster consciousness-raising among women across space and time.

Upon exploring the intertextuality arising from *A Room of One’s Own* and *The Sacred Hoop*, we may also recognize the dialogic that emerges between *The Sacred Hoop* and *Three Guineas*.<sup>12</sup> Both deconstruct the mechanisms of patriarchy and consider how it might be replaced with woman-centered social constructs. To begin, Allen finds that “the social transformation from egalitarian, gynecentric systems to hierarchical, patriarchal systems” occurs primarily from four actions: displacing female creators with male creators, stripping Native peoples of tribal sovereignty, forcing people off their lands so that they must “curtail or end altogether pursuits on which their ritual system, philosophy, and subsistence depend” (41–42), and replacing the clan structure with the nuclear family.<sup>13</sup> She discusses the ensuing “devaluation of women that has accompanied Christianization and westernization” and how patriarchy establishes and circulates misrepresentative accounts of tribal life (202). “Consequently,” Allen writes, “Indian control of the image-making and information-disseminating process is crucial, and the contemporary prose and poetry of American Indian writers, particularly of woman-centered writers, is a major part of Indian resistance to cultural and spiritual genocide” (42). In sum, she says, if all Americans embraced “the traditions of various Native Nations, the place of women in society would become central, the distribution of goods and power would be egalitarian, the elderly would be respected, honored, and protected as a primary social and cultural resource, the ideals of physical beauty would be considerably enlarged,” and nonhuman life would thrive (211).

Before envisioning the advantages of a woman-centric culture, Woolf enumerates in *Three Guineas* the catastrophes wrought by patriarchal society. In reflecting on the question put to her of how to prevent war, she considers the causes of war and reveals the link between private and public violence: the psychological violence inflicted upon the individual within the family unit and the widespread slaughter of modern warfare. She connects the oppression of women in the home with the photographs strewn on her desk of the “dead bodies and ruined houses” of the Spanish Civil War. Woolf considers universities, the professions, and the church, bastions of male privilege whose hierarchies, ceremonies, prizes, uniforms, and specializations foment competition, jealousy, and greed, thus “encouraging a disposition towards war” (27) in women as well as men when their keeping with the status quo meets with social approbation. As Jane Marcus finds, “it is clear that Woolf did not believe that nonviolence was innate in women” (2006, xxxviii). Unlike in *A Room of One’s Own*, in *Three Guineas* Woolf “refuses to recognize or sanction the inevitability of patriarchal authority or the ‘strategic objectivity’ of patriarchal values” (Solomon 341).

In response to the letter from the barrister, Woolf offers specific suggestions for preventing war. Although England has been patriarchal for centuries, opportunities nevertheless exist for establishing an alternate society. First, women must create an entirely new educational system made not of “carved stone and stained glass, but of some cheap, easily combustible material which does not hoard dust and perpetrate traditions” (43). The new women’s college must reject anything that divides, excludes, and segregates, a principle akin to “an Indigenous philosophy of putting community before individualism” (Guillory and Wolverson 74). When joining the professions, women must call upon what have commonly been their lives’ disadvantages and apply them towards creating a more just society. Women’s poverty, chastity (by which Woolf means independence of mind), derision, and freedom from unreal loyalties—all should be marshaled in opposition to patriarchy. “[Y]ou must refuse to sell your brain for the sake of money,” she states. Also, “[d]irectly badges, orders, or degrees are offered you, fling them back in the giver’s face. (...) By freedom from unreal

loyalties is meant that you must rid yourself of pride of nationality in the first place; also of religious pride, college pride, school pride, family pride, sex pride and those unreal loyalties that spring from them” (97). As Solomon observes, Woolf shows how women’s existence on the margins of society enables them to “subvert and restructure” it (342).

Finally, Woolf urges women to exercise the power of abstinence to effect change: abstain from subscribing to newspapers that encourage war, abstain from any war efforts such as nursing or the manufacturing of weapons, and abstain from joining any profession that privileges material gain over human dignity. If patriarchal society cultivates and unleashes selfishness and violence, women must create a Society of Outsiders, working with patriarchy when striving for the same goals, such as avoiding war, but from the outside, not from within. Such are the “passive methods” Woolf proffers “for protecting culture and intellectual liberty” (117). In fact, she cites several newspaper reports indicating that the Society of Outsiders exists already—in the Mayoress of Woolwich’s refusal to “do as much as darn a sock to help in a war” (137); in women’s sports leagues whose rules forbid bestowing a “cup or award of any kind to a successful team” (137); and in the “paucity of young women” (139) attending church.

Some find Woolf suggesting that women collectively opt out of society altogether—a dubious and unlikely prospect. Jane Marcus sees Woolf “stretched to the limit” in *Three Guineas*: “While her attacks on middle-class professional men were right on target, her hopes for an alliance of all the alienated workers and disaffected women of all classes were not fulfilled,” she writes (2006, liii). Briggs sees a “sense of frustration and helplessness” throughout the book, “a recognition that some problems might have no solutions” (328), manifest, for example, in a question Woolf poses after enumerating the steep obstacles facing women who seek societal change: “Had we not better plunge off the bridge into the river; give up the game; declare that the whole of human life is a mistake and so end it?” (90). This is a hypothetical question, however, perceived as an understandable query from women burdened by a seemingly impossible task. Woolf’s implicit response to the question is “no,” for she then delves into nineteenth-century gender relations as a further means of understanding women’s present-day struggles. Briggs also believes women in the Outsiders’ Society will act “as observers rather than agents” (328), yet as aforementioned, Woolf provides guidelines for women who join the professions. “She believed that women would be the most important agents of the necessary social transformations,” writes Black (17).

Once they earn their own living, for example, women will have economic power—to the extent that “their refusal to earn [their livings] would be a matter of concern to the work master” (Woolf 2006, 132). Woolf models how a woman with money might influence society as she establishes the specific conditions under which she will contribute the guineas to those who solicit her—a women’s college, “a society to help the daughters of educated men to obtain employment in the professions” (51), and the barrister’s peace society. “Since you, too, are asking for money,” she writes to him, “it might be possible to ask you, also, to define your aims, and to bargain and to impose terms” (119). As Black writes, “*Three Guineas* gives substantial attention to the role of women as actual and potential agents of change” (17), while the Outsiders’ Society shows “a number of ways in which individual women and women’s groups can transform public life” (18). Transforming public life is Andrea Smith’s goal for Native American women as well—to “‘make power’ by creating those structures within our organizations, movements, and communities that model the world we are trying to create” (2005b, 130). Despite the profound difficulties of achieving a just world, Woolf tells the barrister that the very nature of his query on how to prevent war “assure[s] us of a unity that rubs out divisions as if they were chalk marks only” and of “the capacity of the human spirit to overflow boundaries and make unity out of multiplicity” (169). Woolf would likely have concurred with Smith that “we can be



part of a collective, creative process that can bring us closer to a society not based on domination” (2005b, 131), and she affirms in her response to the barrister that developing such a process is possible: “we can best help you to prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods, but by finding new words and creating new methods” (169–70).

Reading *The Sacred Hoop*, we see no need to create new methods, for models already exist in Native American gynocratic ideals, which, as Allen writes, “value peacefulness, harmony, cooperation, health, and general prosperity, systems of thought and practice that would bear deeper study in our troubled, conflict-ridden time” (29). In *Three Guineas*, Woolf also demonstrates that pacifism and the prevention of war can only prevail in tandem with respecting women. Both writers envision a female-centered worldview leading to a more just society for women, men, and all living beings, for as Woolf reminds her male interlocutor, “Scarcely a human being in the course of history has fallen to a woman’s rifle; the vast majority of birds and beasts have been killed by you, not by us” (9). Allen’s poem “Molly Brant, Iroquois Matron, Speaks” (1988, 13) similarly notes non-Indian destruction of the environment:

All that is left is not so precious after all—  
great cities, piling drifting clouds  
of burning death, waters that last drew breath  
decades, perhaps centuries ago,  
four-leggeds, wingeds, reptiles all  
drowned in bloodred rivers of an alien dream  
of progress. Progress is what  
they call it. I call it cemetery,  
charnel house, soul sickness,  
artificial mockery  
of what we called life.

Both Woolf and Allen bear in mind the well-being of all life forms.

There exist further key and illuminating differences among *A Room of One’s Own*, *Three Guineas*, and *The Sacred Hoop*, such as their consideration of anger in women’s writing—when anger serves as an appropriate response to oppression or when the suppression of anger constitutes a more effective rhetorical strategy. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf lauds Jane Austen for “writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching” (67) and states that anger compromises a woman’s artistic integrity—her primary criticism of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. When one finds the anger blazing across Brontë’s pages, Woolf writes, “one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly” (69). Solomon finds such a stance problematic, for Woolf’s condemnation of “anger wherever she finds it—in herself or in others ... rall[ies] behind the flag of ‘objectivity’ ... [but] ignores a crucial factor: ‘objective’ values and standards are the creations of male-dominated social institutions” (334). Conversely, Laura Marcus suggests that Woolf’s fable of Shakespeare’s sister and critique of Brontë are themselves expressions of anger, while Jane Marcus believes “Woolf’s anger is directed at Haworth Parsonage, not at Brontë”—that is, directed at the restricted life Charlotte was forced to lead by her authoritarian father (1988, 132).<sup>14</sup>

In her study of anger and sentimentality in the works of nineteenth-century Native American women writers, Cari M. Carpenter states that “social proscriptions against female anger” date back to the 1800s; these proscriptions were “doubly challenging for the first published American Indian women writers” (2) as whites have conflated Native anger with “savagery” (10).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Million recounts the fierce



backlash faced by Native Canadian women who exposed in their fiction and personal narratives the horrific abuses they suffer as colonized peoples, and she quotes Emma LaRocque's take on the situation: "Our anger, legitimate as it was and is, was exaggerated as 'militant' and used as an excuse not to hear us. There was little comprehension of an articulate anger reflecting an awakening and call to liberation, not a psychological problem to be defused in a therapist's room" (Million 63). As Carpenter finds, "anger is not entirely translatable: it looks and perhaps even feels different across cultures" (8). Anger, she says, "is raced" (10)—as are readers' responses to it.

Contrary to Woolf's devaluing of women's anger in *A Room of One's Own*, Allen deems as essential the anger suffusing Native women's writing—anger that manifests "our continuing awareness of imminent genocide," she writes (155). Janice Gould also finds "pain, anger, and [a] sense of alienation inscribed in much indigenous North American women's poetry" (797) and sees these poets engaged in the same recovery work as Allen: "Our imperative is to resurrect, sometimes hundreds of years after the fact, a history that has been buried, lost, or ignored" (799). Native women's rage stems from collective historical trauma to which their poetry bears witness. But "[i]f there is sorrow and rage in American Indian women's writing," Gould, herself a poet, says, "there is also hope" (805), for poets "notice what is beautiful" and offer "expressions of hope and healing" (815).

In a chapter in *The Sacred Hoop* called "Angry Women are Building: Issues and Struggles Facing American Indian Women Today," Allen provides a concise and devastating summation of the horrors of colonization and the grievous problems facing Native Americans today. As she concludes, she asserts that Native American women "have no intention of disappearing, of being silent, or of quietly acquiescing in our extinction" (193). Rather than standing in peculiar isolation, as Woolf seems to view the anger of *Jane Eyre*, Allen and Gould highlight women's anger as existing in a constellation of emotions along with cultural and historical factors that together "embody, articulate, and share reality" (Allen 55). Similarly, Audre Lorde finds women's "well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being" (127). Such anger, she writes, "can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change" (127).<sup>16</sup>

Unlike in *A Room of One's Own*, anger plays an integral role in *Three Guineas*, wherein Woolf "was able to indulge the glorious release of letting her anger rip" (Heilbrun 1981, 21). Brenda Silver presents a case study of critical responses to the anger in *Three Guineas* along with responses to anger in feminist critical discourse overall. She finds that "the contemporary reviews on both sides of the Atlantic reveal a number of rhetorical strategies that deny the authority of the text by denying it the authority of its anger" (346). In her work on the critical reception of *Three Guineas*, Black discovers that "the most common response to *Three Guineas* specifically was that because Woolf was so well off, her anger (and her feminism) reflected some sort of psychological defect" (150). While Carpenter notes that in Native American writer Alice Callahan's nineteenth-century novel *Wynema*, "the anger that is central to the self-development of the white heroine ... is denied her Indian counterpart" and that "it is only the anger of the white woman that can be imagined" (24), Silver and Black demonstrate that white women's anger has also historically been denied or impugned. *Three Guineas* itself reveals the same dynamic, for as Hermione Lee notes, "the fight for the franchise (along with the fight for the professions) is repeatedly instanced as an example of the caricaturing of and violence against women" (277). While "Woolf's short-lived period of suffrage activism affiliated her to the suffragist rather than the more militant suffragette cause" (L. Marcus 144), Woolf rues in *Three Guineas* the press's ongoing trivialization of the suffrage movement and its tactics. "The younger generation therefore can be excused," she writes, "if they believe that there was nothing heroic about a campaign in which only

a few windows were smashed, shins broken, and Sargent's portrait of Henry James damaged.... Burning, whipping and picture-slashing it would seem become heroic when carried out on a large scale by men with machine-guns" (193).<sup>17</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, Silver finds in feminist readings of *Three Guineas* the "recuperation of anger and authority" that "identifies [Woolf's feminism] as a political position that accepts anger as part of its authority" (361): "To become angry ... becomes a political act" (362). Heilbrun locates in the anger of *Three Guineas* Woolf's "terrible daring" and a truth about "all the best, feminist writing; by its nature, it opposes what we have learned from the great art of the patriarchy, that anger is inimical to creation" (1981, 25). In addition, Winterhalter finds Woolf deliberately eliciting emotional responses such as anger in *Three Guineas*, for "publishing only rational accounts of war delegitimizes outrage at such images [for example, dead bodies and ruined houses] and casts emotional responses as something to be kept in check, something not to trust.... Woolf seems to hold that a truly ethical rhetorical position cannot be separated from an emotional one" (243-44).

Toward the end of her study, Silver considers the reluctance of white Western women to express anger in their writing due to "conventional academic discourse and the rules of rationality and propriety it entails" (368). At the same time, many erroneously assume that white feminist criticism is inherently angry, prompting Silver to ask, "What tone of voice can feminists adopt in our polemical critiques of the culture and institutions within which we speak and write?" (369). Yet she acknowledges that asking which tone (singular) of voice to adopt absorbs all women into a monolithic category—a "totalizing process" that fails to consider "the all-too-real differences of race, color, class, age, ethnicity, and sexual identity that separate women and generate conflicts among them" (369). Closing her essay, she states, "Most important is the question whether mainstream feminism can respond to the angers coming from those women perceived to be on the 'margins' without replicating the politics of authority and tone practiced by those in power when their position is threatened" (370). Bearing relevance here is Hickman's view that the "central ethical and political problem" of Woolf's 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway* "becomes not simply how to get people to 'only connect,' but how to do so in a way that won't do violence to those with whom we seek connection" (59). We might consider Butler's optimistic stance that precisely because women "cannot be totalized or summarized by a descriptive identity category, the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignifiability" (50). *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, and *The Sacred Hoop* together launch a conversation that "releases the term [women] into a future of multiple significations" (Butler 50).

Earlier, I provided an account of divergent views of feminism among Native American, First Nations, and white Western women. Woolf's rejection of the term "feminism" in *Three Guineas* also warrants attention—although, as Black states, *Three Guineas* is "explicitly feminist in spite of the denials in the text" (147). While discussing her gift of a guinea to the barrister, Woolf deems it "a free gift, given freely" (120). She then ponders the word "free" and links it with women's newfound freedoms outside the home—a circumstance in need of celebration and therefore a new ceremony: "What more fitting," she asks, "than to destroy an old word, a vicious and corrupt word that has done much harm in its day and is now obsolete? The word 'feminist' is the word indicated" (120). In Woolf's dictionary, a feminist is "one who champions the rights of women.' Since the only right, the right to earn a living, has been won, the word no longer has a meaning" (120-21). She finds the word "feminist" divisive since her goal is "men and women working together for the same cause" (121). As Christine Froula explains, "Woolf argues [that] to fight one form of tyranny must logically be to fight them all, as those nineteenth-century women activists misleadingly labeled 'feminists' were doing from the start" (34). Fighting only for women's rights perpetuates inequities. Thus "Woolf

declined to call her position ‘feminist,’” Carroll states, which “did not imply a rejection of feminist theory or politics, but a discomfort with all labels, dogma, and hierarchical or bureaucratic organization” (121). Such a stance resonates with Native American and First Nations women’s aforementioned concerns about mainstream feminism as a potentially damaging ideology. Beneath the terminology, however, we see the common goal in Allen and Woolf of achieving equity for all people.

When considering *The Sacred Hoop* and *Three Guineas* together, perhaps the most problematic among Woolf’s suggestions for women is that they reject tradition and nationhood, for achieving nationhood stands at the forefront of Native American activism. For many Native Americans, the primary distinction between the feminism of Native and non-Native women lies in the former’s promotion of cultural sovereignty first and foremost (Ross 41). “In the view of the traditionals,” Allen writes, “rejection of one’s culture—one’s traditions, language, people—is the result of colonial oppression and is hardly to be applauded” (210). Throughout *The Sacred Hoop*, Allen stresses the importance of tradition and nation in tribal life, without which no equitable society can exist. Smith also recognizes the link between nationhood and gender equity; one will not be achieved without the other, for “we must understand that attacks on Native women’s status are themselves attacks on Native sovereignty” (Smith 2005b, 123). In patriarchal England, on the other hand, traditions and concepts of nationhood foment arrogance, aggression, and the violence of modern warfare while at the same time excluding and degrading women.

“What does ‘our country’ mean to an outsider?” Woolf asks (127), for women in England were *de facto* outsiders, historically denied education, land, employment, property, and legal protection. “Thus the nationality men enjoy, rather than an advantage, is a stigma, a wound, and an embarrassment” for Woolf, writes Marian Eide (49), eliciting Woolf’s reiterated call for abstinence. Once again, she urges women in wartime to refuse to make munitions, refuse to nurse the wounded, and refuse to incite her brothers to war, instead “maintain[ing] an attitude of complete indifference” (127): no rallying cries to defeat “foreigners” because “for her [woman] there are no ‘foreigners,’ since by law she becomes a foreigner if she marries a foreigner” (128)—just as Native American women were stripped of their tribal status upon marrying white men due to United States governmental policies aimed at depleting tribal rolls and weakening tribal sovereignty. After considering woman’s place in English society over hundreds of years, women can only conclude, Woolf writes, “that [their] sex and class has very little to thank England for in the past; not much to thank England for in the present; while the security of her person in the future is highly dubious” (128), hence her declaration, “as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world” (129). Woolf articulates a sense of concurrent global female exile and belonging.

Smith appears to adopt a similar stance when acknowledging the link between feminism and sovereignty, since Euro-American misogyny led to loss of Native lands to begin with. “Before Native peoples fight for the future of their nations,” Smith states, “they must ask themselves, who is included in the nation?” (2005b, 121). While some consider issues of sexism and survival as distinct, Smith argues that decolonization efforts must address sexism. Similarly, LaRocque states, “history teaches us that it is in moments of nationalisms that we are most vulnerable not only to essentialisms/fundamentalisms, but to the disempowerment of women” (68), resonating with Woolf’s declaration in *Three Guineas* that women must take no part in “patriotic demonstrations” and reject “all such ceremonies as encourage the desire to impose ‘our’ civilization or ‘our’ dominion upon other people” (129). Smith finds “Native feminist theory and activism mak[ing] a critical contribution to feminist politics as a whole by questioning the legitimacy of the United States specifically and the nation-state as the appropriate form of governance generally” (2005b, 128). Her assertion could apply to any nation that oppresses others under the guise of patriotism and nationalism.

In exploring *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, and *The Sacred Hoop*, I hope to have shown the potential for literary and feminist studies of bringing together the voices of Native American and white Western women. Their “shared concerns may transcend racial, national, and generational differences” (Courington 245), while such differences shed light upon the impact of interlocking sociocultural facets on women’s lives.<sup>18</sup> When viewed through an intersectional or coalitional lens, sites of contestation in and among these works become sites of opportunity for fruitful, broad-ranging discourse in keeping with third-wave feminist sensibilities. Ultimately, I believe Allen would have agreed with Woolf that “[a] common interest unites us; it is one world, one life” (2006, 168) and that Woolf would have championed Allen’s assertion that “Strong women make strong nations” (30). Placing Allen and Woolf in conversation with each other might help create a better world for all of us.

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## Notes

I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of this essay as well as Vara Neverow and Erica Delsandro for their invaluable suggestions on earlier drafts.

1. In using the terms “Native American” and “American Indian,” my intention is not to paint North America’s hundreds of tribes with a single brush. Scholars such as Devon Abbott Mihesuah and Margaret Kovach resist pan-Indian approaches in their work and caution others to do the same, due to the diversity between and within individual tribes and to the risk of essentializing, appropriating, or misconstruing the experiences of “individuals outside one’s racial and cultural group” (Mihesuah 5). Yet they and other scholars note certain commonalities among Native American and First Nations cultures. Kimberly Roppolo sees “a strong Pan-Indian culture in the Americas today” arising from shared experiences of colonization as well as “syncretic spiritual experiences” (265). Mihesuah notes that while “it is preferable to refer to the Indigenous people of this country by their specific tribal names, for the sake of space” she opts for broader terms in her work on Indigenous American women (xxi). Kovach grounds her research in Cree epistemology yet also discusses Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples, cultures, and methodologies more broadly.

2. One need not look far to find such depictions today. In the *New York Times* bestseller *The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud, An American Legend*, published in 2013, authors Bob Drury and Tom Clavin write that in the mid-eighteenth century, the Sioux “transported their smallish lodgepoles and tepee skins across these rocky highlands on the backs of their dogs, women, and children—including girls as young as six or seven” (41). By the late 1700s, they write, “the Sioux were still on foot: slow, plodding travelers, lugging whatever belongings their women, children, and dog travois could carry” (51). The authors refer to Sioux women as “closer to slaves than second-class citizens by modern standards of thinking” (65) and take “a Sioux woman’s inferior status” for granted (72).

3. Guerrero echoes Allen in her “conceptualization of ‘Native Womanism’ [that] advocates for more ‘historical agency’ in reenvisioning a pre-patriarchal, pre-colonialist, and pre-capitalist US society, as well as for Native women’s self-determination in reclaiming their indigenous (that is, matrilineal/matrifocal) roles that empower them with respect and authority in indigenous governance” (67).

4. Allen embraces the productive interplay between Native American and white women’s creativity, stating, “the patchwork quilt is the best material example I can think of to describe the plot and process of a traditional tribal narrative, and quilting is a non-Indian woman’s art, one that Indian women have taken to avidly and that they display in their ceremonies, rituals, and social gatherings as well as in their homes” (243).

5. The literature on Woolf’s concept of androgyny (by scholars such as Elaine Showalter, Carolyn Heilbrun, Mary Jacobus, Kari Weil, and Laura Marcus, among others) is vast and beyond the scope of this essay to rehearse.

6. Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird, editors of *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America*, the first anthology of Native American and First Nations women's writing edited by Indigenous women, also write of the "ills of colonization [that] have visited us in its many forms of hatred, including self-doubt, poverty, alcoholism, depression, and violence against woman, among others" (21). And so they celebrate their anthology, many years in the making, for "to speak, at whatever the cost, is to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction" (21).

7. Women ought to examine "the psychology of the other sex [women] ... when you have five hundred a year of your own" (36), Woolf states. Curious about Elizabethan women, she muses, "What one wants, I thought—and why does not some brilliant student at Newnham or Girton supply it?—is a mass of information" (44–45) and observes that "It would be ambitious beyond my daring ... to suggest to the students of those famous colleges that they should rewrite history" (45). Regarding the effect of discouragement upon the mind, she points out, "Here the psychologists of Newnham and Girton might come to our help" (52). In addition, an "amusing book" might be made out of "men's opposition to women's emancipation ... if some young student at Girton or Newnham would collect examples and deduce a theory" (55), and she suggests that examining men's obsession with women's chastity "might provide an interesting book if any student at Girton or Newnham cared to go into the matter" (63).

8. Smith writes, "As a result of the Hyde Amendment, which eliminated federal funding for abortion services in 1976, IHS [Indian Health Services] cannot provide abortions unless the mother's life is in danger or the pregnancy is the result of incest or rape. Because most Native women rely almost exclusively on IHS for their healthcare, and IHS does not provide abortion services except under these limited circumstances, it is clear that the Hyde Amendment discriminates on the basis of race.... Unfortunately, this issue has not been addressed by either racial justice or pro-choice organizations. In fact, in the early 1990s, pro-choice organizations such as NARAL (National Abortion Rights Action League) and Planned Parenthood made the conscious choice to sell out the interests of Native women, poor women, and women of color when they supported the Freedom of Choice Act, which retained the Hyde Amendment provisions" (2005a, 96).

9. In *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, in 1978, "the Court ruled that Indian tribes lack the inherent sovereign authority to exercise criminal jurisdiction over non-Indian defendants" (Duthu 18). Bruce Duthu discusses this case and its ramifications at length in *American Indians and the Law*.

10. As Black writes, "Woolf never presents women's experiences as child bearers and child rearers as a potentially valuable influence on society" (191).

11. "The ring of those olden golden guineas ritually invoked by the title reminds us again and again that this civilization is based on slavery," Marcus writes, "that the English empire and its present democracy derived much of its capital power from the buying and selling of slaves and the use of their labor. We are meant to connect this fact to the patriarchal use of the unpaid labor of women" (2006, lix). Black situates the guineas of Woolf's title differently: "The guinea ... is the unit of money that a middle-class person would have used in the 1930s for, among other things, a donation to a good cause.... The guinea therefore represents women's use of economic and cultural resources to produce social change, and *Three Guineas* tells them just why and how to do so" (17–18).

12. I use the term "dialogic" instead of "dialectic" in keeping with David L. Moore's assertion, as explained by Suzanne Lundquist, that "dualistic and dialectic approaches to Indian/White deliberations are terminal—static, fixed, deadly" (Lundquist 292), while a "dialogic emphasizes ... the changeability of meaning in 'both' participants, the colonized and the colonizer, the text and the author, the text and the reader, by showing how they are not aligned dualistically but rather are surrounded by influence in a multiple field" (Moore quoted in Lundquist 292–93).



13. Smith's *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* also explains colonization's systematic dismantling of matriarchal social structures.

14. Such a reading is certainly plausible given that in *Three Guineas* Woolf criticizes Patrick Brontë outright for refusing to allow Charlotte to marry (156).

15. In "Facing the Fire: American Indian Literature and the Pedagogy of Anger," Jeffrey Berglund writes that his Native American students and colleagues are often "called angry or told not to be so angry" and that "too often, Native students are faced with two options, neither of which are satisfactory: (1) shut up and put up, or (2) be viewed as angry and militant, a prickly rabble-rouser" (83).

16. Echoing comments in *Three Guineas* and *The Sacred Hoop* that it is men rather than women who have devastated the natural world, Lorde writes, "For it is not the anger of Black women which is dripping down over this globe like a diseased liquid. It is not my anger that launches rockets, spends over sixty thousand dollars a second on missiles and other agents of war and death, slaughters children in cities, stockpiles nerve gas and chemical bombs, sodomizes our daughters and our earth" (133).

17. Janet Lyon names additional militant tactics, including "anonymous letter-box bombings, arson, golf-course vandalism ... window-smashing, assaults on policemen and politicians" (103).

18. Courington refers here to Virginia Woolf and Alice Walker (245), but I believe the sentiment applies as well to Woolf and Allen.

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