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Introducing Cultivate: The Feminist Journal of CWS
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In January 2017 an estimated **five million people worldwide took to the streets**. This 'Women's March' was sparked by the imminent inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the USA, protesting his governmental and personal politics and inspired by earlier U.S. demonstrations, such as the 1913 Suffragettes March and the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Significantly, this US women's event exploded beyond its original remit. First, people in <u>at least 137 countries</u> took part, combining protests against U.S. policies with a focus on local issues. Second, this 'women's march' took on matters far removed from narrowly-defined 'women's problems', and ranged across a whole host of human rights issues, clearly embedding feminism within intersectional activism. Despite the 'women's march' receiving <u>several critiques,</u> especially around classism and racism, as women in our 20s, it was the most public and wide-ranging embrace of feminism that we had experienced. We have both been feminists for a long time, in the US and the U.K., yet the openness and popularity of these marches and their aftermath seemed to herald a new era of feminist protest, and one we wanted to explore and extend for the first issue of *Cultivate*.

As well as being feminists, we are also women in academia, and feminist activism is part of our day-to-day lives. We view our scholarly work – making new sense of the injustices in the world, attempting to understand who holds power in what contexts and how change can be affected – as political. *Cultivate*, a journal based in a University, starts from this premise, but aims to be a space where feminist thought can be explored through alternative modes of expression. Alongside sociological, literary and interdisciplinary papers our inaugural issue includes poetry, film and visual art. We are excited by these contributions as they represent significant modes of feminist protest within and without of academia.

By definition, 'to cultivate' is to acquire or develop a quality or skill, and we are proud that our contributors are at different stages of their feminist journeys. We hope our inaugural edition of *Cultivate* will nourish and encourage this activist space. And we look forward, with you, to future issues and new visions of feminism.

Acknowledgements

The Inexpressible in Iraqi Women's Narratives of War

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Abstract

This paper examines selected extracts by Iraqi women writers of the war with Iran in the 1980s, the First Gulf War in the 1990s and the occupation of Iraq in 2003. The three wars that Iraqis have witnessed brought about a series of human tragedies which traumatized those who survived the atrocities and became witnesses to the wars. For each war, I examine a text which centers on that specific period in the lives of Iraqis. For the war of the 1980s, I will analyze Ibtisam Abdullah's story "al- Akhar fil Mir'ah" (The Other in the Mirror 1999).1 For the war of the 1990s and the subsequent sanctions I will analyze Maysalun Hadi's novella al-'Alam Naqiṣan Waḥid (The World Minus One 1999). Lutfiyya al-Dulaymi's novel Women of Saturn is chosen to represent the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003.2 The study examines the way in which the narratives resist the idea of war in a way that participates in subverting the Iraqi political propaganda of war. By bringing private experiences into the public domain, these writers create a historical narrative of a shared experience of cruelty, distress, damage and marginalization that leads to political challenges for the narratives. Their work functions as a testimony that resists war by unveiling the complexity of the history of war and its bearing on the survivors/victims.

Key Words: War, resistance, testimony, marginalization and survival

Introduction

As testimonial narratives of resistance, Iraqi women's narratives of the periods of war, sanctions, occupation and its aftermath not only critique the cruelties of the Iraqi Ba'th party and of war, but also provide future generations with an account of a history of violence, displacement and disarray. The women writers I focus on provide female civilian points of view which tackle the human suffering and agony on the home front. In the analysis of these extracts, I examine how this fiction expresses the authors' positions as "underground historians" (Steiner, 1973: 32) who, due to the restrictions and censorship of their government, are expressing "the inexpressible" (Allen, 1995: 256). My main concern is with texts critiquing war and dictatorship.

In her description of Arab women's writing, Lebanese novelist Etel Adnan refers to the way in which such writing is affected by intersecting "circles of oppression" and "circles of repression" (1982: 104). Such texts become a site for representing possibilities of resistance to political and social forms of "oppression" and "repression." What characterizes Iraqi women's narratives of war is that these narratives represent the way in which Iraqis become victims of "circles of oppression" brought about by a dictatorial regime and by wars.

The Ba'thist regime politicized historical memory in the 1970s and early 1980s and engaged in rewriting the history of the country on a scale never before seen in Iraq (Davis, 2005: 3). In an effort to rewrite history, Saddam's government tried to "cultivate ideals of honour, glory and self-sacrifice" (Benigo, 1998: 153) in order to embellish the ugly reality of war. This in turn created a discourse that promoted a view of the male as champion on the battlefront and the female as powerless on the home front. Any writing which did not conform to the Ba'thist master historical narrative was prohibited. Overt resistance to war was not tolerated by the government of Saddam Hussein. Writers who fell short of obedience were penalized or, if compliant, rewarded depending on their attitude towards the state (Mustafa, 2008: xvi). Some writers supported the Ba'th ideology out of fear of punishment. This group of writers is considered by the Iraqi critic Salam 'Abud to be an outcome of the "culture of violence" in which "Iraqi artists had either to

collaborate with the regime or go into physical or inner exile" (2002: 156). However, others developed restrained forms of resistance that kept the spark of opposition alive until the fall of the regime (Scott, 1990: 87). These writers resorted to silence and preferred to publish their work after the fall of the regime. Eric Davis argues that Iraqi intellectuals in the 1980s "subvert the state's goals by incorporating multiple levels of meanings into their texts" (2005: 11). The choice of theme and technique enabled writers to veil their anti-war attitudes so that their texts would pass the censor in a way that makes these texts particularly interesting. One of these writers is Ibtisam Abdullah whose story I have chosen here to represent the type of writing that appeared during the period of the 1980s.

Given the fact that Ibtisam Abdullah's "The Other in the Mirror" was actually published in Iraq during the 1980s, it was state-sponsored by the Ba'th regime. However, Abdullah endeavors to portray a counter image of war to the one propagated by Saddam Hussein's government. The story is told from the point of view of the unnamed female protagonist. The very first lines of the story describe how the absence of the protagonist's husband on the battlefield wears her down: "All I have learned these years is how to kill time with silence. It's a profession I began to master after he went to war. Or after he was drafted" (Abdullah, 2008: 185). The narrator's description of her gloomy state, which is not going "to change anytime soon" (185) not only indicates her desperation, but implicitly refers to the prolonged war, with no end in sight. Moreover, the protagonist's use of the word "drafted" also signifies a veiled condemnation of war in which men are enrolled against their will. The protagonist's reference to how she engages in killing time "with silence" intensifies the depressing routine of her life. The tediousness of her life is strengthened by the notion of the silence engulfing her and eradicating her facial features: "evenings and nights […] wear down my shoulders and eyelids and by night's end dim lines spread across my face. My nose alone sticks out, presiding over a landscape of features vanquished by the barriers of mute darkness" (185). The metaphor of the "mute darkness" overwhelming her refers to the death-like state that she experiences with the slow passage of the night hours. By not naming the protagonist, the writer tries to deepen the sense of the death in life that she is undergoing. By obliterating the protagonist's individual identity, the writer turns her story into a kind of everywoman's story, rather than the tale of a unique woman.

However, the lonely protagonist comforts herself by declaring that she "can put up with that," highlighting her determination to live through this difficult situation. Despite the pain that she undergoes at the slow pace of her lonely days, a faint hope reappears every now and then to rekindle her faith in a better future "that might bring something else" (186). As such, the episode above is analogous to the structure of a story which, though governed by anguish, nevertheless bears signs of relief through the narrator's focus on her ways of coping with the situation. To outlive her "crisis of survival" (Bloom, 2004: 14), the protagonist achieves an imaginary reunion with her absent husband. In the text, the narrator describes how she makes up her own ways of connecting with him in his absence: "I place his teacup on the small table in the kitchen and talk to him. Joke with him or reproach him. Sometimes I even create scenes and quarrel with him. His vacant seat always seemed filled with his presence" (185). The imaginary presence of the absent husband helps to fill the long days of waiting, but does not bring him back. This image of the presence/absence of the husband/soldier foreshadows his state of change, which I will examine later, when the actual presence of the man turns out to be a kind of absence for his wife.

As the narrative progresses, the focus shifts from the protagonist's condition to her husband's "sharper changes" (186) during his leaves from the war front. Caruth describes trauma as a "reaction to an unexpected, violent event or events that are not fully assimilated as they occur, but return later in […] other repetitive forms" (1995: 91). The repetition of the word "change" throughout the narrative always occurs with reference to the husband's traumatized state. Vickroy argues that repetition can be a sign that a character "is caught in stasis, not able to move on and resolve the initial trauma" (2015: 99–100). The insistent progression of the husband's state of change is strengthened by means of the "mirror" that he keeps holding "to

stare for long frightened moments at his face" (186). The act of staring at the mirror recurs in the text to emphasize the physical and spiritual shift in the man/soldier:

One night he gazed at his face in the mirror, but after some scrutiny
turned to me and surprised me with a question, "What has changed in
me?" He repeated the question, "What has changed in me?" "What do
you think?" "I don't know. I don't seem to know myself anymore.
A strong feeling tells me I've changed. That much I'm sure of [...] I
mean my face, my features. Don't you see that?" [...] "I don't know,"
I said. "Perhaps some paleness in the face." He [...] then whispered to
himself, "Yes, I'm sure I've changed. No, it's not the paleness. What
I mean is that I have a different face." (186)

Despite the protagonist's realization of her husband's trauma, she strives not to tell him the truth of how awful he appears, both physically and morally. Instead, she tries her best to reassure her husband and support him: "I'd still love you even if the change were for the worse. Do you hear me? I'd still love you. I don't know if he really believed me, for he said nothing [...] He turned his back to me and left the house" (187). While the protagonist tries hard to divert her husband's attention from the idea of change by showing love and care, he becomes indifferent. This intensifies my earlier suggestion that the soldier's "crisis of survival" reflects the intensity of his divided self. The enigma lies in the fact that, although he turns to his wife for reassurance, the husband is unable to believe her words. Hence, the gap between them grows.

The state of alteration the husband experiences is more generally referred to as a struggle between "the unbearable nature of an event and the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth, 1995: 7). The husband's inability to comprehend the change he feels increases the periods of silence between him and his wife. The prevalence of silence is intensified in the minimal dialogue throughout the text. It becomes confined to the subject of change and later on to that of the situation at the warfront. At the same time, the long silences which recur throughout the text turn the husband's bodily presence into a state of spiritual absence. The protagonist thus struggles with her husband's physical absence by creating his imaginary presence, and then finds herself in a position where she has to cope with his spiritual absence when he is actually physically present.

Despite her unvoiced grief at her husband's gradual deterioration, the protagonist remains hopeful that a day will come when he returns to his pre-war self. The protagonist is determined to support her husband: "I became very much the wall he needed to lean against during those times of ebb and flow that left the psyche drained" (188). The protagonist's position as a source of encouragement and reassurance is summarized in the metaphor of the "wall" on which her husband depends. The reference to a wall could be read by the censor as a symbol of Iraqi women's continuous support for the men/fighters who go to war for the sake of defending the women/land and thus serve the war propaganda. I look at the "wall" as a symbol of the way in which women overcome their "crisis of survival" and refute the propaganda about their weak position as inferior to men. The symbol of the "wall", which stands firm in the face of difficulties, signifies women's perseverance and is contrasted with the weakness of the men/fighters.

The psychological injury experienced by the husband is emphasized by his description of how he "kills" time at the battlefront: "What scares me is the lull when we are in the trenches, the silent wait when we run out of words. The silence we sometimes try to kill with meaningless words" (189). This use of "we" denotes a shared feeling of fear out of the "silent wait" the soldiers experience in the trenches during the intervals between one air-raid and the next.

The penultimate scene portrays the protagonist's failure as she tries to pull the mirror away from her husband who, in turn, tightens his grip on it: "Are you crazy? It's just a mirror," I said. "No, it's the truth" (190). The protagonist's attempt to take the mirror denotes her rejection of the truth of his change. Her act is meant to shift her husband's attention away from the change he is undergoing. As such, the mirror symbolizes the "truth" for both wife and husband. In the last paragraph, the protagonist describes her furious husband's reaction as he still clings onto the mirror: "His eyes widened and flashed. He raised his hand and threw the mirror at me. Its broken pieces flew all over the room. A long wound opened on my chest, and blood flowed between the two of us" (190).

The throwing of the mirror articulates the otherness in the husband, who no longer knows any language other than that of violence. The physical wound he inflicts on his wife signals the arrival of war in the home. She cannot hold his transformation at bay. However, while the physical "wound" of the protagonist is likely to heal, the spiritual "wound" within her husband seems to deepen. The war thus succeeds in wounding the protagonist but fails to destroy her. This is evident in the narrative structure, which begins with the protagonist remembering the events of the story unfolding alongside her husband's transformation. The testimony the unnamed protagonist provides about her ways of coping with the absence/presence state of her husband and his traumatic transformation, along with the stories he brings her from the war front, is a narrative about the history of a communal trauma. This trauma not only involves the soldiers at the battlefront but also implicates the wives, who are doomed to endure a double burden at home.

The image of the soldiers' "weakness" challenges the Iraqi government's dominant discourse of that time about the legendary Iraqi male fighter who knows no fear and is ready to sacrifice himself. The protagonist's position as a caring, loving and patient listener "not daring to interrupt," (188) lest her husband returns to his earlier spells of silence, casts her at one level into a conventional feminine, supporting role. But it also highlights her strength in coping with his damage. Since the text was officially endorsed, the presence of the censor did not stop the writer from describing the brutality of war and exposing the ways in which gender hierarchies operate.

During the second half of the 1990s, and as a result of the long period of sanctions following the First Gulf War, the hold of the Iraqi government loosened and writers became bolder in portraying Iraqi life. At this stage, their writings focused on the large-scale destruction caused by the wars and portrayed the effects of sanctions on the lives of Iraqis. Irada al-Jabburi suggests that "this situation offered more space and freedom of speech to writers who described it and were very bold in portraying the status quo in a way that brought about a type of writing called 'Kutub al-Hisar' (the sanctions' books)" (Skype Interview with Abdullah, 8 Nov. 2011). Lutfiyya al-Dulaymi describes this kind of writing as a "text of resistance" (Interview with Kurayshan, 2 Oct. 2000). Resistance, in al-Dulaymi's view, carries a double meaning in that it is not only a manifestation of clinging to life against the death brought by the US-imposed embargo, but also a resistance to the Iraqi policy of propagating war and to the tyranny of the ruling system.

Maysalun Hadi's The World Minus One expresses this resistance. Yet, the text escapes censorship. Sarmak argues that Hadi is one of a handful of Arab writers who have made great use of the wars to change their oeuvre in a way that has produced "a resistant, humanitarian and creative type of writing in the age of crisis" (2004: 13–14). In The World Minus One, two parents lose their only son, 'Ali, in the war. Because the body was left unburied, the father cannot be sure of his son's identity and is overwhelmed with doubts about whether he is burying the wrong body.

In this text, Hadi destabilizes the notion of the "martyr." The term "martyr" was officially used in Iraq to label any soldier killed in the war zone while fighting the Iranians. Saddam's statement that "Martyrs are the most generous" was found everywhere: on street corners, on school walls, university gates, on the radio and on television as part of the regime's attempt to elevate the death of Iraqi soldiers and to promote the idea of a just war against a savage enemy.[3]

In Hadi's text, the theme of death gains a complex meaning through showing the human body as degraded to the level of an animal's carcass in the awful smell it produces. In the text, when 'Ali's father approaches "'Ali's" corpse to check, "the smell […] sickens him" (Hadi, 1999: 17), and when the corpse is taken to Baghdad to be readied for burial, someone says: "no shroud is required […] the martyr is buried wearing his military uniform" (20). At the same moment 'Ali's father feels that the corpse smells like a "fatisah (decayed carcass) […] left over by the side of the road for days" (21). The fact that the body has been left for three weeks without proper burial evokes in the father the image of a dead animal left unattended. The juxtaposition of "the martyr" with the olfactory image of the disgusting "smell" and the recurrence of the word fatisah throughout the text refutes the notion that death in war has sanctity and places the deceased in the position of a rotten carcass, for which a fast burial is the best remedy. This idea contradicts the Islamic story of what happens to the corpse of the martyr.[4]

The concept of the "martyr" is further challenged by Hadi through the image of worms attacking the dead body. When 'Ali's father hears the news of his son's death three weeks after the aeroplane accident, he thinks: "three weeks are not enough time for the armies of worms to attack his son's body" (15). This thought references an "ordinary" death, since the bodies of "martyrs" supposedly do not decay. The image of the worms keeps recurring in the father's mind whenever the idea of opening the tomb after burial occurs to him. 'Ali's father's paradox stems from "the intricacy of the recurring images" (Lifton, 1991: xi) that haunt his mind and become almost "incomprehensible" (Caruth, 1996: 6). He believes that, once he attempts to open the tomb, he will face a body "wasted away by worms and humidity" (44). 'Ali's father realizes that it is nearly impossible to try to re-check the identity of the corpse in the cemetery as it decomposes. This means that he will never be certain whether the body in the ground is his son, a fact that leaves open the traumatic paradox of his survival. This "continuing predicament" (Bloom, 2004: 14) is furthered by the constant presence of the absent 'Ali in the mind of the father, who soon realizes that he is not alone in his suffering.

The World Minus One not only critiques Saddam Hussein's manipulation of the concept of the martyr to serve his war agenda, but also criticizes the Iraqi regime's practice of silencing grief. As the war in Iraq grew fiercer and more casualties were brought back home, the Iraqi regime put restrictions on mourning ceremonies because these would instigate social gatherings. The point was to hide the human cost of war from view. Black placards were allowed outside martyrs' houses, with the name of the martyr and the date of his death on them. These placards were not permitted to stay outside the house for more than two weeks (Whittleton, Muhsin and Hazelton, 1986: 248). Tony Walter suggests that "emotions have to be suppressed if the war effort is to continue" (1999: 132). The silencing of grief is thus constructed as a national necessity in wartime. Yet, this practice in Iraq could not hide the growing number of black placards, along with women in black mourning dresses everywhere in the country, denoting more war victims. In the following excerpt, the mourning customs begin when "'Ali's corpse" is brought to his parents' house. The novelist describes the way in which the neighbourhood women show their sympathy towards the family of the deceased:

Rapidly, the house is crammed with them, the men and women of
the vicinity. One woman comes in with a torn dress, another with
pulled hair and a third one with a mournful sound. All women cry
with the names of their sons. All sons are martyrs. All are distant and

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will be present at this noisy, peaceful, scorching and crazy funeral
wedding. (18)

The distress of 'Ali's family overwhelms the women of the neighborhood, who express their sorrow with a traditional act of lament. The sight of the coffin propels the women into hysterical cries, in which each cries out the name of her son. The loss of 'Ali becomes the women's loss as well, as they try to call back their own sons who are "martyrs," "distant" or missing, and 'Ali's name mingles with all the other names. The novelist's juxtaposition of the contrasting images of the "noisy" and the "peaceful" atmosphere with that of the "crazy funeral wedding" suggests that the solemnity of the death event is overcome by the crazy dances of women, who produce sounds which reverberate and overwhelm everybody around them, as is the case with wedding parties.5

The mourning gathering lasts for three days. Women and men, family and friends visit the family of the deceased to present their condolences. The women condolers "look similar to one another […] in their groans, the memories they bring about the dead one […] and the way they call 'Ali's mother's tears down" (23). The black dresses of the women, the manner in which they sit and the way in which they recall the dead person happens every time these women visit a bereaved family for consolation.

Besides helping 'Ali's mother to get rid of her sorrow, the women make use of 'Ali's funeral to grieve over their own bereavements. The collective crying of the women at the funeral and the neighborhood women shouting and dancing at the arrival of the dead body imply a group performance of lament. The same performance and the same lament recur in other houses, leading more and more women to join in this universal mourning that works against all attempts to silence it.

By describing the ugly face of war under strict censorship, the writers of the narratives of the 1980s and 1990s are thus located as underground historians who strive to record history in a way that does not conform to the Iraqi regime's endeavor to rewrite the country's history. The idea of the narration of history from an underground position is also evident in the narratives of the 2003 US Occupation. In al-Dulaymi's Women of Saturn, the basement where the central character hides from the explosions outside is depicted as a place that tells the history of Baghdad through the old documents she finds there.

In the aftermath of the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, and the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003, resistance in women's writings took a different approach. During this period, writers were engaged with representing the new period of desolation, violence, destitution and uncertainty for Iraqis. From the very first days following Saddam's removal, anarchy and disorder triumphed in the streets of many Iraqi cities, especially Baghdad. Saddam's presidential palaces, ministries, hospitals, factories, homes, schools and shops were plundered. Burkemen argues that the burning of the National Library of Baghdad destroyed the library's archive of thousands of manuscripts, books, and Iraqi newspapers (2003: n.p.).

The act of burning books symbolizes the large-scale destruction of libraries and cultural symbols in Iraq immediately after the US military invasion. The attack on the cultural resources that connect the Iraqi people to 7,000 years of history, "is part of the process of systematically destroying their national identity" (Martin, 2003: n.p.). As such, the burning of books echoes past acts of cultural annihilation conducted by the Mongols in Iraq, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the Nazis and the Allied troops in Germany, who used books as fuel for barbecues during World War II (Knuth, 2006: 179). Knuth suggests that the vandalizing of libraries is a kind of "libricide" committed by extremists on the grounds that books and libraries are sources of adversarial principles which they despise (2006: 201). The novel thus becomes an act of

historical preservation, documenting actual events in fictional form and thereby continuing their memories.

In addition, the religious and tribal groups that came to the fore "opened the gates to retribalize and resubordinate women" (Efrati, 1999: 171). Throughout the period of occupation, different religious extremist groups became infamous, either in their resistance to the occupation, or in terrorizing the population by carrying out random acts of killing. In many instances, ethnic cleansing and revenge stood behind the rape and killing of women. Sectarian killings of men led to the displacement of families from their homes into refugee camps inside Iraq and increased the numbers of households headed by women (al-Jawaheri, 2008: 144).

In her novel Women of Saturn, al-Dulaymi uses Saturn to represent Baghdad during the post-occupation phase. In the text, Saturn is described as "a dark jinxed male planet that is cold and barren […] Saturn's misfortune lasts for 30 years followed by 30 more years of good fortune" (2010: 136). The association between Saturn's qualities of misfortune, darkness, death and sterility over "30 years" alludes to the succession of wars during the 1980s, 1990s and 2003. During the post-occupation period, conditions worsened for women: "women are pursued by the US marines, the armed men, the fundamentalists, the militias and the officials" (100). The features of Saturn and the situation of women during wars justify the correlation made in the title between women and Saturn.

During periods of military conflict, Hayat leaves her room and descends to the house's underground cellar that acts as a shelter not only for Hayat but also for her women friends, Manar, Rawiyah, Halah and the French journalist Prisca Bernard. "They nearly live with me in our house, the women's house" (42). Years before, this basement was a hiding place for Hayat's uncle, Sheikh Qaydar, who went missing while looking for his wife, kidnapped in the aftermath of 2003. Qaydar's love for Baghdad urged him to "embark on a manuscript project in which he chronicles Baghdad's history during the 19th and 20th centuries accompanied by his lute" (27). In the basement, Hayat finds papers by Sheikh Qaydar in which he describes the decades of devastation that Baghdad witnessed.

Describing Baghdad, Hayat states: "Baghdad is eating its people up and my death is only a question of time. What is time? What is death? And what is Baghdad? A ghoul? A massive pot? A giant black hole that would devour itself?" (100). During the war years of the 1980s and 1990s, most deaths took place on the warfront and sometimes on the home front as a result of an enemy air raid on civilian targets. In 2003, and the years that followed, the possibility of death increased due to the US marines, militia groups, extremists, thieves and explosives. This suggests that Hayat is in confrontation with death in Baghdad. The rhetorical questions regarding "time" and "death" portray the uncertainty that overwhelms Iraqis as to their destinies. Living in a state of disarray and fear of the unknown that can "devour" one's life at any minute is equivalent to a state of death. The vision of Baghdad as "a ghoul" symbolizes the killings and lawlessness which triumphed during the post-occupation period and undermines the US government's claims about its endeavor to "spread the seeds of democracy in Iraq" (Sourcewatch.org, 2013: n.p.). The allusion to Baghdad as a "black hole" recurs in the writings of Hayat's uncle, where the destiny of Baghdad is suggested in a prophecy about the city, which seems to have fallen under the bad omen of Saturn.

Although Hayat finds refuge in her basement, she still "imagines the murderers lurking beyond dawn […] Evil strolls around to ridicule us, it frequently masquerades to become a rocket, a bearded man, an explosive or a betraying friend" (10–11). The idea of the "evil" that roams abroad signifies the hardship of survival in the midst of anarchy. In the text, Hayat is targeted during the burning of the neighborhood's library, during which unidentified men pile up books in the front yard of the library by "throwing encyclopedias, dictionaries and books of history from the upper windows of the library, spraying them with gasoline and setting them on fire. I dashed

towards the fire shouting and screaming: 'Why? Why? What you are committing is haram, haram'" (34). Haram is an Arabic term which means forbidden. The use of the word haram in Islam refers to a sinful deed which is forbidden by Allah. Acts which are haram are typically prohibited in the religious texts of the Quran and the Sunnah. The category of haram is the highest status of prohibition.

The depiction of Hayat frantically running to save the looted library is the antithesis to the act of burning and plundering the library. Ironically, Hayat uses the word haram to stop the looters, who use the same word whenever they threaten women. The looters' indifference to Hayat's cries reflects their double standard in dealing with what is haram. Their criminal acts blur the lines between what is and is not haram. While they commit their crimes under the banner of haram, the plunderers do not consider the damaging of the library and the books to be religiously prohibited deeds. Instead, they go even further in attempting to kill Hayat:

I was shot before reaching the building, probably by one of those who
started the fire, or he might be a member of the same group which sent
me a threatening letter […] I infrequently regained consciousness
at the noise of the blasts and the bullets around me. The pillagers were
engaged in taking away computers, cabinets, office desks, heaters
and air conditioners. They thought I was dead, and so did the bearded
armed man who desired a corpse in the darkness under the charred
mulberry trees […] I was so weak that I couldn't scream when the
necrophiliac groped my body, lifted my bloody shirt […] when his
fingers reached my blood-soaked jeans […] I woke and yelled in
madness. I scratched his face, pushed him away and grabbed his leg. He
uttered a dreadful gasp and disappeared. I was unconscious afterwards.
(35)

Silencing Hayat is intended to prevent her from documenting the history of Baghdad and from testifying to its destruction. Her shooting constitutes an escalation from the threatening letter she previously received because of her work in journalism. The image of the "bearded necrophiliac" in his attempt to assault Hayat is ironic. The beard suggests that this man is a religious figure who, the text implies, violates the religious law he is meant to uphold. This image is significant in its relation to the concept of haram. In religious terms, the acts of shooting, looting, and the burning of the library are haram and so is the "bearded" man's assault. The text thus offers a sustained critique of the death of moral and religious values articulated through the violations in which these men engage. This is also related to the description of Saturn as a "male planet" responsible for the calamities inflicted on women.

By relating narratives of past and present torture, Hayat presents a counter story to the dominant political discourse. Hayat's narrative has become, in al-Dulaymi's words, "a text of resistance" (Interview with Kurayshan, 2 Oct. 2000) to all forms of dehumanization as they were experienced under Saddam Hussein's government and sustained by the US forces. Hayat narrates because she feels that there are crimes that must not be forgotten and there are "victims whose suffering cries less for vengeance than for narration" (Ricoeur, 1988: 189–191).

Conclusion

In representing human suffering, Iraqi women novelists of war realize their moral responsibility as historians towards the victims/survivors. The writers of the 1980s and 1990s have breached the barriers of censorship to rise above their fear of punishment (Grace, 2007: 189). By empowering women characters and by portraying the human tragedy, the texts troubled the gendered Iraqi policy against women and undermined the dominant discourse of war as glory. The writers' evaluation of the conflict places their work within the context of a critique of the

history that is the source of the conflict. This produces changes to the ways in which history is conceptualized and narrated.

By analyzing the traumatic experiences of women, the author who writes about the occupation in 2003 displays the impact of war on civilian life and reveals "the other side of the invasion in a way that undermines the one-sided illiberality of the mainstream media and White House political speeches" (Mehta, 2010: 81). Building on biographical experience, the writer produces a record "which is almost impossible to counter by the US occupation" (Zangana, 2004: 143).

The movement between past and present in the texts creates a sense of circularity in the narratives, where the present duplicates the past and gives an impression of the rewriting of a narrative of history. Hayat asserts that "The country is overburdened with stories and we have to keep narrating them" (65) since narrating these stories is a weapon against the annihilation of memory practiced during the post-occupation period in Iraq. In the texts, narration turns into "a constant obligation to the woes of history" (Felman, 1990: 115). Narrating the collective experience of victims and of Baghdad as a wounded space is an attempt to recreate a collective memory of Iraqi society so as to do justice to both the living and the dead. Contemporary Iraqi women's fiction of war embodies women's artistic responses to that context and offers testimonial accounts of history from the home front by women who are resisting the Iraqi regime's attempt to rewrite history and to silence grief. It suggests that gender roles are challenged and resisted, and that this is done from a female perspective.

Notes
1. Ibtisam Abdullah's short story "al- Akhar fil Mir'ah" ("The Other in the Mirror") is from her anthology Bakhur (Incense 1999). The story was written in Arabic and translated into English by Mustafa Shakir.

2. Maysalun Hadi's The World Minus One is published in Arabic. The excerpts used in the analysis of the novella, along with the excerpts from Lutfiyya al-Dulaymi's Ladies of Saturn, are translated by the author.

3. Sons or brothers/sisters of martyrs were awarded bonus points in the examinations taken during the final year at school on which admission to university depends.

4. Shahid is the person who sees and witnesses, and he is therefore the witness, as if he is the martyr. A martyr in Islam is a true believer who sacrifices himself willingly in defence of his religion, his country and the honour of his family. God supposedly honours martyrs and places them in higher ranks in paradise. They are buried in the same clothes they were wearing when they died. Due to their distinguished rank, their bodies supposedly do not decay, and good smells emanate from their corpses. (See al-A'araji, 1997: 168-172)
5. In most cases, women console each other by shouts, cries, and the recitation of lines of poetry which lament the dead person and describe the best qualities of the dead. This is mostly accompanied by breast-beating, the tearing of clothes and hair-pulling to express their deep sorrow and distress.

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Biography

I was born in Mosul, Iraq. I had my Bachelor degree in Arabic-English translation and Masters in English Literature from Mosul University in 1992. I worked as a translator and lecturer of Comparative Literature and World Literature in Iraq, Jordan, Yemen and Oman (1995-2009). I had my PhD in Women's Studies from Centre for Women's Studies, University of York in 2015. Currently, I work as a part-time lecturer of Advanced Arabic and translation at the Department for Continuing Education, University of Oxford.

I am a co-translator of a recently published book on Iraqi artist Firyal al Adhamy's sculpture Don't Unveil My Colours A Country Sleeps There. In addition, I am in the process of publishing my PhD thesis into a book.

The paper I am presenting is based on my thesis "Contemporary Iraqi Women's Fiction of War" where the writers' experiences of war, my personal experience as a witness and victim of war and those of the characters in the texts I analyse intermingle to produce an endless story of survival.

Email Me

Words of Resistance: Women's Writings and Feminist Reading Practices

Natália da Silva Perez

Introduction

This essay is an invitation for feminist readers to actively engage in "reweaving the tapestry" of women's intellectual history.[1] I start by tracing a sketch of how the expectation that women should remain silent arose in Western cultures: my examples range from antiquity to the early modern period, and come from diverse linguistic groups, illustrating that the trope of silence affects women all over the Western world. I subsequently proceed to show that this is not simply a literary trope affecting works of fiction: it can have drastic consequences for our understanding of women's roles in history. Anybody—including scholars—can be influenced by a discursive horizon within which women are expected to have no voice. Next, I discuss a few concrete strategies that feminist scholars have used in approaching historical evidence about women's lives, highlighting some of the benefits afforded by such strategies. In conclusion, I emphasise that writing and reading are entangled practices, and invite readers to take full responsibility for their roles in the process of making meaning from texts by women from the past.

Women's Silence: A Brief History of a Trope

Women in Western[2] cultures live under the weight of a tradition commanding that they remain silent in public. For classical scholar Mary Beard, our imagination is permeated with "a long line of largely successful attempts stretching throughout Greek and Roman antiquity, not only to exclude women from public speech but also to *parade* that exclusion."[3] Consider, for example, the excerpt below:

Mother, go back up into your quarters, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff… speech will be the business of men, all men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household.[4]

This is an extract from The Odyssey selected by Mary Beard to show young Telemachus disrespecting his mother Penelope in front of a crowd of her unwelcome suitors, after she had asked a bard to stop playing a sad song "about the difficulties the Greek heroes are having in reaching home."[5] It shows the act of silencing a woman as ingrained in the process of turning from boy to man, helping to constitute discursive aggression, and its celebration, as part and parcel of an ideal of masculinity.

Stories like this one from *The Odyssey* are part of a long tradition that has repeated and even celebrated the exclusion of women from public speech;[6] they became an important aspect of beliefs that, over time, helped calcify women's discursive exclusion into a societal norm. Stories of silencing the voices of women, or of punishing women for using their voices in public, were repeated and reinforced: Penelope, Antigone, Echo, and Philomela come to mind as a few examples of this common trope. The utterance, repetition, and iteration of the story of silencing women has gradually over time bled power and authority from women's speech.

If women were supposed to be excluded from public debate, it follows that formal education would be considered futile for them.[7] There exists evidence from Hellenic culture showing that some women received an education and knew how to read, but the evidence also shows that women were far less likely than men to be educated.[8] The topic of women's education was quite often discussed by influential figures, and most of these intellectual men, with the exception of Plato in the Republic, were not very enthusiastic about educating women. If education for women was defended, it was in a qualified manner. Classical scholar Susan Ghettel Cole summarises:

Plato advocated equal education for women in the Republic, and even after retracting some of his more radical ideas on other subjects, still speaks in the Laws of educated women (658d). Theophrastos, two generations later, says that instructions in letters is necessary for women, but he qualifies his statement by saying that instruction should be limited to those items which are necessary for running a household. He says that intensive study makes women "lazy, babbly, meddlesome" (Stobaeus IV, 193, no. 31 Meineke). An unknown writer of New Comedy is far more spiteful. He says that teaching women letters does no good: "It's just like giving venom to a viper!"[9]

The long Greco-Roman tradition that curtailed women's right to speak in public came, eventually, to be entangled with Christianity.[10] In this context, it is not surprising that a particular Bible verse attributed to Paul the Apostle became a point of focus for the organised church:

Mulieres in ecclesiis taceant non enim permittitur eis loqui sed subditas esse sicut et lex dicit.

[Let women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak but to be subject, as also the law saith.][11]

A particular interpretation of this verse acquired prominence: it came to mean a strict directive for women to be silent.[12] This interpretation helped to discourage women from engaging in public speech in Christian societies, regardless of whether the context was the church or not. And, in such societies, female virtue came to be conceptualised as chastity, which required modesty.[13] If women aspired to be virtuous, they had to be chaste, and thus modest. In order to be considered as such, they needed to pay attention to their bodily behaviour and stay away from the public eye;[14] they should not participate in public debate, and hence they could not exercise a political voice. To do so, they needed to appear in public, and that would be interpreted as immodest.[15] Ancient Greek, Roman, and Christian traditions have performatively contributed to the process of siphoning women off, away from discursive authority. The long tradition of repeating that women must be silent influenced the process: there are other biblical verses encouraging women's education, but they have not acquired nearly the same weight as the Mulieris Taceant.

Women have nonetheless always resisted these cultural norms restricting their intellectual activities. In the Western world, perhaps one of the most famous manifestations of such resistance can be found in Le Livre de la cite des dames (The Book of the City of Ladies), written in 1405 by Christine de Pizan. Here, Pizan imagines herself responsible for building an intellectual fortress for women, a place where women can be free and safe to learn, write, and live. In this allegorical first-person story, Pizan must herself undertake the enormous endeavour of building a city of ladies. For that, she receives the help of her learned and virtuous foremothers, wise and generous women who give Christine the physical, emotional, and intellectual support that she needs to build the fortress, helping her to strengthen her confidence in the abilities and virtues of her own sex.

In *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Pizan explains her motivation to write this story, referring to how she had felt devastated by the fact that so many of the scholarly accounts she had consulted spoke vehemently against women. Her own experience of the company of other women had taught her something completely different from what the scholars said, and she could not understand this contradiction. At first, fictional Christine says she felt slandered, discouraged; then she confesses that she started to doubt her own experience of women. She started to consider whether those scholars, who she had thought to be slanderers, might be right. She writes:

Mais j'eus beau tourner et retourner ces choses, les passer au crible, les éplucher, je ne pouvais ni comprendre ni admettre le bien-fondé de leur jugement sur la nature et la conduite des femmes. Je m'obstinais par ailleurs à accuser celles-ci, me disant qu'il serait bien improbable que tant d'hommes illustres, tant de grands docteurs à l'entendement si haut et si profond, si clairvoyants en toutes choses—car il me semble que tous l'aient été—aient pu parler de façon si outrancière, et cela en tant d'ouvrages qu'il m'était quasiment impossible de trouver un texte moral, quel qu'en fût l'auteur, où je ne tombe sur quelque chapitre ou paragraphe blâmant les femmes, avant d'achever la lecture.[16]

[No matter which way I looked at it and no matter how much I turned the question over in my mind, I could find no evidence from my own experience to bear out such a negative view of female nature and habits. Even so, given that I could scarcely find a moral work by any author which didn't devote some chapter or paragraph to attacking the female sex, I had to accept their unfavourable opinion of women since it was unlikely that so many learned men, who seemed to be endowed with such great intelligence and insight into all things, could possibly have lied on so many occasions.][17]

Christine de Pizan writes that she had almost begun to be convinced that her efforts towards acquiring knowledge were in vain, perhaps even laughable. She started feeling alone in her desire to write and to pursue knowledge; she found no written authoritative account that could corroborate her own life experience. She describes how she felt affected by a sense of ridicule regarding her intellectual ambitions. Experiencing ridicule planted in her mind the seed of self-doubt; it began to inculcate in her the sensation that, because she was a woman, she was not as intellectually capable as a man. If Christine had given in to this self-doubt, this feeling could have suppressed her curiosity, her intelligence, her desire to write. But she looked into her own life experience and questioned this ill-feeling. She started resisting these received accounts about women—her real-life evidence contradicted them—and she observed that all of those speaking ill of the female sex were in fact men. Perhaps if more women could have a chance to be heard and demonstrate their intellectual capacity, such unfavourable opinions would not be so prevalent. She took up that task, in fiction and in reality.

For fictional Christine, the imaginary fortress of the City of Ladies served as a defence mechanism for women. For the real-life writer Christine de Pizan, *The City of Ladies* was her poetic argument in favour of women's intellectual capacities. The Book of the City of Ladies is both a fictional safe space, and a real genealogy of women intellectuals, leaders, artists, and creators. While presenting the fictional story of this space of solidarity, where any woman could feel entitled to be an intellectual without the fear of isolation, violence, or ridicule, the book also provides the reader with a list of learned, virtuous, and courageous women whom Christine de Pizan wanted to celebrate.

Another French writer, the 17th-century Madame de Villedieu, also demonstrated a longing to celebrate through her writing the accomplishments of other women. In the first part to Les Annales galantes de la Grèce, published posthumously in 1687, she explains to her readers that, without stories about women, the portrait of the Greek nation would remain only half-way complete. Her book represents her small effort to redress this incompleteness:
… il me semble que les nations étant composés des deux sexes, on ne peint la Grèce qu'à demi, quand on peint que les grands hommes; ajoutons quelques traits à cette peinture et disons aujourd'hui quelque chose des dames.[18]

[… it seems to me that, nations being composed of two sexes, Greece is only halfway portrayed when we only paint great men; let us add some features to this painting today and say something about the ladies.][19]

Three centuries after Madame de Villedieu made this remark, and more than five and a half centuries since Christine de Pizan wrote The Book of the City of Ladies, another woman writer grappled with the desire to hear more about other women. On 22 January 1981, Marguerite

Yourcenar gave her acceptance speech at the Académie Française as the first woman to be welcomed among its members. In her speech,[20] she wondered how it came to be that she was receiving this honour, how it came to be that her male peers welcomed her to the Académie, but not one single other woman before her. Yourcenar seemed sceptical about this exceptionalism. Many women writers, she felt, should have been there much earlier, but she was the first one. Accompanied only by the shadows of other women writers, Yourcenar said in her speech that she felt "tempted to become invisible to let their shadows pass."[21]

Writing in 17th-century New Spain, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was also a fierce defender of women's right to intellectual pursuits. In a famous letter that she wrote in defence of her right, as a woman, to pursue secular studies—the Respuesta de la poetisa a la muy ilustre Sor Filotea de la Cruz—she historicises the above-mentioned biblical verse *Mulieris Taceant* by Paul the Apostle. Based on the historical and theological sources available to her,[22] she explains to her readers that, in the period when Paul was writing, it was common for women to study together on church premises, so he was simply commanding them to be silent during the service. She rebuts the common practice of church authorities of evoking the verse *Mulieris Taceant* to justify barring women from education, arguing that the dictum had been historically misinterpreted due to misinformed "grammarians":

Todo esto pide más lección de lo que piensan algunos que, de meros gramáticos, o cuando mucho con cuatro términos de Súmulas, quieren interpretar las Escrituras y se aferran del Mulieres in Ecclesiis taceant, sin saber cómo se ha de entender.[23]

[All this calls for more study than some people think, who as mere grammarians, or at most with four summary terms, want to interpret the Scriptures and invoke the *Mulieres in Ecclesiis taceant*, not knowing how it must be understood.][24]

According to Sor Juana's reading of Paul's texts, he in fact encouraged women to learn, and she provides support for this assertion by indicating the existence of another passage in the Bible where he refers to the potential for experienced women whose behaviour is saintly to be good teachers.[25] Her effort to contextualise the interpretation of the dictum indicates that she understood it as having been co-opted by church political authorities to keep women from studying.

In fact, in Sor Juana's opinion, this very attitude of some church authorities went against Paul's own teachings, resulting in an even more infelicitous situation. With so few educated women, there were also very few women teachers, so girls were educated by men, and that could be considered a threat to modesty. If there were more women capable of teaching, Sor Juana contends, Paul's teachings would be more easily followed, and women could be educated by other women, in all chastity. Sor Juana mentions a plethora of examples of wise and knowledgeable women who used their skills for good:

…veo a una Débora dando leyes, así en lo militar como en lo político, y gobernando el pueblo donde había tantos varones doctos. Veo una sapientísima reina de Sabá… Veo tantas y tan insignes mujeres: unas adornadas del don de profecía, como una Abigaíl; otras de persuasión, como Ester; otras, de piedad, como Rahab; otras de perseverancia, como Ana, madre de Samuel; y otras infinitas, en otras especies de prendas y virtudes…[26]

[I see Deborah arbitrating militarily and politically, and governing a town where there were so many learned men. I see a very wise queen of Sheba… I see so many distinguished women: some endowed with the gift of prophecy, like Abigail; others with that of persuasion, like Esther; others with piety, like Rahab; yet others with perseverance, like Anna, mother of Samuel; and infinitely many others, gifted in other qualities and virtues…][27]

Notice how Sor Juana, intelligent and eloquent, had to make a careful effort to frame her defence of women's right to education by using the voice of a church authority, cautiously toeing the

line that circumscribed the gender roles of her time. She used this as a strategy to be heard by the authorities that surrounded her.

Throughout history, women have often been caught in situations where they had to invoke prejudices against their own sex in order to advance their needs. An example of this is the case of Mercy Harvey, an English woman who lived in the 16th century. In 1574, a married nobleman was flirting with Mercy, who herself belonged to the middling sort, and she was far from certain of the honesty of his intentions. It seems that Mercy wanted to judge it for herself, but she knew her brother Gabriel might intercept her correspondence with the man. To circumvent that danger, Mercy asked the nobleman to disguise his letter to her by signing it in her own name, as if it were from her to her brother, and to add plausibility to it, the handwriting should look bad, like her woman's handwriting was assumed to look:[28] "write thus in the backside, in a small raggid secretary hand, —To mie loving brother, Mr. G.H., on of the fellowes of Pembrook hall, in Cambridg."[29] We only know of all this because Mercy Harvey's brother indeed got hold of the letter, and copied it into his commonplace book,[30] otherwise, it is unlikely that her writing would have been preserved. As a woman who did not belong to the elite, Mercy Harvey took advantage of the fact that she was not recognisable as someone who would receive a letter to correspond with her secret lover.

Women have always intervened in society, yet their interventions keep passing under the radar; they have always participated in the public sphere, yet their participation has been glossed over. If we consider storytelling as a practice that enables the making, validation, and communication of knowledge, it is important to consider whether the tropes of silence that we have inherited from history might have a more serious, more concrete implication for women's lived experience.

Repercussions of the Trope of Silence

I argue that this old trope has contributed to silencing women in real life, since it has played a part not only in stories, but also in history, and consequently in historiography. Take, for example, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,[31] in which Jürgen Habermas theorises about the discursive dimensions of power dynamics. In this book, he posits that the public sphere is where political decisions are influenced by those who have stakes in those decisions. Although he provides us with a useful model to think about the role of socio-cultural forces for the history of democratic spaces, this book is also a blatant example of how particular gender-blind historiographical approaches can have the effect of distorting the role of women and even erasing them and their experiences from history.

Habermas proposes that a transformation of the public sphere started to take shape with bourgeois society in the 18th century, helped by the advent of newspapers and national media, although its seeds had already been planted a little earlier:

A new form of the representative publicness, whose source was the culture of the nobility of early capitalist northern Italy, emerged first in Florence and then in Paris and London. It demonstrated its vigour, however, in its assimilation of bourgeois culture, whose early manifestation was humanism; the culture of humanism became a component of courtly life.[32]

Women, however, are erased from the picture due to certain biases in how Habermas developed his model. First of all, there is a normative bias that views political decisions as influenced chiefly by "rational" debate:

Only after national and territorial power states had arisen on the basis of the early capitalist commercial economy and shattered the feudal foundations of power could this court nobility develop the framework of a sociability—highly individuated, in spite of its comprehensive

etiquette—into that peculiarly free-floating but clearly demarcated sphere of "good society" in the eighteenth century. The final form of the representative publicness, reduced to the monarch's court and at the same time receiving greater emphasis, was already an enclave within a society separating itself from the state. Now for the first time; private and public spheres became separate in a specifically modern sense.[33]

Habermas also has a geopolitical[34] historical bias. In an article entitled "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World," Nancy Fraser lists some of the unwarranted assumptions in Habermas's model. She discusses some problems that arise from his Eurocentric analysis of the formation of a public sphere. According to Fraser, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere assumes the following:

1) a modern state apparatus that exercised sovereign power over a bounded territory…,
2) the participants in public-sphere discussion [are] fellow members of a bounded political community…,
3) a principal topos of public-sphere discussion [is] the proper organization of the political community's economic relations…,
4) [the association of] the public sphere with modern media that, in enabling communication across distance, could knit spatially dispersed interlocutors into a public…,
5) that public-sphere discussion was fully comprehensible and linguistically transparent…,
6) the cultural origins of the public sphere [are] the letters and novels of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century print capitalism… [grounding] the structure of public-sphere subjectivity in the very same vernacular literary forms that also gave rise to the imagined community of the nation.[35]

Throughout history, there have always been cultural pressures that have helped to shape political dynamics. But this process is quite messy, certainly not purely rational, and contextually contingent. The example of women is telling. Indeed, as we have seen, although women have not been very welcome in legitimated public debates throughout history, they have managed to carve some space—however contingently and painstakingly—to make their needs and ideas heard. Numerous studies[36] show that The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere presents a skewed picture of societal communication. Naomi Tadmor puts it succinctly: If Habermas presented the public sphere as bourgeois, modern, male, secular, rational, and structured essentially around the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, current scholars portray it as popular, early modern, wrought with religious debate, … crossing gender boundaries, and active since the early seventeenth century or even since post-Reformation debates.[37]

Since the publication of this seminal book, other scholars have developed other conceptual models, and Habermas himself has revised his thinking on the subject,[38] to account for the multiplicity of types of public spheres that come into conversation, as well as to account for the problems that arise from being excluded from those public spheres that are more legitimated than others. But, for the sake of my argument, one thing we can learn from the example of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere is that, not only do scholars play a critical role in interpreting the terms of discourse within culture, but they are also inevitably influenced by the discursive horizon authorising their interpretations. And a possible consequence of this is that historical explanations of the delegitimisation of women's engagement in discourse in society end up serving as the means by which the problem is perpetuated.

We always contrast what we learn with what we already know;[39] either in a specialised or in a lay context, there is always a danger of subsuming the new into the old. The problem with this common human tendency is that it serves as a gatekeeper: it lets certain ideas pass, but not others. We are accustomed to engaging in studies of women of the past in the terms that sound most familiar, and the idea that women were kept away from the public sphere is certainly familiar. Since writings by women of the past are not well known by the wider public, the

frameworks available to talk about their writing is most commonly academic. When they are not academic, they are "translated" in terms of what is known by the wider public, and generally that means relating the work of women to that of men of the same period. This primes us on *how* to think about women writers, and consequently limits *what* we might think about them. Take, for example, the case of Virginia Woolf's fictional character, Judith Shakespeare.

In A Room of One's Own (1929), Woolf imagined a woman writer, Mary, who herself imagined another woman writer, Judith Shakespeare. Mary pondered the material conditions that can allow a woman to sit down and write: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."[40] In this nested storytelling, a woman who had privileged conditions to write is writing about another woman who has the same privilege imagining another woman who does not have this privilege. An important point of the story is how difficult it was for Mary to even imagine what the lives of women were like in the Elizabethan period. Mary says: "Let me *imagine*, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say."[41] Even when Mary went through the trouble of trying to research women in the Renaissance in the library, there was simply very little information about them, and to her that was "deplorable."[42] All that was available to her about early-modern women came from books written by men.[43] Based on the information she found, Mary was only capable of imagining someone like Judith Shakespeare—an abused woman who cannot pursue her intellectual talents and ends up committing suicide.[44] This is all that Mary can speculate upon[45] based on what men gave her as the 'facts' about Elizabethan women.

These 'facts' that give rise to the character of Judith Shakespeare in Mary's imagination also help shape her as a tragic heroine: she is William's fictional sister, she is as talented as her brother, and her talents are tragically wasted because of the living conditions that women purportedly experienced during the Elizabethan period. There is irony in Virginia Woolf's formulation, an irony that stems from, and at the same time supports, her critique of the paucity of richer historical accounts about women. The character of Judith Shakespeare sounds familiar: we recognise her not only because she stems from the pen of Mary who stems from the pen of Woolf, an important, real woman writer, or because she shares a last name with an immediately recognisable, canonical writer; Judith Shakespeare's story also has the right arc, towards doom. It is recognisable on many levels. Part of Woolf's point was to highlight the fact that it was difficult for a woman writer to learn about women's history, precisely because of the male bias in the few accounts that were available to Mary at the library.[46] Woolf did not denounce this problem directly, though: she told a story that implied this denunciation. Woolf's irony works because Judith Shakespeare is a product of Mary's meagrely fed imagination: it requires this context given within the story.

The problem with the figure of Judith Shakespeare travelling outside Woolf's text and standing as shorthand for women in the early modern period is that we lose Mary, and then Woolf's nuance is lost. If in her research Virginia Woolf's Mary could have learnt about Christine de Pizan, perhaps she would not have imagined that Judith Shakespeare's destiny was necessarily suicide. We now do know about women like Christine de Pizan, Sor Juana, Mercy Harvey, Louise Labé, Madame de Villedieu: we do know about women who wrote despite being encouraged otherwise, we know of the multiple uses they made of their education. What might our scholarly accounts look like if, instead of thinking through a metaphor like that of Judith Shakespeare, we thought through the stories of Louise Labé, or Mercy Harvey, or Sor Juana, or Madame de Villedieu?

Reweaving the Tapestry: Strategies for a Feminist Reading Practice

Lisa Jardine brings our attention to the need to constantly conceive of alternative models to think with, especially when the subject matter concerns gender.[47] She recognises that the interplay between history and historiography can have serious consequences. In "Unpicking the Tapestry: The Scholar of Women's History as Penelope among her Suitors,"[48] Jardine discusses the problem of women's authorial voice by invoking a concrete example from her own

discipline of history. She mentions the reaction of a male historian to Natalie Zemon Davis's book The Return of Martin Guerre (where he challenges what he sees as speculation on Davis's part), and interprets his reaction as an act of questioning not simply the plausibility of Davis's portrayal of Bertrand de Rols, but of the very authority of Natalie Zemon Davis as a historian.[49] Jardine even jokes that "One woman's fact is another man's fiction."[50]

The problem of conducting research on women's history is not simply one of a paucity of evidence, but that the evidence that does exist tends to be interpreted within an already established framework, often tainted by male-centred bias. Since the 1960s and 1970s, feminist scholarship has managed to draw attention to this problem, and has worked to counter it.[51] Feminists indeed have been working hard for women to be recognisable as knowledge-makers in their own right. Today, women are active in many realms that were almost unthinkable just 60 years ago, but they still have to make concessions, as they had to do in the past. These concessions are so commonplace that I can't help but think of Paulo Freire: Do women need to struggle just to step on the other side of the privilege line?[52] Is it really true that women must wrest from men the right to use their voices?[53] As we can see, the question is not only one of history, of course, but also of historiography. Feminist historians have been contributing studies that provide support for a shift in perspective, an effort that Lisa Jardine herself acknowledges and contributes to:

Fortified with the great wealth of 'incremental women's history', which has recovered and enriched our understanding of women in past time, we must now begin again to reweave the unwoven tapestry, reweave our ruptured historical narrative again and again in pursuit of that new history in which women's and men's interventions in past time will weigh equally… It is not yet clear to me where that new historical narrative will lead, but it will surely take us away from the continuing of women's history within the traditional discipline of which all of us are all too aware.[54]

We need to start weaving a different tapestry, as Lisa Jardine suggests. Without Mary, we must let go of Judith. I say that we need to recruit other stories, other existing knowledge, to formulate other, multiple metaphors that allow us to imagine and speak about women from the past in their true diversity.[55] As historian Hayden White explains, "events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motivic repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies…"[56] A scholar uses the same tools as any other storyteller in order to build a world in the imagination of the reader. Linguistic tools, like metonymy and metaphor, serve to build frames, mental spaces that allow us to understand ideas that are new to us in terms of things we already know.

Texts written by women who lived in the past, much like those written today, reflect not only their author's own ideas at the moment of writing, but also the general contexts[57] in which these texts originated.[58] The existence of a cultural attitude of discouragement did not keep women from thinking, writing, having ideas—unlike what Virginia Woolf's Mary was led to believe in her fruitless search at the British Library. On the contrary, in fact it encouraged some women to fiercely resist the silence imposed upon them.

However, we have also seen that, in order to carve out their space in the public sphere, women have often had to abide by tacit rules that only recognise them as creative beings insofar as what they create is comparable to standards imposed by a male-oriented tradition. Women's strategies have been to improvise with what was available,[59] but it is not always straightforward for those of us encountering their texts in the 21st century to understand their contingent strategies.

It is along an axis of temporal dimension that social rituals, community rules, and tacit conventions congeal and form something that we perceive as common sense.[60] Judith Butler argues that "one 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognised, but, in a prior sense, by being

recognizable."[61] Being recognisable is a matter of conventions[62] which, as Butler explains, come about as "the effects and instruments of a social ritual, often through exclusion and violence."[63] For these conventions to emerge, acquire their status as legitimate, and function as a structure through which communication can take place in society, they require time. Like other conventions, discursive practices also acquire legitimacy over time, with repetition. Butler also advances another hypothesis: that language has a certain power to injure.[64] Throughout her work, she tries to come to grips with what exactly constitutes this injury.[65] Thomas Laqueur, in his exploration of the history of discursive constructions of sex, remarks that "[t]he fact that pain and injustice are gendered and correspond to corporeal signs of sex is precisely what gives importance to an account of the making of sex,"[66] pointing to a similar interplay between words and material reality as the one suggested by Butler. For Karen Barad, "[d]iscursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements."[67] Statements are not meaningful in isolation; they acquire different meanings within the wider cultural context where they are interpreted; that is to say, the cultural context shapes the horizon of acceptable discursive practices at a given historical moment. If the hypothesis that the use of language has the power to injure has any bearing, perhaps a converse hypothesis could also be plausible: the use of language might be a good defence against such injury, or at least a counter measure.[68]

These two hypotheses taken together suggest that women are placed in a position of vulnerability when they are discouraged from engaging in public speech. Throughout history in the Western world, an insidious cultural surveillance has affected women's ability to participate in the production of knowledge and culture and, when they have participated in this production, the discursive horizon has hindered the validity of their contributions to knowledge and culture by constraining the interpretation of their works. Moreover, having had less access than men to education and intellectual creative practices throughout history,[69] women have been deprived of the tools to effectively communicate their own experiences and insights: their situated knowledges.[70]

Conclusion

The tropes that reinforce the idea of women as silent have helped to stall the contribution of women as a group to our collective imagination.[71] Because our collective imagination remains impoverished of stories in which women are able to counter the prevailing discursive violence to which they are subjected, we are primed to believe that women are indeed less able to do so; we are primed to more easily recognise women as discursively helpless, with no authority.

With painstaking effort, women throughout history have fought to be recognised as authors, and in many cases have managed to be recognised as such. But if, generation after generation, those women who are recognised as authorities are constantly branded as the exception, women in general remain unrecognisable, even as individual women are recognised. For those of us interested in engaging in a feminist reading practice, one of the crucial tasks is to pay attention to the intellectual activity of women on their own socio-historical terms. Resistance through writing also requires resistance through reading.

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Footnotes

[1] Lisa Jardine, "Unpicking the Tapestry: The Scholar of Women's History as Penelope among Her Suitors," in *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (Taylor & Francis, 2005).
[2] Although there are practices of silencing women in non-Western cultures, the performative process through which these practices came to be is not the same as in Western cultures. Thus, I will refrain from generalising the causes. Nonetheless, the effects of negating women's public voices are just as problematic.
[3] Beard mentions passages from Aristophanes, Ovid, and others to demonstrate the efforts that were made to ridicule the idea that a woman might speak in public. Later in the essay, she shows that ridicule was not the only tactic, as violent images of cut tongues and murders abound as metaphors for the silencing of women. Mary Beard, "The Public Voice of Women," *London Review of Books*, 20 March 2014.
[4] Quoted in Beard.
[5] Beard.
[6] For an account of this type of practice in philosophy, see Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Routledge, 2002).
[7] Even Juan Luis Vives, an early modern pedagogue who was favourable towards women's education, feels the need to carefully justify the specific contexts and ways in which this education should happen. See particularly the preface to Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[8] For her study of women's literacy in Ancient Greece, classical scholar Susan Ghettel Cole explains that she defines literacy "as knowledge of the alphabet and the ability to write one's own name and to read simple formulaic expressions." Her findings indicate that "generally speaking [...], it is clear that literacy is not universal in antiquity, that the level of literacy varies from place to place and from time to time, but in all places women are less likely to be literate than men." Susan Guettel Cole, "Could Greek Women Read and Write?," *Women's Studies* 8, no. 1/2 (January 1981): 129.
[9] Cole, 137.
[10] Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* provides a compelling discussion of this history. See in particular Chapter 2, where she discusses the examples of Philo, Augustine and Aquinas, who "attempted to harmonise Judaeo-Christian theology with Greek philosophy. Their use of male-female symbolism to describe Reason occurs in a context of interpretation of the Genesis stories of Eve's subsidiary creation out of Adam's side, her subordination to Adam, and her role as temptress in his fall." p. 22.
[11] "First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians," in *Latin Vulgate Bible*, chap. 14: 34, accessed 2 August 2015, http://www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=1&b=7&c=14.
[12] King and Rabil Jr. trace the long-lasting negative interpretation of these verses to Tertullian (On the Apparel of Women), Jerome (Against Jovinian), and Augustine (The Literal Meaning of Genesis). Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., "Editors' Introduction to the Series," in *The*

Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), xiv.

[13] For example, Juan Luis Vives writes: "A woman's only care is chastity; therefore when this has been thoroughly elucidated, she may be considered to have received sufficient instruction." Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, 47.

[14] Modesty and chastity were explicitly conceived as types of bodily behaviour, and Margaret L. King cites a particularly relevant example of this: "Barbaro described the bearing proper in a woman: 'I therefore would like wives to evidence modesty at all times and in all places. They can do this if they will preserve an evenness and restraint in the movements of the eyes, in their walking, and in the movement of their bodies; for the wandering of the eyes, a hasty gait, and excessive movement of the hands and other parts of the body cannot be done without loss of dignity, and such actions are always joined to vanity and are signs of frivolity. Therefore, wives should take care that their faces, countenances, and gestures… be applied to the observance of decency. If they are observant in these matters, they will merit dignity and honour; but if they are negligent they will not be able to avoid censure and criticism.' Laughter is to be eschewed: 'This is a habit that is indecent in all persons, but it is especially hateful in a woman.' As for women who talk too much, 'Loquacity cannot be sufficiently reproached in women,… nor can silence be sufficiently applauded." Margaret L. King, "Daughters of Eve," in *Women of the Renaissance* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 40.

[15] Margaret L. King, "Virgo et Virago: Women and High Culture," in *Women of the Renaissance* (University Of Chicago Press, 1991).

[16] Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de la cité des dames* (Stock, 1986), 36.

[17] Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (Penguin UK, 1999), chap. 1.

[18] Marie-Catherine Desjardins Villedieu Madame de, *Annales galantes de Grèce* (Claude Barbin, 1687), 3.

[19] My translation.

[20] "Discours de Réception de Marguerite Yourcenar | Académie Française," accessed 6 May 2016, http://www.academie-francaise.fr/discours-de-reception-de-marguerite-yourcenar.

[21] My translation. "Discours de Réception de Marguerite Yourcenar | Académie Française."

[22] George O. Folarin and Stephen O. Afolabi, "Christ Apostolic Church Women in Dialogue with 1 Corinthians 14 34 36," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 33, no. 1 (February 8, 2012), https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v33i1.731; D. W. Odell-Scott, "Editorial Dilemma: The Interpolation of 1 Cor 14:34-35 in the Western Manuscripts of D, G and 88," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2000).

[23] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, "Respuesta de La Poetisa a La Muy Ilustre Sor Filotea de La Cruz," 1691.

[24] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (my translation).

[25] "Anus similiter in habitu sancto, bene docentes." Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

[26] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

[27] My translation.

[28] Heather Wolfe, "Women's Handwriting," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[29] Quoted in Eve Rachele Sanders, "She Writes," in *Gender and Literacy on Stage in Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 166.

[30] Sanders, 165.

[31] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (MIT Press, 1991).

[32] Habermas, 9.

[33] Habermas, 10.

[34] See Fraser's discussion of Habermas' assumption that nation-states are based on the Westfalian model. Nancy Fraser, *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

[35] Nancy Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World," in *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 11–12.

[36] For overviews, see John L. Brooke, "Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29, no. 1 (June 1998): 43–67; Andreas Gestrich, "The Public Sphere and the Habermas Debate," *German History* 24, no. 3 (August 2006): 413–30.

[37] Naomi Tadmor, "Revisiting the Public Sphere and the History of the Family," in *Vänskap Över Gränser: En Festskrift till Eva Österberg* (Lund, 2007), 217; quoted in Eva Osterberg, *Friendship and Love, Ethnics and Politics: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern History (The Natalie Zemon Davis Annual Lectures)*, vol. 1 (Central European University Press, 2010).

[38] For a theoretical approach, see Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (MIT Press, 1998); for an overview of different historical approaches, see Brooke, "Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere."

[39] See Benjamin K. Bergen, *Louder Than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning* (Basic Books, 2012), chap. 8 for a discussion of the role of context and environment for human understanding.

[40] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1977), 7.

[41] Virginia Woolf, 52 (my emphasis).

[42] "But what I find deplorable, I continued, looking about the bookshelves again, is that nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century. I have no model in my mind to turn about this way and that." Virginia Woolf, 50–51.

[43] "Professor Trevelyan is speaking no more than the truth when he remarks that Shakespeare's women do not seem wanting in personality and character. Not being a historian, one might go even further and say that women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time—Clytemnestra, Antigone, Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Phedre, Cressida, Rosalind, Desdemona, the Duchess of Malfi, among the dramatists; then among the prose writers: Millamant, Clarissa, Becky Sharp, Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary, Madame de Guermantes—the names flock to mind, nor do they recall women 'lacking in personality and character.' Indeed, if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater. But this is woman in fiction. In fact, as Professor Trevelyan points out, she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room." Virginia Woolf, 48–49.

[44] Woolf writes: "This may be true or it may be false—who can say?—but what is true in it, so it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty." Virginia Woolf, 55–56.

[45] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie would say that Mary has fallen prey to the dangers of a single story. And Adichie would add that "It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is 'nkali.' It's a noun that loosely translates to 'to be greater than another.' Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali: How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, 'secondly.' Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story." Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," October 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en.

[46] "A very queer, composite being thus emerges. 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." Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 49–50.

[47] Though, as I see it, the same applies to discussions of race/ethnicity, class, and other types of constitutive exclusions.

[48] Jardine, "Unpicking the Tapestry: The Scholar of Women's History as Penelope among Her Suitors."

[49] See also "Agential Realism: How Material-Discursive Practices Matter" Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), chap. 4.

[50] Jardine, "Unpicking the Tapestry: The Scholar of Women's History as Penelope among Her Suitors," 143.

[51] For different perspectives on feminist engagement with women's writing and knowledge-making practices, see the following: Margaret W. Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France*, vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 2003); Linda J. Nicholson, *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory* (Psychology Press, 1997); Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back, Fourth Edition: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (SUNY Press, 2015); Rosemarie Buikema and Iris van Der Tuin, *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture*, vol. 1 (Routledge, 2009).

[52] Paulo Freire and Myra Bergman Ramos, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum Publishing Company, 1970).

[53] Foucault asks: "Do the workings of power, and in particular those mechanisms that are brought into play in societies such as ours, really belong primarily to the category of repression? Are prohibition, censorship, and denial truly the forms through which power is exercised in a general way, if not in every society, most certainly in our own?" Michel Foucault and Robert Hurley, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, vol. 1 (Pantheon Books, 1978), 10.

[54] Jardine, "Unpicking the Tapestry: The Scholar of Women's History as Penelope among Her Suitors," 144.

[55] Commenting on Shakespeare's practice of what could today be recognised as code-switching, Michael Neill asserts that "What such restless switches of perspective do is to subject the audience themselves to unexpected forms of translation, bearing them across from a point of view to another… it is what in its most intense and extraordinary moments creates the illusion (which the discovery literature of the period never manages to supply) of crossing over into the Other, whether its name is Caliban, or Shylock, or Joan la Pucelle, or Othello." Neill goes on to conclude that "it is partly because Shakespeare more than any other writer of his period is capable of glimpsing how it might feel to inhabit the other side of the mountain that he is worth the endless labour of the form of translation that we call criticism." Michael Neill, "'The Figure of Transport': Shakespeare and Translation" (4th TEEME Conference, Paris, 2015); But we do not need to give up on the beauty of Shakespeare's texts to appreciate their partiality: each of them will never be anything but one story. As Adichie puts it, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story."

[56] Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 84.

[57] Butler conceptualises the dynamics between the author's own ideas and the cultural context in which they are inserted by building upon Bourdieu: "The habitus is not only a site for the reproduction of the belief in the reality of a given social field—a belief by which that field is sustained—but it also generates dispositions which 'incline' the social subject to act in relative conformity with the ostensibly objective demands of the field." Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (Psychology Press, 1997), 155.

[58] Laura Lunger Knoppers, "Introduction: Critical Framework and Issues," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 14.

[59] For other examples of women adapting to a discursive context centred on a male point of view, see Wendy Wall, "Dancing in a Net: The Problems of Female Authorship," in *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Cornell University Press, 1993).

[60] For a discussion of the mechanisms of shared awareness between humans from a formal logic point of view, see Morris F. Friedell, "On the Structure of Shared Awareness," *Behavioral Science* 14, no. 1 (January 1, 1969): 32–33, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1301273044/citation/CB27A0578AC54467PQ/1. Friedell formally demonstrates that "If something is common opinion, it is common opinion that it is common opinion… Public opinion, then, acts in a special way like an individual consciousness, and can be considered as a generalised Other." From there, he continues on to suggest a taxonomy of "common sense," and defines it as "that which is common opinion between typical strangers in a culture, or among all who are full participants in a culture." Finally, he explains that "Probably assumed common sense tends to be ontogenetically and phylogenetically prior to self-consciously private opinion, as awareness precedes self-awareness."

[61] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 5; See also Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*; Judith, "Merely Cultural."

[62] Butler explains: "Whereas illocutionary acts proceed by way of conventions (107), perlocutionary acts proceed by way of consequences. Implicit in this distinction is the notion that illocutionary speech acts produce effects without any lapse of time, that the saying is itself the doing, and that they are one another simultaneously." Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 17.

[63] Butler, 5.

[64] Butler writes: "When we say that an insult strikes like a blow, we imply that our bodies are injured by such speech. And they surely are, but not in the same way as a purely physical injury takes place. Just as physical injury implicates the psyche, so psychic injury effects the bodily *doxa*, that lived and corporeally registered set of beliefs that constitute social reality. The 'constructive' power of the tacit performative is precisely its ability to establish a practical sense for the body, not only a sense of what the body is, but how it can or cannot negotiate space, its 'location' in terms of prevailing cultural coordinates." Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 159–160.

[65] Butler, 159; Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*; Judith, "Merely Cultural."

[66] Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud*, vol. 1 (Harvard University Press, 1992), 16.

[67] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 146.

[68] Butler also points to the catch 22 in which the resisting party ends up caught: "Insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change." Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 163.

[69] Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France*; Natalie Zemon Davis, "City Women and Religious Change," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Polity Press, 1987); David Cressy, "Literacy in Context: Meaning and Measurement in Early Modern England," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (Routledge, 2013); Sara T. Nalle, "Literacy and Culture in Early Modern Castile," *Past & Present* 125 (November 1989): 65–96.

[70] Donna Haraway, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, vol. 1, 2000.

[71] "The collective imagination is not a kind of 'group think'. It is not the big-brother society or even the bog society. It is not the state direction or government planning. Rather it simply echoes the reality that societies as well as individuals create, and both create through the medium of paradoxical imagining." Peter Murphy, *The Collective Imagination: The Creative Spirit of Free Societies* (Routledge, 2016), chap. 6.

Biography

I was born and raised in São Paulo, but moved to Montreal at the age of 20 for a B.F.A. in Theatre and Francophone Literature. During my M.A. in Performing Arts Studies (Brussels/Seville), I started to pursue interdisciplinary research, linking my interest in theatre with a newfound

curiosity about women's history. This paved the way for my PhD (Canterbury/Berlin), which focused on the work of early modern women playwrights. My most recent work involved research on the history of women's religious rituals in the Old City of Jerusalem. Now, as a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Privacy Studies at the University of Copenhagen, I am turning my attention away from women's public voices to study the history of privacy.
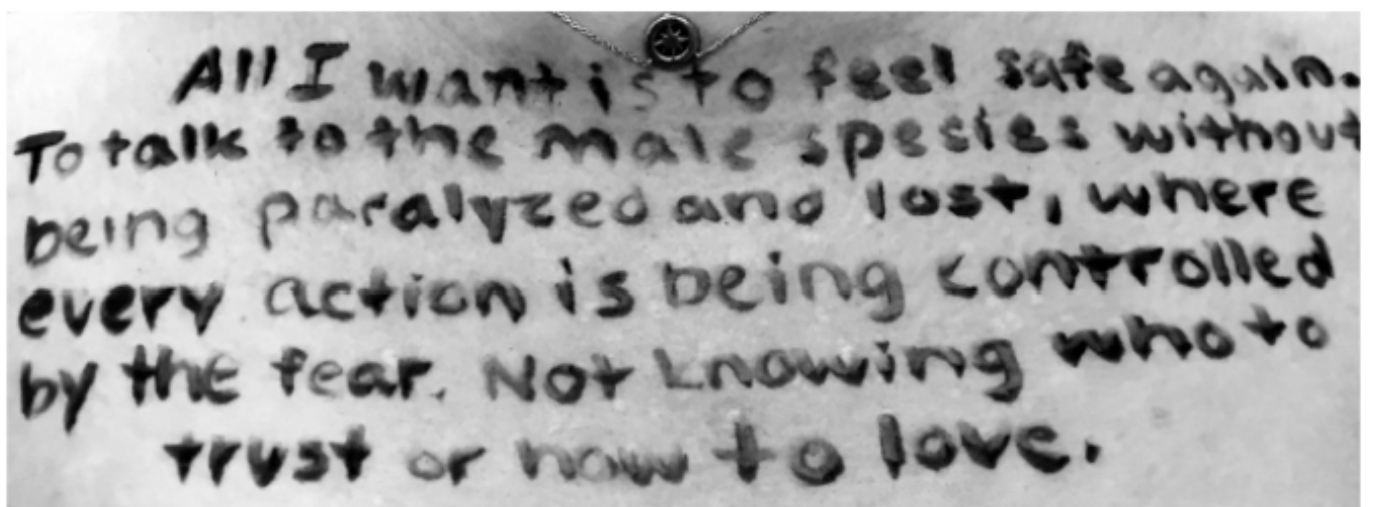
Email Me

NOT A VICTIM, A SURVIVOR

Sarah Isaacson

The following poem is a reflection of my experiences with sexual violence. To complete my artistic vision, the stanzas are written on various parts of my body and photographed. The resulting images produced are organized with their corresponding text in the following document.

All I want is to feel safe again. To talk to the male species without being paralyzed and lost, where every action is being controlled by the fear. Not knowing who to trust or how to love.

All I want is to feel safe again
To talk to the male species without being paralyzed and lost
Where every action is being controlled by the fear
Not knowing who to trust or how to love
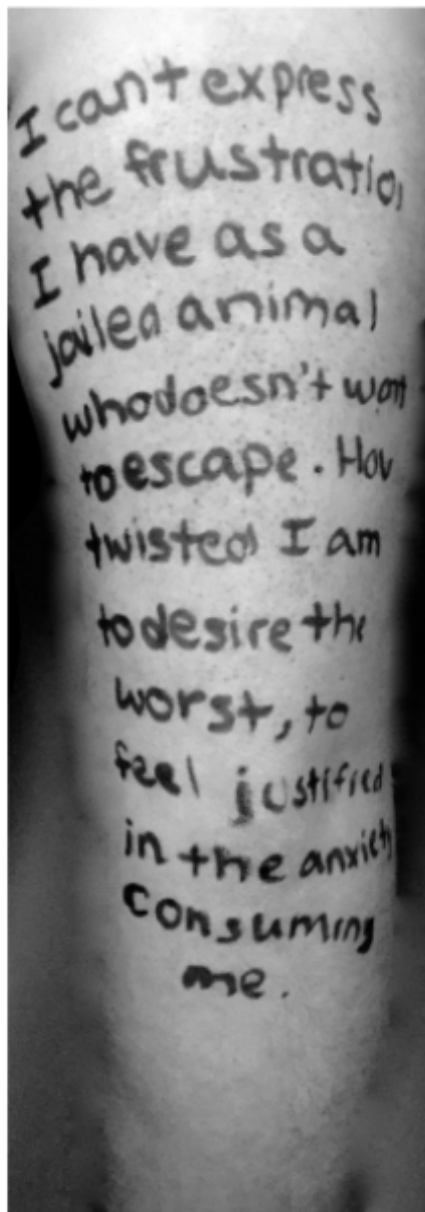
I can't express the frustration I have
As a jailed animal who doesn't want
to escape
How twisted I am to desire the worst
To feel justified in the anxiety
consuming me

It began when I was dripping wet
Wrapped in a loved dark green
towel
Much too large for my five year
old body
Fighting back tears as your
prodding burnt my skin
I think she came in furiously
yelling

But no one remembers
The hate-filled glares were not
real
Such a thing couldn't happen
It didn't happen
It didn't happen
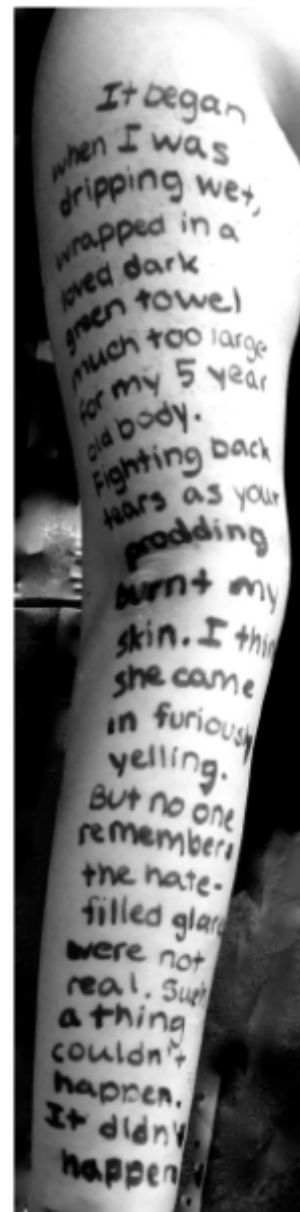
My twelve year old self kept eyes to the floor
Hyperventilating when leaving my seat is
necessary
For each time I stood you touched me
You grabbed me and sneered at my frazzled
state
You laughed and denied my accusations

You were a little boy playing man in this
game of house
Where I cooked all of our assignments
As you seized my body for your pleasuring
needs
But yet again the teacher didn't know
Because I was far too scared and weak

At fourteen all I wanted was to teach
To show these young boys their potential
But you caught me quiet and alone
It didn't matter that it was a public place
A library holding books for my escape
You circled me as your tortured prey
Luring me in with your instability
Your awkward attempts to speak with me

Her blank stare was a warning
The one belonging to the paper crane you left
But I cast her aside with the tip of my finger
To distance myself from that darkened gaze
The one that lead you to touch me
Grinning with intent to keep me quiet
The one that made me sprint with my heart in my stomach
Tears blinding my vision as I fretfully peered behind me

You were arrested but that was it
It was in the paper but no one noticed
The court dates moved and never came
You were gone but never left
I was lost without a cause to take
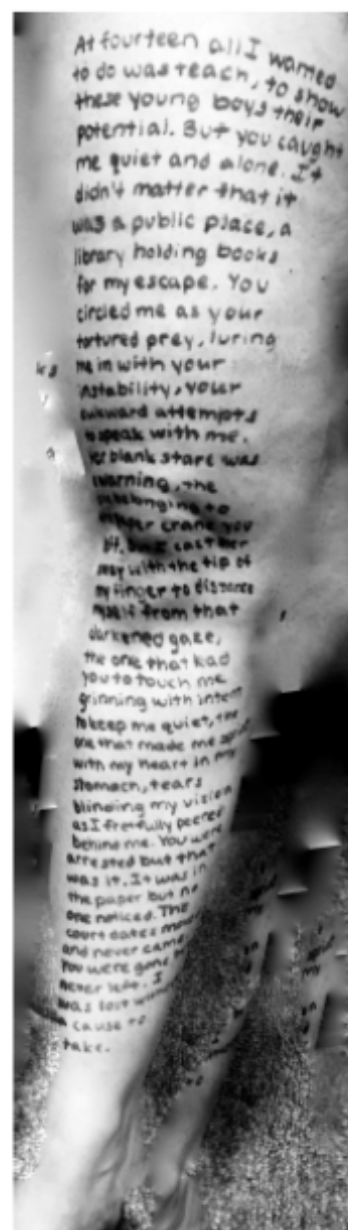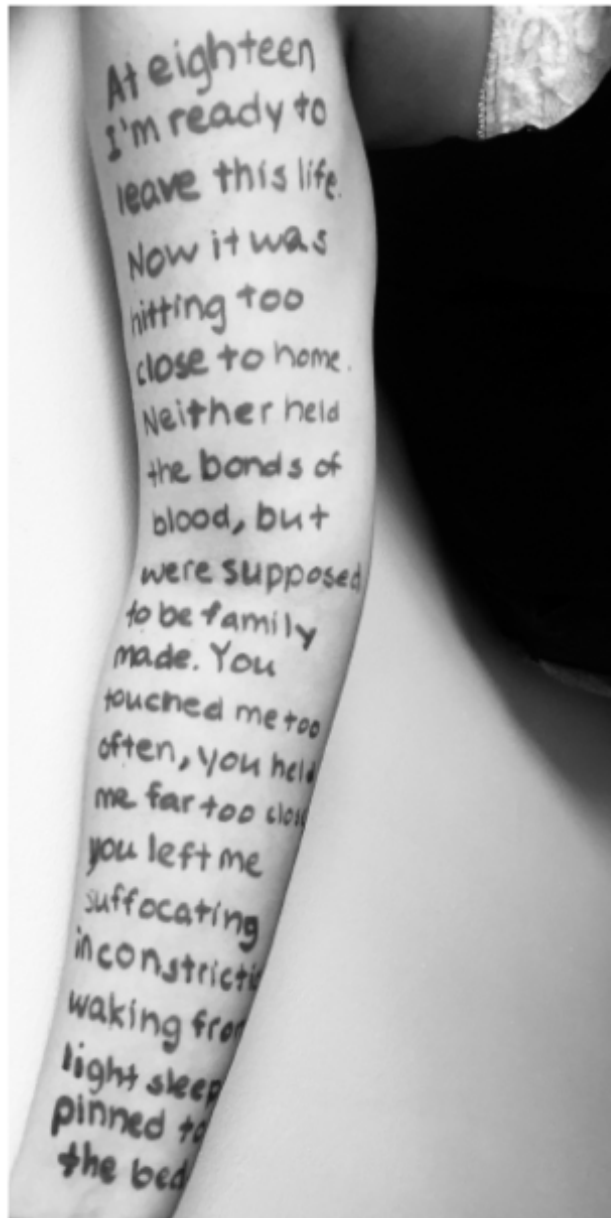
At eighteen I'm ready to leave
this life
Now it was hitting too close to
home
Neither held the bonds of blood
But were supposed to be family
made

You touched me too often
You held me far too close
You left me suffocating in
constriction
Waking from light sleep pinned
to the bed

Caught from behind
with arms held at my
side
Turning around after
that unexpected
touch
Staring at that
mischievous glimmer
in your eyes

But no one dares to
know
Maybe I'm being
crazed and dramatic
I can't be the cause of
such gross disruption
For something I
myself don't want to
accept
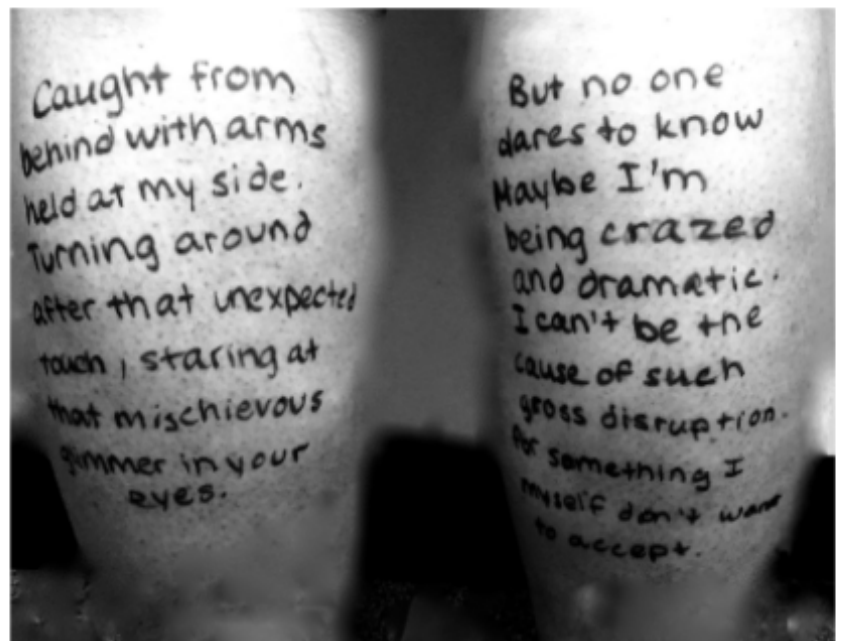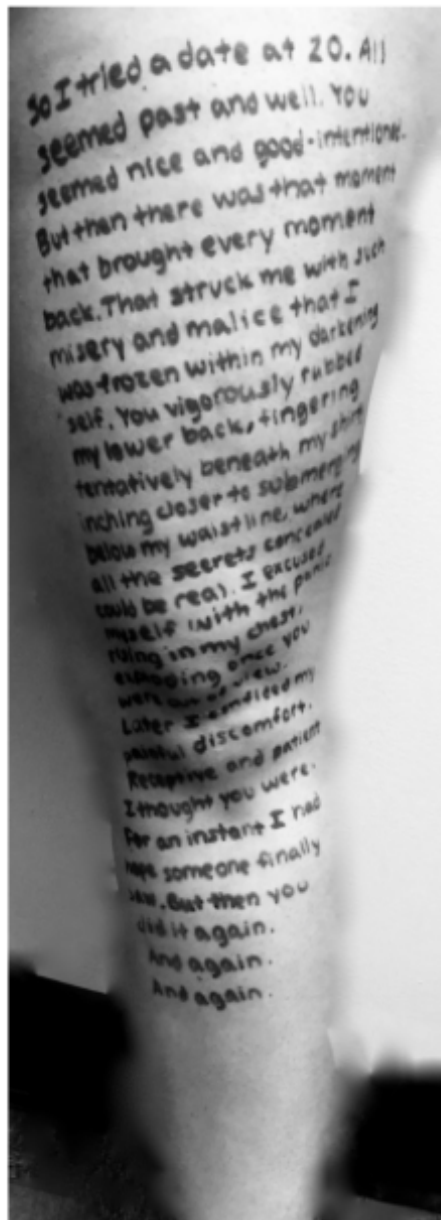
So I tried a date at twenty
All seemed past and well
You seemed nice and good-intentioned
But then there was that moment
That brought every moment back

That struck me with such misery and malice
That I was frozen within my darkening self
You vigorously rubbed my lower back
Fingering tentatively beneath my shirt
Inching closer to submerging below my waistline
Where all the secrets concealed could be real

I excused myself with the panic rising in my chest
Exploding once you were out of view
Later I confided my painful discomfort
Receptive and patient I thought you were
For an instant I had hope someone finally saw
But then you did it again
And again
And again
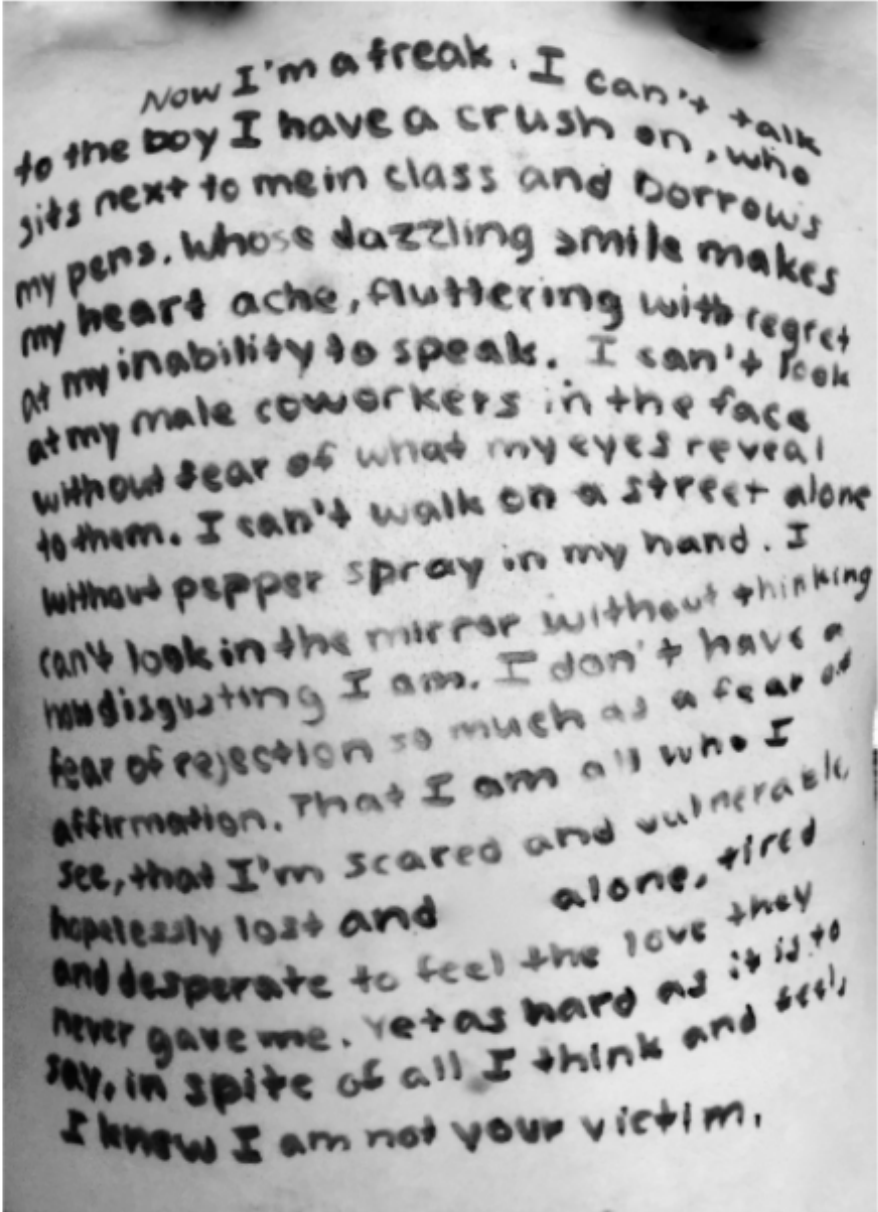
Now I'm a freak
I can't talk to the guy I have a crush on
Who sits next to me in class and borrows
my pen
Whose dazzling smile makes my heart
ache
Fluttering with regret at my inability to
speak

I can't look at my male co-workers in the
face
Without fear of what my eyes reveal to
them
I can't walk on a street alone
Without pepper spray in my hand
I can't look in the mirror without
thinking
Just how disgusting I am

I don't have a fear of rejection
So much as a fear of affirmation
That I am all who I see
That I'm scared and vulnerable
Hopelessly lost and alone
Tired and desperate to feel the love they
never gave me

Yet as hard as it is to say
In spite of all I think and feel
I know I am not your victim

Now I'm a freak. I can't talk
to the boy I have a crush on, who
sits next to me in class and borrows
my pens. Whose dazzling smile makes
my heart ache, fluttering with regret
at my inability to speak. I can't look
at my male coworkers in the face
without fear of what my eyes reveal
to them. I can't walk on a street alone
without pepper spray in my hand. I
can't look in the mirror without thinking
how disgusting I am. I don't have a
fear of rejection so much as a fear of
affirmation. That I am all who I
see, that I'm scared and vulnerable,
hopelessly lost and   alone, tired
and desperate to feel the love they
never gave me. Yet as hard as it is to
say, in spite of all I think and feel,
I know I am not your victim.

I am a
survivor

Of what you
deny is real.

Biography

(she/her) is a recent graduate of the University of Connecticut, who received her Bachelor of Arts by double-majoring in Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies and Human Rights, as well as minoring in English. Being involved in these areas of study at UConn has transformed and enriched her life, allowing her to engage in social justice through art as well as academics. During her time at UConn, she has published *Defeated* in the Namaste Human Rights Magazine, been the President of the National Organization for Women for the past two academic years, was Secretary of the Delta Alpha Pi Honor Society for students with disabilities, and acted as a Peace Corps Ambassador for the UConn Storrs Campus. She has interned with Access Community Action Agency for the past year in the Access to Employment department, where she helped develop a curriculum that utilizes new skills for under and unemployed individuals in the community. She has also studied abroad in Cape Town, South Africa, where she worked with the community of Hanover Park, whom are plagued with the gang violence and substance abuse instilled by colonialism and white supremacy, through her internship at First Community Resource Centre. All of these amazing experiences served key roles in allowing her to grow into a proud feminist and activist, as such has allowed her to discover her voice through the combined power of poetry and photography.

Email Me

Speculative fiction and resistance: stories from Octavia's brood

Ruth Kelly

Abstract

Despite their patriarchal, imperialistic and racist histories, women throughout the centuries have turned to speculative/science and utopian fiction to imagine subversive possibilities. Speculative fiction can be a tool for generating strategies and playing out possible responses to current and future catastrophes. Traditional vernacular texts, like folktales, jokes and songs allow oppressed groups to make political statements that would otherwise not be possible. Women in particular have used such genres, and modern, hybrid forms, to articulate subversive possibilities, often by retelling existing tales. Just as folktales have been retold by many storytellers, science fiction includes a rich vein of retold stories, or fan fiction. The anthology *Octavia's Brood* (2015) includes speculative fiction written by activists and closely connected to their activist practice. The authors take inspiration from the work of Octavia Butler and Ursula Le Guin to invent characters that take risks, are punished and yet have hope in the face of an uncertain future. I read these stories through the lens of Donna Haraway's essay 'A cyborg manifesto' (1991 [1984]) and Hélène Cixous' essay 'The laugh of the medusa' (1976), exploring how the stories can be seen as part of an aesthetic of resistance and the importance of aesthetic forms – notably origin stories and myths – within the stories themselves.

Speculative fiction and resistance: stories from Octavia's brood

Science fiction and utopianism are genres with patriarchal, imperialistic and racist histories; they have done much damage, particularly to women and people of colour. Yet women throughout the centuries have turned again and again to such writing (Haraway 1991, 310-315; Johns 2015; Lefanu 1988), 'seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other' (Haraway 1991, 311). Audre Lorde is well known for saying that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house (1984). But what if such tools, appropriated and transformed, are necessary for our very survival? In response to woman's experience of being diminished 'within' the discourse of man, Hélène Cixous argues that,

it is time for her to dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of … For us the point is not to take possession in order to internalize or manipulate, but rather to dash through and to 'fly' (Cixous 1976, 887).

Alessa Johns argues that utopian writing has been crucial for women for three reasons. First, 'gender equality has never fully existed, so it must be imagined if it is to become.' Secondly, given women's limited political, economic and social clout, we have turned to utopian fiction as a cultural mode that allows us to make 'a different future comprehensible to the largest possible audience.' Thirdly, utopianism offers a socially viable way of expressing deviance in a form that mirrors the writer's own situation (Johns 2015, 175).

I would add another criterion to those proposed by Johns: utopian writing, particularly science fiction, is vernacular and accessible. Unlike other writing which might be 'at once too high, too great for you' (Cixous 1976, 876), science-fiction is a genre that lends itself to retelling by its readers (James 1994, 137-147), by those who never would have imagined that they could become writers. The classification of speculative fiction as "low" culture and the well-established tradition of fan fiction, gives it particular potential to be used in interesting ways. Digital technology allows fan fiction and other writings to be disseminated quickly and cheaply, partly dodging one obstacle that Cixous identifies to her call to women to inscribe femininity, namely 'the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the craft, obsequious

relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not *yourself*' (Cixous 1976, 877).

For feminist and subaltern activists whose strategies are 'constantly thwarted by reactionary political and social forces,' utopian literature allows them to 'take time out to dream'; it 'facilitates the imaginative speculation necessary for generating new liberating strategies in globalized world' (Johns 2015, 176). Cixous argues that 'writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures,' allowing woman at once to 'unthink' and to get rid of (*dé-pense*) 'the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield', blending her personal history with all history and the story of all liberations (1976: 879, 882, emphasis in the original). For example, Johns describes how some early examples of proto-feminist utopian writing (Pizan's medieval *Book of the City of the Ladies* and Sarah Scott's eighteenth century political histories) counter historiographical theories that argue that it is great movements, leaders and nations that make history, theorising instead that smaller forces, the cumulative acts of individuals create change of which the conspicuous events are merely the results (2015, 188-189).

If 'feminist methodologies are forms of intervention, of making a difference' that allow for, among other things, dissent, dialogue and dissention ('the internal revolutions or overturnings that might afford us non-entrepreneurial opportunities or spaces for some serious play' (cf. Haraway 1991, 291)) then, Kember argues, writing is 'a pre-eminent technology of intervention' (2012). Writing science fiction certainly offers opportunities for theorising – experimenting, speculating – and for serious play. For those more used to reading books than participating in theatre, such writing may provide opportunities to engage in what Augusto Boal calls 'rehearsals for revolution' (1998 [1974], 141). While writing is a less fully embodied practice than acting, and therefore stops short of the 'concrete experience' or 'real act' that Boal argues is experienced by spectator-actors (1998 [1974], 141), writing offers the opportunity to imagine more complex and systematic alternatives that those that can be explored through theatre games. In her afterword to the 2015 science fiction anthology, Octavia's Brood, adrienne maree brown argues that writing science fiction (or speculative or visionary fiction) gives activists the space to imagine possibilities, 'challenging the narratives that uphold current power dynamics and patterns' (for theorising), as well as facilitating the development of 'emergent strategy,' allowing writers to play with different outcomes and strategies before having to deal with real-world costs (for serious play) (brown 2015, 279-280).

The anthology *Octavia's Brood* (brown and Imarisha 2015) includes speculative fiction (a genre which includes both science fiction and fantasy) written by activists and closely connected to their activist practice. *Octavia's Brood* was born out of what the editors describe as an intensive collaborative process of imagining and writing. adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha, supported by seasoned sci-fi editor Sheree Renée Thomas, invited activists, educators and community organisers to take part; for many of them this was their first time writing fiction. brown and Imarisha took their ideas and initial writings and, through many rounds of edits, worked with the writers to help them create compelling and visionary stories (Imarisha 2015, 4). The collection makes space for people whose identities are marginalised in mainstream culture, who know so well that 'what is possible always changes as we change with the transformations we try to realise' (Cornell, cited in Johns 2015, 192). Members of communities that have experienced historic trauma, including the editors as Black women whose ancestors were slaves, are 'science fiction walking around on two legs. Our ancestors dreamed us up and then bent reality to create us' (Imarisha 2015, 5).

Three of the women whose work is included in the collection describe themselves primarily as activists, working closely with movements to fight for change. (Other contributors are men and transgender folk, and women who are primarily writers, scholars and artists but also engaged in activism.) Autumn Brown lives in Minnesota, supporting and training community organisers and movement organisations; she describes herself as 'a mother, community organizer, theologian, artist, and facilitator' (brown and Imarisha 2015, 289). Mia Mingus, based in the San

Francisco Bay Area, works for disability justice and prison abolition, a home for all and not just some of us; she describes herself as 'a queer physically disabled Korean woman transracial and transnational adoptee' (brown and Imarisha 2015, 292). Morrigan Phillips has been involved in anti-globalisation campaigning and currently works with communities in Boston to combat rising rates of HIV/AIDS infection and has been involved in and trained others in direct action; she describes herself as 'an organiser, writer, Hufflepuff and social worker' (brown and Imarisha 2015, 292). In their three stories, discussed below, the authors take inspiration from the work of Octavia Butler and Ursula Le Guin to invent characters that take risks, are punished and yet have hope in the face of an uncertain future. In the following essay, I read these stories through the lens of Haraway's cyborg manifesto and Cixous' essay 'The laugh of the medusa.'

Autumn Brown's story 'Small and Bright' (2015)[1] is most closely aligned with the work of Octavia Butler, which inspired the anthology, much of which describes adaptations necessary for survival on an irreversibly altered earth. Brown describes a remnant of humanity, surviving underground, thousands of years after the surface of the Earth has been rendered uninhabitable. The community's women are warriors against underground vermin and, in their ability to have children, against the decline of the population; their withered elders are midwives (SB 86). The protagonist, Orion, has committed the ultimate crime in a small threatened population: the taking of a life, of a man who threatened to kill her (SB 86). In response, the life she created has been separated from her; her breasts are swollen and sore with milk for her recently born child (SB 80-81). But the community, even the elders, are not united in their disapprobation of her crime (SB 82, 86). For many of them, Orion's punishment is also a quest:

Our community is dying. Children are born, yes, but not enough. We have become too isolated. We must find our brothers. Orion, you must do this for all of us (SB 84).

Mia Mingus' story 'Hollow' (2015)[2] begins with the arrival of a baby in a tiny spacecraft swaddled in blankets, having survived the long journey from Earth. Seva, who carries the baby away in her arms (H 110), had spent her childhood abandoned in a violent institution (H 118-119). Fellow 'UnPerfects' helped her to escape and she joined their revolutionary work to free others from such institutions (H 115, 119). At one point 'they thought they had won and the people finally seized the government, Perfects and UnPerfects working side by side for liberation' (H 120). But there was a rapid backlash. The New Regime forced them into death camps where 'UnPerfects' and the 'Perfects' that were their allies and lovers were beaten and raped, shot and injected, burned, tortured, killed; 'Like we were some kind of garbage, like human waste' (H 114, 116). Later, perhaps because those in authority couldn't face the prospect of killing their own 'cripple' children, those who were still alive were sent in rockets to the Hollow (H 113-115).

They all remembered the massacres and the camps. They all remembered the Hollow before Southing. … After the initial batch of soldiers had been killed off, it felt like they were finally free from the Perfects. Finally able to live again. (H 118)

By building the city of Southing, the inhabitants transformed the Hollow 'into places they could inhabit with pride and ease' (H 118). The necessity of collaboration in the face of a harsh environment – 'Separate? … That is certain death' (H 117) – is strongly evocative of Ursula Le Guin's harsh and barren utopia, Anarres, which is similarly contrasted to a richer and more fertile, but also less equal and more repressive, original planet:

Our society is practical. Maybe too practical, too much concerned with survival only. What is idealistic about social cooperation, mutual aid, when it is the only means of staying alive? (Le Guin 1974, cited in Johns 2015, 192)

In Mingus' story, the vessel that brought the baby also brought a message: people from Earth were on their way.

Leaving behind the other U.P.s to face the arrivals from Earth, a small group leaves 'for the other side of the Hollow, towards the edge of the red sky', where there may not even be vegetation, 'in hopes of surviving' and 'to try and find a way to return' (H 119-120).

Morrigan Phillips' story 'The Long Memory' (2015)[3] is set on an imaginary Archipelago, echoing Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea series which is set on an archipelago where the act of naming and binding perform powerful magic. In the third book of the series, *The farthest shore* (1972), a sickness spreads inwards from the outer islands of the archipelago: magic loses its power, songs are forgotten and people go mad. Phillip's story also recalls Le Guin's later novel, *The Telling* (2002), which explores the conflict between technological development and ancient tradition which is preserved in hidden libraries and through storytelling. Phillips' protagonist, Cy, is a savant being trained to access the long Memory: the stories, details and sensations of past lives (TLM 57, 59, 65-66). Many years previously, fearing the loss of history, 'powerful story makers' from the north, used the letters of the making found only on the scroll in the caves of the Coull Mountains to write a story. A story that would bind memory to a line of people. The Memorials. (TLM 62)

The Memorials served as advisors to kings and queens and later to the Council, reviewing legislation and policies in the light of the lessons of history. But a rising merchant class, tempted by profit, seeks to abolish this advisory role (TLM 57-60, 66). One of those merchants, Councilman Holt, has Cy captured and imprisoned in a fortress where, over the centuries, 'refugees and slaves would be held without recourse, until they withered to dust' (TLM 62-65).

During brief periods outside her cell, Cy manages to talk with a gardener, who helps her to understand that binding the Memory took something away from those who were not Memorials; they were unable to recall 'the stories that made us,' stories of the 'making of All' (TLM 67-69). Cy realises that the Memorials are powerless to stop Holt if the people do not support them because they do not remember 'those things of the past that shape the present' (TLM 69-71). Cy enlists the help of the gardener and some of the guards to write notes to other prisoners, instigating a hunger strike, and to share information with the outside world (TLM 73-76). After posters appear across the Eastern Isles about the hunger strike, Holt orders the killing of the prisoner who first went on strike. But he is shaken. Holt knows that memory is not irretrievable:

In Coull and other obscure parts of the north, it is also said that these story makers wrote a story of unbinding. … To unbind memory would mean to restore full memory to all the people. It would mark our end. (TLM 62-63)

The people's response to the letters was threatening Holt's power.

No future was certain, but that was all right. Cy felt confident that the unbinding was upon the world (TLM 78).

The utopian elements of these stories do not describe a perfect world, but rather a hopeful way of being and doing which may facilitate adaptation to changing circumstances. In this sense, the stories are in the tradition of feminist utopian writing: rather than imagining and describing fully-mapped worlds, feminist and proto-feminist writers through the centuries have tended to imagine utopian processes; pragmatic responses to a changing world oriented around learning, adaptation and shared power (Johns 2015, 177-178). Traditional patriarchal utopias 'tend to rely on revolutionary substitution, abrupt regime change, for the origin of the society' (Johns 2015, 186). In contrast:

feminist utopias across the centuries tend to depict shared power and promote gradual reform and ongoing change. They avoid revolutionary shifts, build their societies piecemeal and adjust them little by little …Adaptation to circumstances literally shapes the societies: form follows function (Johns 2015, 186-187).

Octavia Butler's trilogy Lilith's Brood, which inspired the anthology, also describes a process of adaptation and uncertainty, an attempt to overcome the hierarchical tendencies that are so incompatible with human intelligence, embracing hybridisation (or not) in the hope of survival on an irreversibly changed Earth (Imarisha 2015, 3; Butler 1989). Today, every human on the planet is ever more connected by the nature of global challenges – whether environmental, economic, technological or otherwise – and uncertainty about our collective future. And yet we are ever more isolated by the technology that claims to connect us. In her cyborg manifesto, Haraway argues:

The home, workplace, market, public arena, the body itself – all can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways, with large consequences for women and others – consequences that themselves are very different for different people and which make potent oppositional international movements difficult to imagine and essential for survival. (Haraway 1991, 302)

In response, Erin McKenna argues that we need multiple and continuously evolving visions that 'take this connectedness into account and prepare people to cope with the multiplicity and complexity of possibilities the future may hold' (cited in Johns 2015, 192).

We are finite developmental creatures who must grow and adapt to both our changing physical and changing social environments in order to survive. This means there can be no set goals, no predetermined unchanging goods or ends (McKenna, cited in Johns 2015, 192).

Even if they are set in worlds that look very different from our own, process-oriented feminist utopias can help their writers and readers articulate provisional goals derived from a critical understanding of the relationships between humans and with our environment, and from the development of expectations and desires for the future; 'visions that help to organise and structure present experience and dissatisfaction towards a desirable, workable purpose in the future' (Johns 2015, 192). Indeed, this is what the editors of Octavia's Brood hope for:

We hold so many worlds inside us. So many futures. It is our radical responsibility to share these worlds, to plant them in the soil of our society as seeds for the type of justice we want and need. (brown 2015, 279)

Science fiction is a place, perhaps one of the few remaining, where writers can 'trade in desire when we write feminist theories' (Kember 2012). According to Haraway, such trading in desire is precisely the kind of theory that is needed to help activists change the rule of the game:

Ambivalence towards the disrupted unities mediated by high-tech culture requires not sorting consciousness into categories of 'clear-sighted critique grounding a solid political epistemology' versus 'manipulated false consciousness,' but subtle understanding of emerging pleasures, experiences, and powers with serious potential for changing the rules of the game. (1991, 309)

In all three stories, the protagonists rely on stories or myths from the past as well as speculation about the future to inspire them to take a step into the unknown. Of the three activist/writers, Phillips makes the most explicit reference to storytelling and the technology of writing as a

theme in her own writing. Libraries are the places of authority, where the Memorials live and work (TLM 58-63). Powerful story makers bind memory to the Memorials by writing a story, to prevent the loss of history (TLM 63), but without access to the memory, to their origin stories, the people have only 'legends and tales that mostly serve to warn the young not to act rashly, or to scold the unscrupulous trader' (TLM 68). These stories are prohibitive, policing behaviour; Cixous decries the power of such stories that warn us not to move, not to go into the forest, to be afraid of the dark (Cixous 1976, 878). In Phillips' story, the people do not have access to stories of how they were made, stories of the making of their world: the Memorials 'took them all to hold' (TLM 68, 69). Humans need their origin stories not because they are necessarily emancipatory – Haraway resists those founding myths of original innocence that posit a return to the deathly oneness in the innocent and all-powerful Mother; Eve before she ate the fruit (1991, 292, 312-313) – but because they are ours. But they do not serve unchanged. It is only by retelling such tales, by subverting them, that their tellers can access the tools of parody, irony and blasphemy that are so important in resistance (Scott 1990, 136-182; Haraway 1991, 291):

The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture. We have all been colonised by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfilment in apocalypse. … Feminist cyborg stories have the task of rec[o]ding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control. (Haraway 1991, 311).

Haraway highlights the power of retellings of the story of Malinche for Chicana identity (1991, 312). Angela Carter, through the purple prose of her collection of fairy tales, has been similarly inspiring for women steeped in European fairy tale traditions (1979). While origin tales are held by the Memorials (or by religious leaders or by nationalistic educators) their potential is limited by what Haraway calls a 'finally privileged reading' (Haraway 1991, 312); setting them free means that they can be used and abused by the people, as they were meant to be.

In Brown's story, such origin stories are integrated into the fabric of their society: while Orion's people had never seen the stars, they continue to sing of them (SB 85), to perform 'the esoteric art of reading our star maps' (SB 86) and to name their children after constellations. The surfacing chamber is the expansive and ornate, covered with pictures of living things 'that crawled or crept or ran or flex on the surface of our dead world' (SB 85). But here the stories are more strongly linked to the future: there is a belief among members of the community that they will surface one day, by choice, to 'live again in the sun' (SB 85). As Orion moves into the unknown she has little knowledge to guide her (SB 83), but she is reminded of the visions a child had had hundreds of years previously about the end of time: while some of these visions were of the period of death and persecution which had driven the community underground more than two millennia before, others were speculative, about a time when the buried people would join with the 'people of color' or the 'people of the plastic'; in their last meeting before her surfacing, Orion's vaginal parent urges her to try to find them (SB 83-84).

Origin stories, while less prominent, are still present in Mingus' story, although these are more recognisable as activist stories: the inhabitants of Southing recall their abandonment by their parents because of their disabilities, their collective revolutionary work – mapping strategies and plans together – and their hope when it seemed that they had taken control of the government, before those hopes were dashed and they were rounded up and killed or sent to the Hollow (H 113-115, 119-120). In an echo of the author's identity as an adopted person, one of the protagonists, Seva, recognises that the babies they receive in Southing have travelled far and will have so many questions and a longing for Earth as they grow up, but also that Southing is a far better place for them than Earth would have been. The origin stories that are part of life in Southing represent shared experience of a close-knit group of activists (H 115); the story later engages with the difficulties of communicating past trauma to new generations: Seva 'knew the other side, and it was impossible to tell them' (H 119).

Transgressing the boundaries of the body is a central theme in Haraway's cyborg manifesto: she describes science fiction writers as 'theorists for cyborgs' in so far as they explore 'what it means to be embodied in high-tech worlds' (1991, 310). In Sarah Kember's reflection on the cyborg manifesto, she describes storytelling as 'theory for post-cyborgs'; it helps us to recognise the degree to which theory is (or should be) 'a form of practice, experimentation, speculation' (2012). The constraints of different genres and the partiality of storytelling as a mode of discourse may give post-cyborg theorists permission to make use of categories previously rejected as too limited, like 'subject/object, nature/culture, human/machine' (Kember 2012). Haraway argues 'for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries' but also for '*responsibility* in their construction ... Some differences are playful; some are poles of world domination. Epistemology is about knowing the difference' (1991, 292, 300, emphasis in the original).

Two of the stories – the Hollow and Small and Bright – collapse the distinction between the body, technology and nature, allowing for adaptations to radically different environments. They imagine worlds not dissimilar to the cyborg world imagined by Haraway, which is 'about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines' (Haraway 1991, 295). Such hybridity and adaptation is a core element of Octavia Butler's work, realised in her Patternist series by generations of selective breeding of humans with telepathic potential, and in Lilith's Brood (1989) by the interbreeding of humans with an alien species.

In Mingus' story, among the 'buried people,' aural sensitivity is greatly prized as an essential adaptation to their dark underground environment; their bodies have lost their colour (SB 83) and are seen only by firelight and the faint glow of phosphorescent lichen growing on the walls. In the distant past they relied on lichen growing on their bodies – from their 'cord cut' – for sustenance. Now it is normally groomed, but Orion has let hers grow 'wild, wet and fecund, reaching up to my ribs and down to my vulval hair,' an 'uncultivated wild space on my body' which may 'provide some sustenance on the other side' (SB 80). Orion cannot hear as well as others, but perhaps 'what is a deficit to you here is an advantage on the surface' (SB 84). As she surfaces she is blinded, but manages 'a flickering of sight' (SB 87). And her body seems to serve: the story ends with a technician's log entry tracking the determined progress of a being across the surface. 'Whatever it is, it is coming for me' (SB 88).

Brown's writing is perhaps an example of what Cixous claims (unfairly?) is so rare that she can only think of three examples: 'writing that inscribes femininity' (Cixous 1976, 878-879, 885). Haraway claims that French feminists like Irigary (who Cixous is often associated with) know 'how to write the body; how to weave eroticism, cosmology and politics from imagery of embodiment' (Haraway 1991, 310). Arguably, Brown does too. Orion's ill-mannered body, her wild, wet and fecund lichen and swollen breasts, has been kept alive in a womb-like underground world whose elders are withered midwives, witch-like creatures practiced in the esoteric art of reading star maps. There are strong parallels with Cixous' description of women's impregnable unconscious that will eventually break loose in their writing:

Now woman return from afar, from always: from 'without,' from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond 'culture'; from their childhood which men have been trying desperately to make them forget, condemning it to 'eternal rest.' The little girls and their 'ill-mannered' bodies ... ever seething underneath ... Here they are, returning, arriving over and again, because the unconscious is inpregnable (Cixous, 1976, 877).

Orion allows the lichen on her body, usually groomed, to grow wild and wet, even as her identity as a mother and warrior begins to fray. Her surfacing is analogous to the end of the Phallic period that Cixous describes, where women, far from being annihilated, have been 'borne up to the highest and most violent incandescence' (Cixous 1967, 886). By transgressing, by 'seizing

the occasion to speak' with her fragile body as much as with her words, with her act of killing, the nurturing of the lichen that might sustain her, and her physical potential for sight, Orion, like the women writers Cixous describes, makes a 'shattering entry into history' (Cixous, 1976: 880-881, 886).

If Brown limits herself to the organic, to organisms, Mingus explicitly embraces 'the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine' (Haraway 1991, 310-311). By building the city of Southing, the inhabitants transformed the Hollow 'into places they could inhabit with pride and ease' (H 118):

They built new adaptations for their chairs, lifts, canes, crutches, braces, and their Unperfect bodies, without thought to what was allowed or having to rely on the Perfects to do so. They experimented with their wildest dreams and ideas, making pulleys and slides and inventing new tools. (H 118)

Props and technologies, as well as pain and drool, are part of their bodies. After the baby's arrival, Wild leans on her cane to gather extra blankets from the floor (H 110). In another scene, after working in the garden all day, Ona helps Prolt wipe encrusted dirt and drool from his body and adjusts his dislocated knee and hip (H 110-111) before Prolt 'expertly' backs his chair up to hitch to the wagon so that he can pull the harvested food and flowers, and Ona as a passenger, out of the biosphere where they are working (H 111-112). Ona considers asking for a small bench to hold her weight so that the effort of holding herself up by her arms doesn't cause her so much pain (H 111). Ona later describes,

the magnificence of Rex as she swings and glides, twisting and turning on her crutches with such grace and strength (H 120)

Mingus talks about technology not in terms of all or nothing – as something that either supersedes us or acts as a panacea, as either a friend or an enemy – but rather 'as a co-constituent of what we call human' (Kember 2012). Her characters' 'UnPerfect' bodies, their aches and their pain, their drool are an integral part of this feminist technological utopia, but their bodies do not 'end at the skin' (Haraway 1991, 314). The Southlings' skill, for example, the 'magnificence of Rex as she swings and glides' (H 120) is a cyborgian adaptation; Haraway argues that such adaptations 'help⬜ redefine the pleasures and politics of embodiment' (Haraway 1991, 314):

Intense pleasure in skills, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshiped and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. (Haraway 1991, 315)

These cyborgs define 'a technological polity based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household' (Haraway 1991, 293). The baby's arrival in a spaceship, with its echoes of externalised reproductive technology, estranges it from its biological origins, just as 'Cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic reproduction' (Haraway 1991, 292) (there is no sense in the story that babies are born in Southing). The inhabitants of Southing 'do not dream of community on the model of the organic family,' nor do they expect their fathers to save them 'through a restoration of the garden' (Haraway 1991, 293); instead, their community is based on affinity and they build their own adaptations without having to rely on the 'Perfects'.

While Phillips does not describe similar bodily adaptations, her description of Cy's use of the Memory collapses distinctions between individuals by combining memories into a collective consciousness: accessing the collective memory of past experiences meant that Memorials did not simply know that a given fortress had been a prison but 'smelled death in the air, heard the sound of screams, sensed hope draining from bodies like spilled blood' (TLM 65-66). At the same time, individuals Cy has faith in the human ability of each person to hold 'her own

memory of what she has lived through and seen' (TLM 70). This blending of personal history with all history and the story of all liberations is, for Cixous, at the heart of the liberating potential of writing as a feminist practice (1976: 879, 882).

More information about *Octavia's Brood* is available here: http://octaviasbrood.com/

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[1] Henceforth 'SB'
[2] Henceforth 'H'
[3] Henceforth, TLM

Biography

Ruth's doctoral research (University of York) explores the potential for storytelling to help communities and activists articulate alternative approaches to development. Before starting her PhD, Ruth worked in the international development sector making sense of the technical details of international trade, investment and tax policy and advocating for change.

Email Me

To the Streets
Tallulah Lines

On the morning of 21 October 2015, a crowd gathered as a man and a woman had sex in a busy street in Quito's historic centre. Some filmed on their mobile phones and some shouted encouragement. What could be described as a moment of passion was not about lust (at least not for the woman) but about a passion for workers' rights. The woman who instigated the encounter was a sex worker who was protesting the local authority's sudden closure of fifteen hotels used by sex workers and their clients. The incident was not isolated; the previous day, around forty sex workers stopped the city's trams from running for an hour by blocking the tracks, and vowed to continue to do so every day until the local authority reconsidered the hotel closures. Although the protest was principally about the closure of the hotels, it was part of the bigger issue of the local authority's plans to relocate the sex workers. Street sex workers in Quito have developed a sense of identity and belonging that is intrinsically linked with the streets in the historic centre. Nevertheless, the protest in October 2015 was the culmination of many years of a fraught relationship between sex workers, government, police, local residents and most recently, tourists. This particular protest cleverly highlighted the controversial position of sex work in Quito, how prejudice and globalisation influence use of public space and identity, and the power of protest.

This illustration is a visual response to the protest and was exhibited and sold at Newcastle's *Nasty Women* exhibition in spring 2017, one of many exhibitions which took place around the world that year to protest the presidency of Donald Trump. The incident took place

while I was living in Quito, and it struck me as particularly innovative and effective. Its audacity launched the fight of sex workers into everyday conversation among many of my friends, colleagues and other acquaintances who had never discussed or contemplated the issue of sex work in Quito before. It seemed the perfect subject for an illustration which would form a part of a global, creative protest to Trump's misogyny.

Please see below for a selection of sources which provide further analysis of the issues addressed by the illustration.

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Wilking, A (2014) *Sex Workers Outsmart Quito Police* [online] NACLA available at: https://nacla.org/author/Anna%20Wilking

Sex workers' blogs and networks:

La Calle en DisPuta (in English and Spanish) available at https://lacallendisputa.wordpress.com/about/

Red de Mujeres Trabajadoras Sexuales de Latinoamérica y el Caribe available at http://www.redtrasex.org/-Ecuador-8-

Global Network of Sex Work Projects *Asociación de Trabajadoras Sexuales Trans de Quito* available at http://www.nswp.org/members/asociacion-de-trabajadoras-sexuales-trans-de-quito
Videos:

Let There be Light (2014) director Anna Wilking

Trabajadoras Sexuales de Quito: Derecho a la Calle (2015) available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIyedtGdNuY

Biography

Tallulah Lines is currently enrolled on an MA by Research in Women's Studies at the University of York. Her research focusses on identity and self perception of domestic workers in the Riviera Maya, Mexico. Tallulah worked as Project Officer for equalities projects at a Scottish Government organisation before leaving to live and work in Spain and Latin America. She is passionate about using art to draw attention to women's rights issues and her work has been exhibited in feminist exhibitions in the UK, Ecuador and Mexico. For more artwork see **my Tumblr**.

Email Me

Ecofeminist Perspectives on Social Sustainability: An Assessment

Nikila Lakshmanan

Abstract

In environmental philosophy, the concepts of social sustainability, ecofeminism, environmental justice, and intersectional identities have gained much theoretical and practical momentum. Social sustainability is an ideal that stands for equal rights, systematic community participation, and strong civil societies. Ecofeminism and environmental justice are two strains of environmental thought that place an emphasis on social sustainability. Both attempt to make connections between environmental problems and social oppression, but tend to prioritize different social issues. Ecofeminism underscores sexism, and environmental justice highlights the global manifestations of white supremacy. Environmental justice movements can be susceptible to sexism, and the tendency to draw false dichotomies between social and environmental sustainability that depict the former as more pressing than the latter. Ecofeminism can help environmental justice to avoid these pitfalls. Ecofeminist perspectives on social sustainability analyze the ways that social variables—including environmental problems—intersect and shape the identities of women. These perspectives are not homogenous. Cultural, radical, postmodern, social, liberal, and socialist ecofeminism have distinct analyses of women's intersectional identities. This paper argues that of these positions, socialist ecofeminism holds the most promise to enrich the environmental justice discourse. This paper uses data from two case studies in India to support this argument. The first case study explores the intersections between sexism, environmental problems, and caste-based oppression in the lives of Dalit and Adivasi women. The second case study examines the intersections of sexism, environmental problems, and religion in the lives of women from the Garhwali ethno-linguistic group. The data from both case studies reveal the advantages of socialist ecofeminism, relative to the other strands of ecofeminist thought.

Introduction

In the field of environmental philosophy, the concept of sustainability has gained much theoretical and practical momentum. As philosopher Sherilyn MacGregor argues, however, the sustainability discourse falls short in crucial areas. Contention brews among philosophers over basic issues such as sustainability's precise definition (MacGregor 2; Vucetich and Nelson 539). Philosophers also disagree about whether the concept of sustainability should prioritize environmental, economic or social issues. Hence, they often place the proposed definitions of sustainability in three categories: environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Environmental sustainability prioritizes the conservation of the biophysical environment, and economic sustainability emphasizes the consumption of an amount of capital during a period that still leaves one as well off at the end of that period. Social sustainability underscores equal rights, systematic community participation, and a strong civil society (Goodland 3). MacGregor suggests that the discourse on social sustainability often lacks substantive analyses of gender (MacGregor 2). Namely, it focuses on the long-range viability of human institutions without fully considering the role of gendered power disparities (MacGregor 7). It overlooks the influence of gender not only on society, but also the environment and the economy.

In response to the neglect of gendered power disparities in the social sustainability discourse, MacGregor turns to ecofeminism as a source of possible solutions. As philosopher Chaone Mallory observes, ecofeminism is a theoretical stance and political movement that maintains that sexist ideologies are closely connected to doctrines that sanction the degradation of the environment (Mallory 253-254). Ecofeminism is distinct from but overlaps with another school of environmental thought—the global quest for environmental justice—that has made seminal contributions to the discourse on social sustainability (Mallory 256). Ecofeminism and

environmental justice are intersectional concepts, in many ways. Both identify and resist the "conceptual and material linkages between the degradation of natural places and the marginalization and oppression of human communities" (Mallory 253). However, they have historically focused on different social issues. Ecofeminism centers sexism; environmental justice concentrates on global manifestations of white supremacy. Environmental justice challenges environmental racism (i.e. the disproportionate impact of environmental disasters on oppressed racial groups) and "ecologically-exploitative" histories of colonialism, as well as forms of neocolonialism and economic imperialism (Mallory 253, 256). Environmental justice activists may not place as much emphasis on sexism, and in fact may be susceptible to it. Men often dominate the environmental justice movement, despite the fact that women created the concept itself (Gaard 116). Mallory suggests that environmental justice activists sometimes subscribe to a "bio-culturally destructive" normative dualism; they insinuate that social sustainability is more important than the environmental variety (Mallory 255-256). Ecofeminism can help them avoid these pitfalls. Environmental justice movements must include an explicitly ecofeminist analysis, in order to better understand the ways in which systems of social oppression (including but not limited to white supremacy, ecological problems, and sexism) "intersect and mutually reinforce one another" (Mallory 251).

However, ecofeminism is not a homogeneous category. Ecofeminists disagree on what connects environmental problems with sexism, and how to overcome them. Ecofeminist positions on social sustainability diverge in their analyses of intersectional identities, especially those of women. MacGregor identifies seven positions as worthy of examination—these are those of cultural, radical, postmodern, social, liberal, and socialist ecofeminism (MacGregor 3). Each perspective has something distinct to offer to the discourse on environmental justice.

The Purpose of this Paper

The purpose of this paper is to assess the cultural, radical, postmodern, social, liberal, and socialist ecofeminist positions on social sustainability. The purpose of this assessment is to understand which position has the strongest analysis of women's intersectional identities—and holds the most promise for the discourse on environmental justice. To this end, this paper uses the data from two case studies in the book Gender and Sustainability by cultural anthropologist María Luz Cruz-Torres and ecologist Pamela McElwee. Gender and Sustainability is a compilation of ethnographies from Asia and Latin America emphasizing the importance of women's voices for cultivating sustainable societies. The case studies that this paper uses are "Democratic Spaces across Scales: Women's Inclusion in Community Forestry in Orissa, India" by Neera Singh and "Meaningful Waters: Women, Development, and Sustainability along the Bhagirathi Ganges" by Georgina Drew.

The first case study examines the ways that Indian women protect community forests in the Indian state of Orissa; it underscores the intersection between caste-based oppression, sexism, and ecological problems in the women's lives. The second case study researches the role of impoverished Indian women in the sustainable management of the Ganges River. It highlights their intersectional experiences of religion, sexism, and environmental problems (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 51, 143). Caste and religion are under-analyzed in environmental philosophy. The studies engage with two distinct, marginalized groups of Indian women, and address different environmental issues. The salience of these case studies also resides in their Indian contexts. Data from India can help sift the claims of ecofeminism that are applicable outside Western societies from those that are not. It can help the environmental justice movement in its quest against Eurocentrism and white supremacy. A careful assessment of cultural, radical, postmodern, social, liberal, and socialist ecofeminist perspectives on social sustainability using these case studies suggests that socialist ecofeminism offers the strongest analysis of the women's intersectional identities. The case studies show that socialist ecofeminism has the greatest potential to enrich the discourse on environmental justice.

The Ecofeminist Perspectives on Social Sustainability

According to philosopher Carolyn Merchant's book Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World, the concept of ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s, when feminists began to make connections between women and nature. The French feminist author Francoise d'Eaubonne coined the term "ecofeminisme" in 1974, calling upon women to lead an ecological revolution to save the planet. For d'Eaubonne, such an ecological revolution would entail new gender relations between men and women, and between humans and nature. The feminist theorist Ynestra King developed the concept of ecofeminism at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont in 1976 (Merchant 184). Ecofeminism became a movement in 1980 through a major conference called "Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the '80s" and the protests of nuclear war and weapons in the United States by women (Merchant 184).

As ecofeminism gained momentum, it quickly split into separate strains with very different ideas about the connections between women and nature, and how to emancipate them both from exploitation. Cultural ecofeminism developed in the late 1960s and 1970s with the second wave of feminism, and radical ecofeminism split from it in the 1980s (Merchant 190; Miles, "Ecofeminism"). Postmodern ecofeminism and social ecofeminism developed in the 1990s (McDonald 88). Liberal ecofeminism incorporated liberal feminist thought from the 17th century to the 1960s, and socialist ecofeminism drew upon Marxist analyses of labor (Merchant 188-190; 198-200). These strains of ecofeminism take positions on social sustainability that offer very different analyses of women's intersectional identities.

The cultural ecofeminist position on social sustainability uses a contested, essentialist definition of womanhood. Cultural ecofeminists claim that women are "socially gendered" and "biologically sexed" (Merchant 191). Cultural ecofeminists tacitly assume that womanhood involves possession of a so-called female sexual and reproductive system. Cultural ecofeminists suggest that due to this reproductive system, women are closer than men to nature. Women's menstrual cycles correspond to the waxing and waning of the moon. Women bring forth life through pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing (Merchant 190-194). Women's traditional "life-giving" and conserving roles as mothers lend them a "privileged epistemological approach to nature" (Littig 133). Cultural ecofeminists reason that a Western patriarchal devaluation of women and nature is the root of socially (and ecologically) unsustainable practices. Many critique mainstream Western philosophy on the grounds that it engages in dualistic thinking. Western philosophers often see the Christian God and men as separate from nature and women. Cultural ecofeminists argue that this kind of dualistic thinking promotes men's domination and control and equates women with nature. The result is a "shared oppression" of women and the earth (Littig 133). Cultural ecofeminists attempt to subvert Western patriarchy by revaluing supposedly innate connections between women and nature, prizing them as a source of social sustainability (Merchant 190-194).

Cultural ecofeminists hold that colonialism and Western science are both responsible for women's oppression and environmental problems for oppressed racial groups and "Third World" regions (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 8; Merchant 193; Salman 857). For cultural ecofeminists, social sustainability requires opposing male-developed and male-controlled science, industry, and technology. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century fostered unsustainable practices by replacing the notion of a nurturing Mother Earth with the metaphor of a machine to be controlled (Merchant 190-194). Cultural ecofeminists embrace "female spirituality" or traditions that they see as woman-centric (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 8). Indigenous cultural ecofeminists sometimes perceive the earth as a mother-figure, a source of "physical nourishment and spiritual strength" (Merchant 193). Cultural ecofeminists laud rituals centering on goddess worship, the female reproductive system, the moon, and animals. Many feel nostalgias for supposedly pre-patriarchal eras when women were lauded as bringers forth of life, and when pregnant female figures symbolized both women and nature. They suggest that patriarchal Western religions dethroned mother goddesses, replacing them with male gods, to whom they became subservient. Cultural ecofeminists often seek to meet their

goals for social sustainability through ritualistic worship of the earth and other aspects of nature as goddesses, as well as lectures, concerts, art exhibitions, street and theater productions, and direct political action (Merchant 190-194)

Another strain of ecofeminism with an essentialist concept of womanhood is the radical variety. Radical ecofeminists hold that biological sex categories are innate, while gender is a social construction (Berman 15). Radical ecofeminists believe that dualistic assumptions create mutable gender categories that oppress women and nature. They claim that social sustainability entails sustaining life in all its forms through the promotion of work women traditionally perform in maintaining life, such as caring for families, the sick, and the elderly (Diamond and Orenstein, ix). However—unlike cultural ecofeminists—radical ecofeminists do not prize the links that see between women and nature. By revaluing women's traditional work and the natural world, radical feminists aspire for a sustainable society without special associations between women and nature (Miles, "Ecofeminism").

Radical ecofeminists examine ways that societies portray women and nature negatively and as commodities, depicting men as establishers of order. They postulate that these representations of women, nature, and men encourage unsustainable practices that exploit the former two for cheap labor and resources (Berman 16). They point to the large-scale, centralized and technological basis of contemporary society as an example of unsustainable practices. Radical ecofeminists have expressed concern about the "sexist and racist impacts of reproductive technologies on women's bodies: eugenics and population control are patriarchal and imperialist tools for populating or un-populating the Earth" (Casselot 81). Radical ecofeminists endorse cooperative, decentralized, and organic forms of social organization. They also promote as socially-sustainable women's management of consumer and production units such as food co-operatives, organic farms and businesses. They believe that social sustainability involves women having greater control in purchasing and producing items with an eye to environmental sensitivity (Bernam 16-17; Diamond and Orenstein ix).

One form of ecofeminism that departs widely from the cultural and radical strains is postmodern ecofeminism. It downplays all forms of biological and material essentialism and determinism (McDonald 89). Postmodern ecofeminists reject the notion of innate gender and sexual differences. In fact, they often question the validity of womanhood and the environment as categories, seeing them as essentially contested, and representative of historical and social conditioning (MacGregor 7). Postmodern ecofeminists embrace the concept of intersectionality. Women can approach environmental questions with "situated knowledges" that are shaped by many layers of identity and difference (McDonald 89). Women's multi-layered social locations shape the bodies of knowledge that they accumulate as they navigate the power dynamics of the world. Many intersecting variables—such as race and class—determine these locations. Postmodern ecofeminism shuns any single organizing concept or meta-theory on social sustainability, instead embracing complexity and diversity (McDonald 89). It lacks any unified political agenda, encompassing an eclectic array of movements.

Social ecofeminism resembles its postmodern cousin in its broad rejection of essentialism (Merchant 194-195). Social ecofeminists assign a little more importance to the role of reproductive biology in shaping women's identities. However, they maintain that biological differences that may exist across gender cannot justify patriarchy. Biology, society, and individual interests interact in all people, giving them the capacity to construct the societies in which they wish to live. Social ecofeminists endorse women's reproductive, sexual, intellectual, and moral freedom for the cultivation of social sustainability (Merchant 194-195).

Inspired by political theorist Murray Bookchin's anarchist social ecology, social ecofeminism postulates that the degradation of nature stems from the domination of human by human. Unjust power disparities directly generate unsustainable societies. These unjust power

disparities include sexism, racism, and existing social institutions, like the capitalist economy and the state. Nonetheless, social ecofeminism has a Eurocentric bent. Bookchin admitted that his theories were limited in their applicability outside the United States: "I am more knowledgeable about this country [the United States] than I am about other parts of the world" (Venturini 2). Social ecofeminism also opposes marriage, the nuclear family, conventional romantic love, and most religions as sexist. It envisions an anarchist society of decentralized communities that transcends the public/private dichotomy necessary for capitalist production and the bureaucratic state. In them, women emerge as free participants in public life and local municipal workplaces. Childrearing is communal. Due to the absence of unjust power disparities, rape and other forms of violence against women are non-existent. For social ecofeminists, social sustainability requires ending all forms of domination, freeing all aspects of human nature from passionate sexuality to rationality (Merchant 194-195).

Liberal ecofeminism views women and men as fundamentally similar, in that they are individual rational agents who maximize their own self-interest. However, liberal ecofeminists distinguish themselves by supporting women's participation in mainstream institutions for the cultivation of social sustainability. Liberal ecofeminists predict that many women can transcend the stigma of having so-called female biology by participating in traditionally-masculine institutions (Merchant 199). Liberal ecofeminists endorse capitalism and the democratic state as optimal structures for social sustainability. They believe they can achieve social sustainability through the promotion of gender equity within these institutions. Liberal ecofeminists therefore seek to help women access education, wage-earning opportunities, control over their reproduction, and positions in the government. They lobby politicians, pressure corporations, and alert the media to their concerns (Merchant 188-190).

Liberal ecofeminists reason that unsustainability results from overly rapid development of natural resources, and failure to regulate pesticides and other environmental pollutants. They claim that they can meliorate such social orders by making social reproduction environmentally-sound. Therefore, they endorse better science, conservation, and laws as proper approaches to resolving resource problems. Given equal educational opportunities to become scientists, natural resource managers, regulators, lawyers, and legislators, women can work with men to improve the environment, conserve natural resources, and increase the quality of human life. Women have the right to join men in the project of social sustainability (Merchant 189-190; 200).

Socialist ecofeminism's account of social sustainability balances elements of social ecofeminism's anti-establishment ideas with some of liberal ecofeminism's more conventional positions. Like social ecofeminism, the socialist variety suggests that sex and gender stem from a combination of biology and "praxis" (their intersections with race, class, and other variables) (Merchant 187). It also holds that social sustainability requires alternatives to many standard institutions. Such alternatives range from women's health care agencies, food and housing cooperatives, and educational and political organizations that foster environmental sustainability (Hessing 9). Socialist ecofeminism's objective is to change institutional structures, especially industrial capitalism, toward more environmentally-compatible systems (Merchant 197-201). Socialist ecofeminists align with their liberal counterparts in their opposition to corporate irresponsibility via public education, research, and lobbying (Hessing 9).

Central to socialist ecofeminism's position on social sustainability is a critique of conventional development. Socialist ecofeminists reason that conventional development directly causes environmental problems. As productivity has transformed with technology, so has the growth of cash markets and economies of scale, the consumption and pollution of resources. For socialist ecofeminists, women's subordination in the home and paid labor force are by-products of conventional development. Women are trapped by the continuing primacy of

familial roles, and their exclusion from or subordination within wage-earning jobs. Women's position is not due to insufficient development efforts, but the inadequacy of the development models themselves. These models orient toward commodity production, the introduction of unnecessary capital-intensive technology, and the concept of production for profit rather than for social needs (Hessing 8; Merchant 197-201). Socialist ecofeminists argue that the transition to a socially-sustainable global environment and economy is based on two relationships—that between production and ecology and that between production and reproduction. In existing theories of capitalist development, ecology and reproduction are subordinate to production. Social sustainability requires reversing the priorities of capitalism, making production subordinate to ecology and reproduction (Merchant 198).

Case Study One: "Democratic Spaces across Scales: Women's Inclusion in Community Forestry in Orissa, India" by Neera Singh

This study focuses on the role that Dalit and Adivasi women play in protecting community forests in the Indian state of Orissa. Impoverished women from Orissa—especially Dalit and Adivasi women—heavily depend on forests for their livelihood. The term Dalit refers to a caste traditionally regarded as "untouchables", and Adivasi people are considered the aboriginal population of India (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 68). Both communities face caste discrimination. Caste-based oppression and sexism are inextricably linked, and manifest in similar ways. In many villages, religion sanctions both caste-based oppression and sexism. Dalits and menstruating women are often denied the right to enter temples (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 68). Caste-based oppression and sexism also have secular dimensions, which intersect with environmental issues like forestry. This case study focuses on the secular aspects of these injustices.

In the case study, the so-called upper caste people—and men—bar Dalit and Adivasi women from decision-making regarding the forests (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 51). The villages poorly deploy the ecological knowledge that these women derive from their interaction with local forests (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 53). The data on the women shows that socialist ecofeminism's position on social sustainability offers the best account of the intersection between caste, gender, and ecological problems in the women's lives. Socialist ecofeminism holds the most potential to enrich the discourse on environmental justice.

Singh's methodology centers a federation of forest-protecting villagers called Maa Maninag Jungle Surakhya Parishad (MMJSP). In Orissa, MMJSP has paid an unprecedented amount of attention to Dalit and Adivasi women's forest-related concerns. Singh's study includes conversational interviews with village men and women, as well as leaders of MMJSP. It compiles records of the meetings at MMJSP and women's groups, participant observations of the meetings, focus group discussions, and interviews with NGO staff. Singh analyzes the records of MMJSP meetings from 1997-2007. To understand the inclusion of women (across caste) at the community level, she examines the forest-related decision-making process in six villages and two village clusters. To understand the constraints to women's participation (across caste), she creates three focus groups with women in village settings (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 55).

Singh finds that while Dalit and Adivasi women's participation in forest protection has expanded, challenges persist. According to a survey conducted in 2005, 111 villages in Orissa are involved in forest protection. Only 23 of these 111 villages had women representatives on the forest protection committees. Only 7% of the officeholders were women. Another 7% were Dalits, and 16% were Adivasis. There was no data on people with one or more of these identities (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 56-57). In 1999, women of different castes in MMJSP formed a Central Women's Committee (CWC) with regular meetings. These meetings help women discuss their problems, encounter other women, and learn from each other (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 59). Through them, the women of MMJSP raise awareness of their hitherto invisible forest-related

livelihood challenges. For impoverished Dalit and Adivasi women, such challenges include their incomes from *kendu* and *siali* leaves. Many Dalit and Adivasi women survive on the trade in *kendu* leaves, which is nationalized in Orissa. The leaves can only be sold at government-administered collection centers called *phadies*. As there had been no *phadies* in the Ranpur town of Orissa, women gathering *kendu* leaves were forced to sell them to private traders. These traders operated illicitly, offering the women a fraction of the state-fixed prices. In 2000, women raised this problem at one of the women's meetings, and by 2001 they decided to organize a rally about the issue. About 2,000 women from 95 villages sent a petition to the Chief Minister of Orissa. The government responded by opening two new *phadies*; it promised more but did not deliver. The women's activism transformed their position for the better within MMJSP, and they continued to rally and organize sit-ins around this issue (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 60-61). As a result, Adivasi women improved their income from *siali* leaves, which are used as food plates. The women bought machines to stich *siali* leaf-plates and collectively market them. The women's trades in *kendu* and *siali* leaves helped them gain more confidence and economic independence (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 61-62). These non-timber trades also strengthened non-destructive forest-based economies. Dalit and Adivasi women's representation has since increased in MMJSP, to their collective benefit. MMJSP has also gained more visibility and popular support among people (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 63-64).

Challenges the women still face include social and cultural restrictions, barriers to participation within federations, and continued neglect of their concerns. Women—especially those oppressed by caste—face strong social and cultural taboos in the public sphere (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 57). Men first resisted the participation of women and oppressed castes in MMJSP, due to the notion that their traditional roles as fuel and fodder-gatherers make them destroyers of the forest. One of the male leaders stated: "How can we include them? No forest will remain if we involve women and Dalits" (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 58). District federations typically nominate men privileged by caste to be their state-level representatives. Women representatives (of unspecified caste backgrounds) can also show apathy to the concerns of Dalit and Adivasi women. Many women felt hurt by one such representative, who had invoked sisterhood and claimed to understand their problems. However, she changed after getting elected, and one woman said: "Now she does not recognize us. We are still the jungle-people, while she has become an urban dweller" (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 61). Another woman added: "She is not a woman. She has become a man," (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 61-62). Dalit women were among the representative's strongest critics. One Dalit woman named Kuntala Nahak met with and demanded accountability from her. Following this meeting, the representative invited MMJSP to further discuss their concerns. The government also promised to open another *phadie* (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 63-64).

State-level policy forums, conferences, and workshops typically exclude women (across caste). Policy forums are usually attended by leaders and those seen as experts—positions that women find difficult to obtain. Women's participation in state-level policy events is further restricted by constraints while traveling. Women find it challenging to obtain familial permission to travel, unless they have a woman traveling-partner. The few women who can travel to these meetings often cannot comprehend the technical and managerial discourse. They also do not understand discussions about issues that seem removed from their immediate concerns. Men often do not deign to inform women about the details of past discussion (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 65). These gender-based challenges continue to restrict Dalit and Adivasi women's participation in forest-related decision-making processes.

The case study's findings challenge cultural and radical ecofeminist positions on social sustainability. The women's stated priorities do not emphasize indigenous practices of nature worship, but their material concerns about their standing within MMJSP, and their forest-related incomes. The dominant spiritual traditions of the culture they operate in often exclude them, by barring them from temples (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 68). The women's political tactics do not mirror cultural ecofeminism's emphasis on goddess-centered rituals (Merchant 190-194). Adivasi women actively use machines to improve their income from *siali* leaves,

simultaneously improving their social standing and boosting a non-timber forest-based trade. Their actions challenge the cultural and radical ecofeminist critiques of technology as male-controlled and inherently unsustainable. The women's experiences at the intersections of caste and gender contradict the claims that women's traditional roles bring them closer to nature than men. The men resist Dalit and Adivasi women's participation in forest management because their caste and gender-based occupations as fuel and fodder-gatherers gives them the label of destroyers—not sustainers—of nature (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 61-62; Merchant 190-194). The social sustainability perspectives of cultural and radical ecofeminism do not account for the women's intersectional experiences of caste-based oppression, sexism, and ecological problems. The environmental justice movement will not obtain the cultural specificity it needs from ecofeminist analysis to resist manifestations of white supremacy in India.

The women also underline some limitations of postmodern and social ecofeminist accounts of social sustainability. Although postmodern ecofeminism's disruption of conventional ideas of womanhood (and the environment) challenges assumptions of their inferiority to men, its lack of a cohesive agenda limits its potential as a source of solutions for these women. The Dalit and Adivasi women in this study share collective identities as people oppressed by caste and gender. However, they do not seem to have internalized a notion of their inferiority (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 61-62). Their advocacy around their incomes suggests that they know they deserve to be more active participants in forest-related decision-making than their society allows (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 61-62). Postmodern ecofeminism offers few coherent strategies for the women to hone their already robust history of resistance. Hence, its current potential for the environmental justice movement is severely limited.

The data on the women challenges social ecofeminist critiques of the state and capitalism. The lack of *phadies* (the government-administered collection centers) is a major barrier the women face in the *kendu* leaf trade. In the absence of government protection, the women face exploitation by private traders (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 60-61). The benefits of state regulation of the *kendu* leaf trade raises the question of whether the social ecofeminist critique of the state is sufficient to justify its abolition. It raises many questions on how social ecofeminists would prevent the economic and caste-based exploitation of the women in their decentralized anarchist communities, and how they would hold perpetrators accountable. The material benefits the women receive from raising their income calls into question whether the social ecofeminist critique of wage labor is enough to abolish it. It is unclear how social ecofeminists would guide a transition from the culturally-specific situation of these women to an anarchist society. Social ecofeminism's Eurocentric origins do not prepare its analysis well for these questions. It lacks a robust understanding of caste-based oppression, sexism, and environmental injustice in its position on social sustainability. The environmental justice movement cannot rely on its Eurocentric position to understand women's intersectional identities, and successfully resist the global phenomenon of white supremacy.

The case study reveals a crucial pitfall of liberal ecofeminism on social sustainability It problematizes the liberal ecofeminist assumption that women's individual participation in traditionally-masculine institutions will secure gender equity. Women state-representatives of federations are often apathetic to Dalit and Adivasi women's collective concerns (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 61-62). This data point suggests that women's presence in these institutions would not fully unravel the prioritization of so-called upper-caste people and men's concerns over those of Dalit and Adivasi women. Certainly, it is unlikely that so-called upper-caste women in these institutions would be free of caste bias. In order to empower the Dalit and Adivasi women in this study, more substantive changes must accompany the reforms that liberal ecofeminists propose (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 142-159). The women are colonized by caste. Environmental justice requires an ecofeminist position with a more transformative vision of society, in order to realize its goals against colonization, economic imperialism, and white supremacy.

The case study aligns best with socialist ecofeminism's position on social sustainability. The women's activism around their forest-based incomes supports the socialist ecofeminist critique of conventional development. The trades in *kendu* and *siali* leaves are part of the women's traditional caste occupations. Neglect of their livelihood concerns stems from an assumption that they are "destroyers of the forest" and cannot raise legitimate issues about forest protection. Singh suggests that the forest faces a problem of destructive, timber-based industries, which fits with the socialist position that many developmental models prioritize commodity production for profit over ecology and social needs (Hessing 8; Merchant 197-201). The inattention to Dalit and Adivasi women's livelihood concerns has hindered the creation of development models that benefit them. The women's motivation to increase their forest-related income is also compatible with socialist ecofeminism. Unlike social ecofeminism's anarchist proponents, socialist ecofeminists do not vocally endorse abolishing wage labor. Their stated goal is to change capitalism toward more sustainable systems. Socialist ecofeminists also indicate that their opposition to unnecessary capital-intensive technology does not extend to technology in general (Hessing 8). The women's use of machines does not contradict its agenda. Moreover, the women's activism around their forest-based incomes within the CWC aligns with many socialist ecofeminist tactics. The CWC's prioritization of women's concerns helped the women learn from each other and demand policy change regarding the *kendu* and *siali* leaf trades. These strategies align with the socialist ecofeminist tactics of public education and lobbying. Their progress, in light of their continued challenges, highlights the potential of these tactics to assist them (Merchant 197-201).

Socialist ecofeminism's position on social sustainability has a lot to offer the environmental justice movement. The socialist ecofeminist critique of conventional development provides environmental justice with an important tool to resist forms of economic imperialism (that are often connected to white supremacy on a global scale). Socialist ecofeminism provides the strongest analysis of the Dalit and Adivasi women's intersectional identities. It disrupts the ways that Eurocentrism—along with caste and gender-based oppression—have erased the women from the global stage. Environmental justice activists have argued that the ecological knowledge of local communities is necessary to compile data to show that a local land use is harmful to a community's human and nonhuman residents (Mallory 258). However, the notion that local communities are good stewards of environmental resources can idealize communities, assuming them to be homogenous and stable (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 51). Socialist ecofeminism can help the environmental justice movement avoid homogenizing Indian communities in its global stance against racism. It can also help it evade charges of sexism (Gaard 116). Socialist ecofeminism also underscores the intersections of Dalit and Adivasi women's identities with ecological problems, validating the women's traditional dependence on *kendu* and *siali* leaves and offering ways that they can improve their incomes from these trades. Through its analysis, the environmental justice movement could sidestep charges that it prioritizes social sustainability over the environmental kind and overlooks ways that they intersect (Mallory 256). Thus, the socialist ecofeminist position on social sustainability holds the most potential to enrich the environmental justice discourse.

Case Study Two: "Meaningful Waters: Women, Development, and Sustainability along the Bhagirathi Ganges" by Georgina Drew

In Gender and Sustainability, Cruz-Torres and McElwee include another important case study that highlights the promise of socialist ecofeminism on social sustainability for environmental justice. The importance of this study stems from the fact that it is an ethnography of Indian women from the Garhwali ethno-linguistic group. Many Garhwali women are part of India's rural and semi-urban poor (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 143). They live near the Bhagirathi River, the primary tributary of the holy Ganges River in the Himalayas. The health of the Bhagirathi River—which the women depend on for survival—is in jeopardy. Scientific reports show that the Himalayan glaciers that contribute to its surface flows are receding significantly. Environmental shifts, such as glacial melt will probably contribute to long-term water stress. Moreover, great gender inequalities persist between those that have access to adequate,

potable water supplies and those that do not. Current approaches to water management, including the proliferation of hydroelectric dams, exacerbate gender vulnerabilities to shifting water availability. Like the Dalit and Adivasi women in the previous study, Garhwali women are frequently overlooked on the global stage (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 143-144). Their intersectional identities are salient for the discourses on ecofeminism, social sustainability, and environmental justice.

Drew's methodology contains nearly one hundred semi-structured interviews of Garhwali women, ten life-history interviews, and ten focus-group sessions. It involves twenty-five movement events, and fifteen cultural ceremonies centering devotion to the river. The field sites for these aspects of Drew's work span from the river's glacial source to the city of Uttarkashi some eighty miles below. Drew's project also entails four months of organizational research in places such as New Delhi. She conducted this field work between 2008 and 2009 (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 147).

For Drew, this ethnography reveals an important point (among others) about gender, sustainability, and religion (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 155). The Garhwali women's belief in the Goddess Ganga—the Hindu deity of the Ganges River—informs their opposition to development projects like the hydroelectric dams along it. They hold that the dams not only block their access to the river water but rupture their religious connections to it. Garhwali women revere the Goddess Ganga as a mother and a source of cosmological guidance. As traditional Hindu wives, many fast regularly on the banks of the Ganges to pray for their husbands' welfare. In addition to jeopardizing gendered codes of conduct, the dam's blockage of the river also impacts their observance of cultural rites of passage in the Hindu life cycle, known as *sanskar* (or *samskara*). They believe that the Ganges water sustains people from the moment of birth by washing away physical and spiritual impurities (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 152). The women also oppose the dams because as caretakers of children, they believe that the temporary income men receive for construction labor does not compensate its impact on their posterity (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 157). For Drew, this data shows that Western anthropologists should "move beyond" negating "Third World" beliefs in gods and spirits as superstitions or "respecting" them as mere cultural artifacts (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 155). Namely, they should examine the possibility that such beings are literally real. She highlights a necessity of accepting "multiple truths" in order to take seriously the perspectives of marginal women on sustainability. Only then, she contends, is a sustainable society possible (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 153).

The findings of Drew's study—and one problem with her conclusions—disrupt the cultural and radical ecofeminist positions on social sustainability. Neither ecofeminist position capture the women's ambivalent religious connection to the Ganges. The women's fasting ritual by the Ganges for their husband's welfare plays an important role in their subordination, glorifying their self-sacrifice and reinforcing their domesticity (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 152). This Garhwali tradition is ambivalent, rather than unambiguously empowering. In light of it, the cultural ecofeminist idealization of the often non-Western, goddess-centered traditions seems simplistic. The radical ecofeminist inclination to revalue women's care labor seems sweeping: it raises the question of whether some kinds of traditionally feminine labor are so alienating that they should be abandoned. After all, this tradition reinforces the subordinate status of women in ways more explicit than tending to the sick or elderly (Merchant 190-194). These issues problematize Drew's suggestion that Western anthropologists should regard all "Third World" religious beliefs as equally valid. Cultural and radical ecofeminism cannot accurately pinpoint the intersection of religion, sexism, and ecological problems in the Garhwali women's lives. Their analyses of social sustainability are too simplistic to aid the environmental justice movement in its quest against Western hegemony.

Drew's findings also highlight important limitations of postmodern and social ecofeminist accounts of social sustainability. The women's fasting ritual is part of the gendered

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expectations of their conduct. However, their devotion to the Goddess Ganga also inspires their vocal opposition to the hydroelectric dams. Both these dimensions of the women's spirituality disrupt parts of postmodern and social ecofeminism. Postmodern ecofeminism's position that gender and the environment are "essentially contested" could be interpreted to suggest that contradictory accounts of both are equally valid. Critics might reasonably interpret postmodern ecofeminism to suggest that the patriarchal womanhood that the fasting ritual endorses is as valid as more subversive conceptions of womanhood. The social ecofeminist critique of religion as patriarchal avoids this trap. However, it does not validate the empowering aspects of the women's devotion to the river goddess, such as their opposition to the water dams and articulation of their needs. Moreover, as in the previous case study it is unclear how social ecofeminists believe that the religious, patriarchal Garhwali society should transition to the irreligious, anarchist society they envision. Their unwittingly Eurocentric utopia may not amount to an environmentally-just society that meets the women's intertwined social and spiritual needs. Postmodern and social ecofeminism do not grapple with the complexity of the women's religious identities. Their views on social sustainability cannot give the environmental justice movement what it needs to challenge Eurocentrism and understand the interplay of religion, gender, and ecological problems in the Garhwali women's lives.

This study's findings also problematize the liberal ecofeminist account of social sustainability. Despite the patriarchy in the women's fasting ritual, it inspires them to voice their concerns about the dams as wives. The ritual is a way in which they care for their husbands. Just as the women regard the Goddess Ganga as their mother that cares for them, they feel an affirmative sense of duty to their own children. The women's roles as children's caretakers also motivate them to oppose the dams. It is their traditionally feminine care labor that inspires the women to vocalize their views (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 157). These results disrupt the liberal ecofeminist implication that funneling women into male-dominated occupations is sufficient for their empowerment. While they neither reduce the problems with the fasting ritual nor imply that women should not enter male-dominated occupations, they do imply a need for women-centric alternatives to conventional development. Liberal ecofeminism runs the implicit risk of reinforcing sexism; it can unilaterally overvalue traditionally masculine labor and undervalue work which is traditionally feminine—including the work that the Garhwali women perform. Its social sustainability views are not feminist enough to serve as a gender lens for the anti-racist but occasionally sexist environmental justice movement.

The subtle aspects of this case study corroborate the socialist ecofeminist position on social sustainability. Socialist ecofeminism—unlike social ecofeminism—does not vocally oppose religion as patriarchal. It is more compatible with some of the women's spiritual connections to the Ganges (though not necessarily the fasting ritual). The understated material aspects of this work support the socialist critique of conventional development. As Drew specifies, current water management approaches like the dams disproportionately block women's spiritual and material access to river water (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 152). This point is consistent with the socialist ecofeminist identification of inadequate development models as a root of women's subordination. It supports their critique of unnecessary, capital-intensive technology (Hessing 8). The fact that the dominant development model prioritizes men's income from construction work of the dams over women's insights as religious care-laborers suggests that it values profit more than social needs. This finding fits with the socialist critiques of production for profit rather than for social needs, and of development emphasizing commodity production (Hessing 8). Socialist ecofeminism best accounts for the interplay of religion, sexism, and ecological problems for the women. Socialist ecofeminist insights on social sustainability can help the environmental justice movement combat Eurocentrism, economic imperialism, and other forms of global white supremacy, which have helped erase Garhwali women from the global stage (Mallory 256). It underscores the fact that social and ecological issues are interrelated in the Garhwali women's lives, and that one does not take precedence over the others. Of the ecofeminist perspectives on social sustainability discussed in this paper, socialist ecofeminism holds the most promise for environmental justice.

Conclusion: Why the Socialist Ecofeminist Perspective on Social Sustainability Matters

This paper shows that a careful assessment of the cultural, radical, postmodern, social, liberal, and socialist ecofeminist positions on social sustainability through the case studies "Democratic Spaces across Scales" and "Meaningful Waters" suggests that the latter view offers the most promise for the environmental justice movement. The case studies highlight some weaknesses in cultural, radical, postmodern, social, and liberal ecofeminism, and some advantages of socialist ecofeminism's account of women's intersectional identities. This conclusion underscores why socialist ecofeminism on social sustainability matters, and why it has some limitations.

The socialist ecofeminist perspective on social sustainability offers a potential solution to philosopher Sherilyn MacGregor's critique of the inattention to gender within the social sustainability discourse. It provides the environmental justice movement with a comprehensive critique of conventional development, shrewdly tracing the way it causes women's subordination in the labor force. It offers a concrete agenda to address this problem, including the formation of women's educational and political organizations that foster environmental sustainability (Hessing 7-9).

Gender—among all power disparities—is uniquely important. Centering women reveals key features of most other interconnected systems of human domination. Women's general subordination across the world leaves them with fewer resources and support against environmental problems. As both "Democratic Spaces across Scales" and "Meaningful Waters" indicate, women disproportionately suffer environmental degradation among "Third World" people like those in India (Cruz-Torres and McElwee 231-233). Indian women suffer more (on average) from the problems that environmental justice advocates identify than their male counterparts. The ecological challenges that women face underscore that social and environmental issues are intertwined, and that the environmental justice movement cannot claim that one is more important than another (Mallory 256). The socialist ecofeminist position on social sustainability offers timely lessons for the environmental justice discourse.

The fact that the Indian women's intersectional identities in both cases align best with its agenda underscores the promise it holds for environmental justice. Socialist ecofeminism's analysis of intersectional identities can enhance the contributions that the environmental justice movement makes to the broader social sustainability discourse. The history of environmental justice is steeped in protest against the disproportionate impact of ecological problems on oppressed racial groups throughout the world. Undergirding these protests are complex, culturally-specific formulations of environmental injustice, and proposed policy solutions for them (Mallory 255-256). Contrary to popular perception, environmental justice activists do not protest the reach of white supremacy in the West alone. In Ecuador, *concheras* are women of African descent who traditionally collect shrimp and shellfish. The *concheras* have noted that that they face racial and gender oppression, as well as the depletion of the shrimp-based ecosystem that they depend on by multinational corporations. Their activism is a notable strain of the environmental justice movement (Mallory 256). The *concheras* underscore the global reach of systems like white supremacy. Socialist ecofeminism can help environmental justice activists better understand the cultural landscape of India, and how local ecological problems intersect with caste, religion, and gender identity. The white supremacy of Eurocentrism has rendered these cultural specificities invisible within the social sustainability discourse. Knowledge of these specificities—and the activism of Dalit, Adivasi, and Garhwali women around them—can help the environmental justice movement formulate better strategies to protest the global phenomenon of white supremacy. It would allow them to understand the environmental concerns of Dalit, Adivasi, and Garhwali women and learn from the details of their protest strategies. It could help the environmental justice movement live out its anti-racist promise of decentralizing the West in the social sustainability discourse.

Despite the value of socialist ecofeminism, the conclusion of this paper has some notable limitations. One is its focus on social sustainability. This paper shows that social and environmental sustainability are linked, but it does not delve into the discourse on the environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability. This paper only features two case studies, and both take place in India. Case studies about women's intersectional identities and the environment in other countries might not support socialist ecofeminism's account of social sustainability. This paper's engagement with the literature on environmental justice is also limited. The environmental justice discourse is wide-ranging and complex; it is not homogenous and encompasses many regions across the world. Along with its implications, this paper's limitations reinforce the necessity of further research on socialist ecofeminism on social sustainability within the movement for environmental justice.

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Biography

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Seedid

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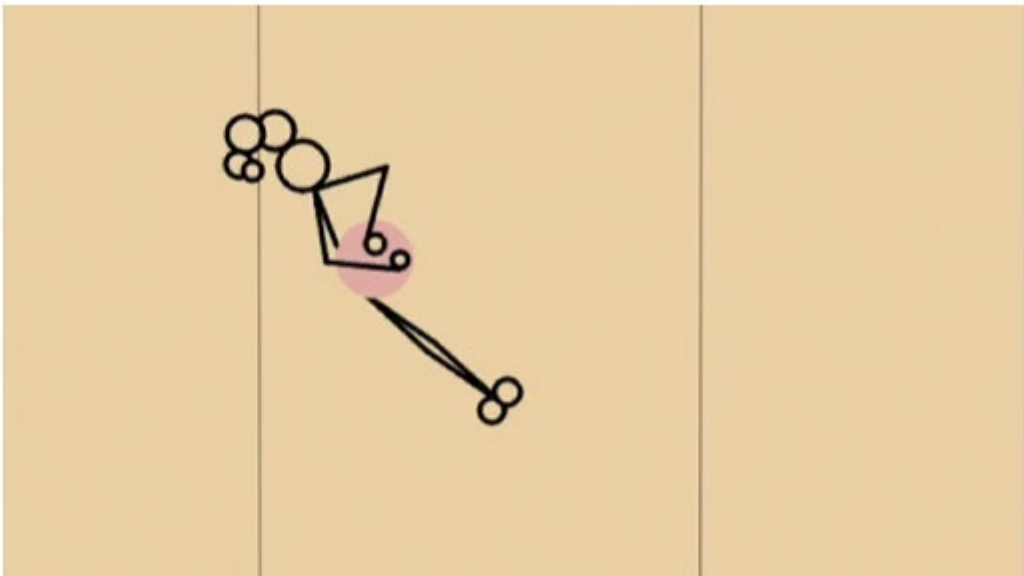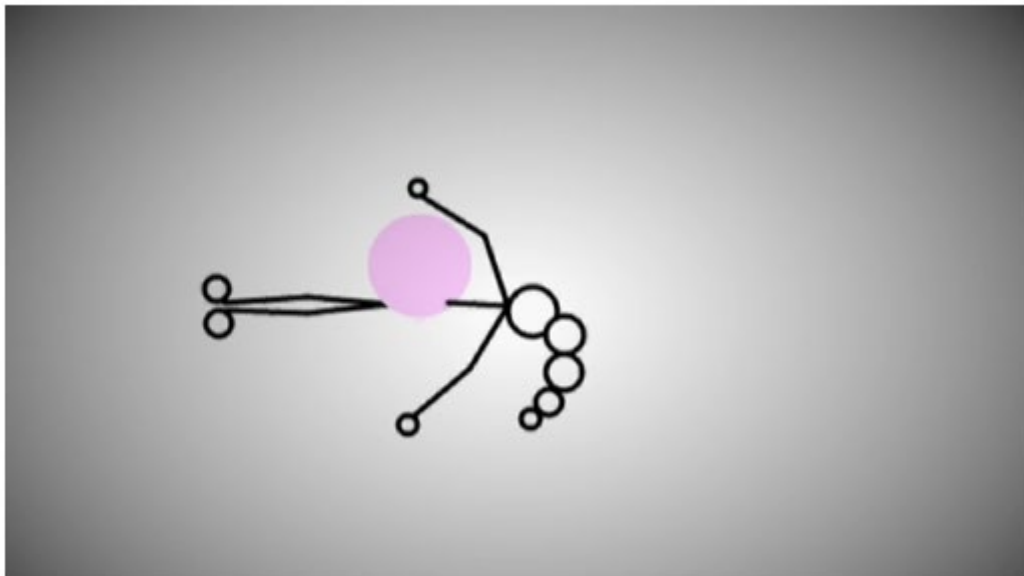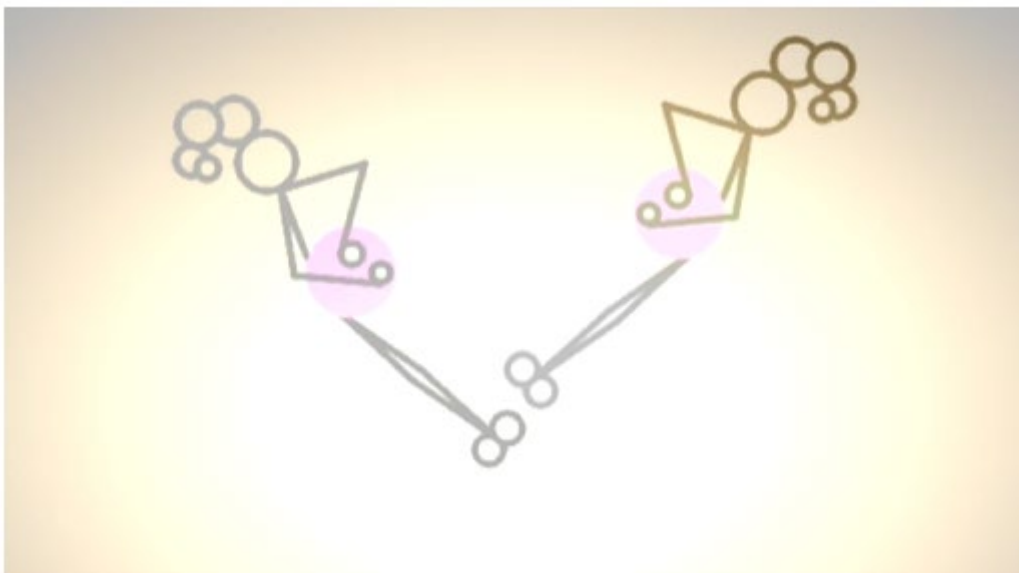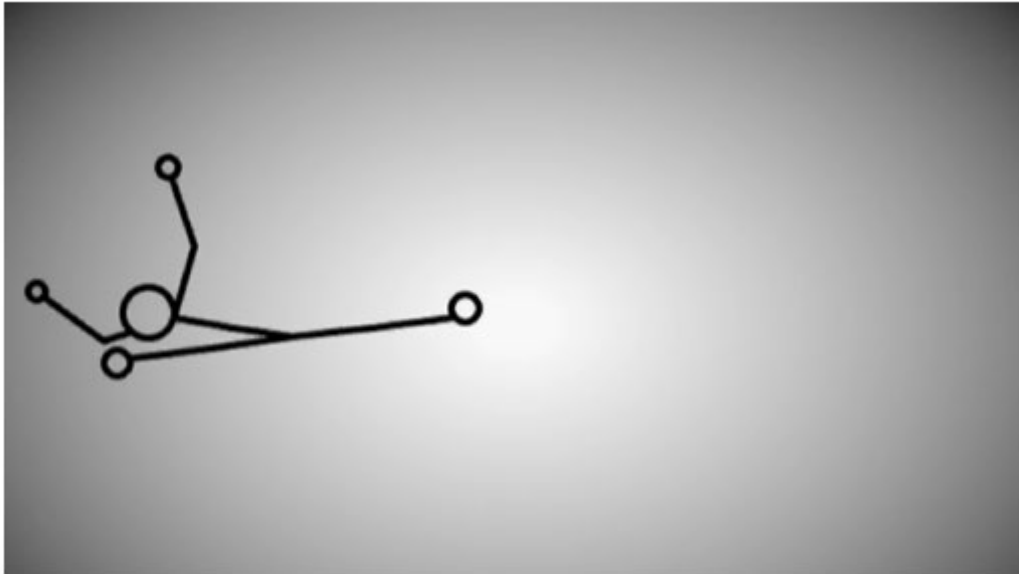
Screenshots from the video <u>Seedid</u> (click to view)

Abstract

My animated musical short Seedid intervenes in a discourse of unplanned pregnancy that constructs a spectacle of irresponsible female sexuality and bolsters both right-wing populist arguments for the retrogression of feminism and neoliberal justifications for cutting women's reproductive services. Seedid evokes the moralising against female sexuality, the spectacle of pregnancy, and the freedom to choose not to give birth, and is one of three animated musical shorts I have made in relation to the topic of intergenerational intimate partner violence (or 'domestic violence'). I devised what I have named the 'Jingle-Doc' form to represent through multimedia research the 'cycle of violence' involved in intergenerational domestic violence. Seedid meditates on vulnerable young motherhood. In particular, this writing focuses on reproductive coercion—which commonly co-occurs with intimate partner violence and is also linked to the 'corrective rape' of gender non-conforming women. As media outlets and commentators would often rather focus on the moral shortcomings of young women in their

explanations of unplanned pregnancy fluctuations, Seedid provides a counter-narrative that constitutes awareness-raising activism.

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1. Introduction

The animated musical short Seedid evokes the struggle for bodily autonomy which already existed for young women before the recent upsurge in opposition from right-wing populism. Seedid takes what I have named the 'Jingle-Doc' form to side-step interests who oppose women's reproductive freedom and would silence women's voices. The 'Jingle-Doc' form avoids video interviews displaying 'confessing victims'—whose specificity can engender dis-identification—and uses cartoon imagery to encourage greater identification (McCloud, 1993: 31).

Seedid is designed for a broad audience and does not depict intimate partner violence explicitly; rather, it evokes the difficulty of falling pregnant at a young and vulnerable age. Thus, Seedid serves as a portal for gaining insight into the issues, for which it serves as an introductory and performative surface. I started with the idea that the ambiguity or open-endedness of sound and melody might get through to audiences who might otherwise oppose a direct message of female autonomy. I hoped that such ambiguity might shield me from some of the backlash and 'trolling' endured by feminist writers and commentators—at least temporarily, while I developed my research.

First, I created a songscape and later added animated visuals, then combined these elements into what I later named a 'Jingle-Doc'. The term 'Jingle-Doc' alludes to how these issues might otherwise be treated in a realistic documentary form, as well as to music's ability to affect the memory of audiences, as advertising 'jingles' do. I also drew on sound theory from William Burroughs (2005) music theory from Phillip Ball (2010), musical multimedia theory from Nicholas Cook (1998), and performative social science theory from Gergen and Gergen (2010), as I experimented to find a form in which to present my research. For the purposes of this article, Seedid serves as a centrepiece for discussing the difficult contemporary landscape inhabited by young women seeking reproductive freedom and bodily autonomy in an atmosphere where moralising against young pregnant women occurs alongside reproductive coercion. I hope that Seedid can contribute to a sympathetic view of the young woman's position while offsetting the condemnatory and paternalistic attitudes that flourish in an age of patriarchal right-wing populism.

2. Unplanned Pregnancy and Austerity Cuts

In 2015, under-18 pregnancy rates in England and Wales were at their lowest since 1969 (ONS, 2017). In 2013, when numbers were also falling, Polly Toynbee credited the drop to the United Kingdom's 10-year Teenage Pregnancy Strategy for England (TPS) launched by the Labour Government and run from 1999 to 2010 with the aims of joining up national and local efforts, improving sex and relationship counselling and access to contraception, and supporting young parents (Hadley et al., Reproductive Health 2016). However, in 2017 more conservative commentators and academics have credited the drop in under-18 conception rates to austerity, citing cuts of 70% to these services since 2008. Their analysis uses research from the American economist George Akerlof to conclude that better access to contraception results in riskier behaviour (Paton and Wright; The Independent, 2017).

A focus on teens is not new, perhaps because teen pregnancies are often unplanned, but it is worth examining the rationale that withholding education and services from women is for their own good. There are other matters to be considered besides sexual risk-taking when it comes to teen birth and abortion rates. For example, intimate partner violence (IPV) currently

disproportionately affects young people aged 16–18 (Laville, 2011) and IPV and controlling behaviours frequently include reproductive coercion (Reuters 2015, in ACOG 2013, Miller et al., 2007). Practices including coercing a woman into becoming pregnant against her will—as a means of dominating and controlling her by enforcing traditional gender roles—are occurring but are not included in the narrative of the risky young woman. After being coerced into becoming pregnant, some abused partners are then coerced to terminate the pregnancy (Gottlieb, 2012), which is easier to do in privacy now that 'morning-after pills' are more readily available (Petter, 2017, Bedell, 2005).

Given the prevalence of reproductive coercion, backed by the threat and/or intimidation of intimate partner violence, the assumption that women's risk-taking is the only explanation for teen pregnancies is problematic. In the case of the 'Akerlof' explanation, women are framed as objects who automatically become riskier the more freedom and education they have. The academics Paton and Wright's analysis of cuts to teenage pregnancy programmes in The Independent newspaper emphasises that local authorities making larger cuts saw significantly bigger reductions in teenage conceptions, abortions and births (2017). However, a closer examination of Paton and Wright's complete analysis in the Journal of Health Economics (published a month after The Independent article) shows that their argument relies on "data on sexually transmitted infections" based on the assumption that "infections should rise if risk-taking is greater" (2017: 136). Soon after Paton and Wright's research was published in the Journal of Health Economics (2017), the American Government espoused a similar perspective, that providing contraceptives to women through health insurance "could promote 'risky sexual behavior' among some teenagers and young adults" (Pear, 2017).

3. Why Protest?

Women's independence is being re-contested amid a rise of right-wing populism across Europe and emanating from the United States, further unsettling the climate for women's reproductive freedom. Moreover, mainstream anti-feminist practices such as 'slut-shaming' work in tandem with deceptive 'sexual strategy' or 'pick-up artistry' to discredit women and take agency away from them. Furthermore, these ideologies cite female irrationality as the justification for dismissing women from reproductive agency, public life (Castells, 1997: 23) and even choosing their own intimate partners (Koziol, 2014). Contemporary right-wing populism harmonises with traditional religious fundamentalism and ethno-nationalism, which emphasise female reproductive cooperation as central to their success; indeed, the "waning of patriarchy" is seen as a reason to return to right-wing populist political ideologies globally (ibid.). Reinforcing traditional gender roles for women is also thought to reinforce masculine identity. Meanwhile, segments of the Men's Rights movement seek to avoid financial responsibility for offspring, in a seeming backlash against the enforcement of child maintenance, much of which goes unpaid in the USA and the UK (Toynbee 2016, Pao 2015, Rees 2017).

While the focus on teen pregnancy is presumed to be about heterosexual relationships, lesbians may be even more vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy, because visible lesbians sometimes suffer 'corrective rape' to enforce heterosexuality (Robson, 2011: 259). Moreover, with increasing numbers of gender-fluid people, the birth-control regimes of previous generations might seem outdated to many, even if they are still necessary. Indeed, non-heterosexual women have been referred to as "sexual amateurs" (Robson, 2011: 271) because they are not as prepared for heterosexual intercourse. However, it is not only lesbians who are expected to take up traditional heterosexual gender roles for the sake of bolstering masculine identity: UK school students are experiencing misogynistic name-calling at higher rates (Parliament.UK 2016, Bulman, 2017) whether they are heterosexual, lesbian or gender-fluid. Echoing this toxic culture are threats of 'corrective rape' made towards female journalists, academics and activists online to silence their perspectives; and it has been noted that there is a habitual use of 'Rape-glish', a rhetoric named for "its near-pathological obsession with the imagery of sexual violence" (Jane, 2017).

In the UK, sex and relationships education (SRE) is set to become compulsory in all but faith schools (Sellgren 2017), but SRE has also been a site of contestation. For example, the group Christian Concern bemoans the lack of parental control in SRE (ibid.). Especially in the USA—where about half of all boys and girls receive no sex education before their first experience of sex (Wind, 2016)—conservative and populist voices have long preferred ignorance (or 'innocence') about sex over educational empowerment, especially for girls. Considering the rise in right-wing populism, opposition to '21st century' relationships and sex education (Bloom, 2017) could be provoked by representations of companionate rather than patriarchal intimate partnerships. Comprehensive relationships and sex education from the perspective of companionate intimacy works against the ignorance, disguised as innocence, on which support for right-wing populism and justifications for neoliberal austerity cuts rest. As for the 'Akerlof' perspective, a more likely explanation is that the TPS investment from 1999 to 2008 (Hadley et al., 2016) has had a cumulative and lingering educational effect that helped to bring down teen pregnancy rates. In the USA at least, many more teens have been using the morning-after pill (Gajanan, 2015) so it is also likely that many pregnancies are ended without being recorded.

4. The Spectacle of the Risky Young Woman

The silencing of women with threats of sexual violence and the shaming of women as objects relies heavily on the use of images of women. In both US and UK schools, it is common for female pupils to be 'slut shamed' by having intimate and private photos of themselves posted online as punishment on "Sket" (or whore) websites (Bulman, 2017). These displays work to visually re-brand human intimacies as objects, serving to justify voyeurism and fetishisation disguised as disciplinary paternalism. The debate about teen pregnancy also uses a discourse that allows the issue to be imagined voyeuristically—to be experienced as "an object of curiosity or contempt", as Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines spectacle (Mish, 1998: 1129) and of risk. This focus on risk erases other factors from discussions of unwanted pregnancies, such as reproductive coercion as part of intimate partner violence. So all that is left is a spectacle of sexual risk and thus an opportunity for moralising. A sexualised world from which non-sexual considerations have been removed harmonises with Susan Sontag's description of the pornographic—a rhetoric which "oversimplifies" and therefore leaves out other factors, both political and economic, contributing to "a particular ignorance" (Wendelin, 2012: 394, 376).

I am not claiming that the teen pregnancy debate is pornographic but rather that arguments relying heavily on a rhetoric of sexual risk-taking oversimplify and contribute to misunderstandings. In this case, the rhetoric serves right-wing populist patriarchy as well as neoliberal justifications for austerity cuts, but it does not serve the subjects of the debate. Back in 1885, during a public debate about contagious diseases among soldiers and prostitutes, the British philanthropist Josephine Butler wrote that British law's treatment of underaged girls "reduced (them) to the level of an inanimate nuisance for political purposes" (quoted in Wendell, 2012: 382) and treated them as objects with "neither souls nor civil rights" (Butler, 1871: 176). Furthermore, the ground-breaking series in London's Pall Mall Gazette that drew attention to the plight of underaged prostitutes, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', has been criticised for ignoring their lowly socio-economic position (Wendelin, 2012: 375). Explanations for fluctuating numbers of teenage pregnancies that put the spotlight on sexual risk can also cause the debate to become "isolated from material economic realities" (ibid.). On a closer examination of Akerlof's 1996 research, he and the other authors assume that 'shotgun marriage' is preferable to single parenthood (Akerlof et al., 1996). They also quote a father's rights group, who rationalise that the free choice of women to physically end a pregnancy should also free men from financial responsibility for offspring (ibid., 281).

5. Reproductive Choice and Intergenerational Violence

ONA statistics indicate that poverty is strongly associated with teen births (Khomami, 2015) and although the numbers of conceptions, abortions and births are down, this is not an indication that we should stop providing services supporting those who would delay motherhood. For instance, the decision not to give birth is crucial in cases where homes would be places of threat and intimidation for the children born into them. IPV happens commonly to pregnant and postpartum women (Refuge.org) and pregnancy may be seen as a trigger for violence, yet this violence is disproportionately under-discussed and underrepresented.

Research shows that homes where a pregnancy is unwanted by the father are more likely to be violent environments for both mother and children (Miller et al., 2007; Jasinski, 2004: 54). Furthermore, the trauma of witnessing domestic violence in childhood has effects that not only linger into adulthood, but often become a part of family life in the next generation. For example, research has shown that over a third of children abused by a family member go on to be abused by a partner in adulthood (ONS, 2017); Jha, 2012) and many child witnesses become perpetrators of IPV in adulthood (Bulman, 2017). According to the NSPCC, recent reports show that children in the UK are witnessing domestic abuse at rates 77% higher than during the previous four years (Bulman, 2017). The US problem is similar, with available estimates of 1 in 15 children in the USA bearing witness to domestic violence (NCADV 2015). Given the evidence, it would seem that trouble is fomenting for these children and their future partners, generations and communities.

6. The 'Jingle-Doc' Form

My initial trepidation about addressing these issues through writing led me to experiment with the non-verbal potentialities of songscape; it was only later that I decided to add visuals. The songscape-making approach served as an opaque form of experimenting and documenting while freeing me temporarily from the moralising and contestation that words with political implications can attract. Also, written language seemed cold and blunt, likely to overdetermine to the point of distortion. I struggled to defer judgement while using words, which provided too narrow an accommodation for this exploration. I was gathering research results but lacked a unified form of articulation. Overwhelmed by this dilemma, I began making a songscape about an imagined unplanned pregnancy.

What I wanted was to be heard but not seen, in a way that some sound theorists refer to as acousmatic (Kane, 2012). I was also inspired by the memetic power of melody, its propensity for being remembered and also transmitted from one memory to another, a characteristic which the writer William Burroughs referred to as viral (Burroughs, 1970: 24). Moreover, I was helped in articulating music's power for setting up and then violating expectations by the theorist Phillip Ball (2010: 323). Furthermore, since I intended my research to reach beyond academic audiences, I saw promise in using a performative approach, and this notion was validated by the theorists of Performative Social Science, Mary and Kenneth Gergen (2010).

Indeed, there have been various inspirations for my choice to employ sound to amalgamate this research, including Toni Morrison's description in The Bluest Eye (1970) of the impossibly complex and contradictory character 'Cholly', of whom the narrator says "only a musician" could make sense (159). The term 'Jingle-Doc' was also partially inspired by the propagandistic documentary short films in Aldous Huxley's novel Brave New World (1960). Furthermore, the idea that documentary-like ethnography or autobiography might be performative or opaque was nurtured by Zora Hurston's humorous and playful autobiography Dust Tracks on a Road (1942). Also validating my experimental approach was Nicholas Cook's characterisation of The Rite of Spring in Disney's 1940 animated film Fantasia—"ethnography masquerading as fantasy"—in which he references both the animated "tribal dances" and Stravinsky's music in Fantasia's Rite of Spring segment (Cook, 1998: 199). John Drever also links acousmatic music, such as

soundscapes based on participant observation or archival studies, to ethnography, noting that "ethnography embraces the subjective sensuous experience of the researcher" (2002: 23).

As I neared completion of my songscape, I thought it seemed unlikely that it would attract an audience on its own. So, I began playing with a lone dancing figure I had been animating. As I contemplated the imagined, unplanned pregnancy that had inspired my songscape, I transformed this lone dancing figure into a pregnant and vulnerable young woman. With the addition of the animations, the visual took up a place of dominance. Meaning also became more specific; however, I wanted to leave meaning open enough to accommodate audience autonomy: while on the one hand there is a visual spectacle of a pregnant young girl, with the moral judgements this might evoke, on the other hand there is an invitation to contemplate and sympathise with a human dilemma and the choice not to give birth. The cartoon aesthetic widens the audience of the message beyond those who have experienced unwanted pregnancy and its consequences themselves—offering a "universal" invitation to identify with the subjects depicted (McCloud, 1993: 31).

With my simple set of shapes, I also found that small transformations have meaningful impact, such as the 'growing' pink circle representing pregnancy, as well as the addition of long hair representing increased femininity. Furthermore, I found that changes in the colour of the figures as well as changes in dance style could suggest gender ambiguity. Although I was not consciously imposing a schema, the change from a pink- to a blue-outlined figure and also the change from pastel background to a polarised view (dark-but-glowing) could be seen as warm and nurturing colours transforming to cool and cerebral ones. Also, the change in dance style by the figure, from slow and balletic to more vigorous and less formal, could signify movement towards androgyny, inter-sexuality or asexuality. Especially in a cultural environment of right-wing populism and the ethnonationalism it entails, Seedid problematises a version of femininity which is overdetermined by a universal and continuous responsibility for giving birth.

7. Conclusion

In this written commentary, I have analysed a contemporary neoliberal justification for austerity cuts to women's services, and found underlying assumptions about female sexual risk-taking. Such a narrow framing of the issue omits other important factors, such as reproductive coercion, and impedes the continued improvements needed for public health and wellbeing. As those involved in the teen pregnancy debate would often rather focus on the moral shortcomings of young women in their explanations of unplanned pregnancy rate fluctuations, counter-narratives are needed, and it is my hope that Seedid contributes such a counter-narrative to this discourse.

In an atmosphere that relentlessly silences feminist voices, my caution influenced a search for an oblique means of expression, and my subsequent development of the 'Jingle-Doc' form that Seedid takes. Seedid is intended as a gentle carrier for my research, enabling its conveyance in a multi-coded way, suited to various levels of reception and engagement among potential listener-viewers. I hope that Seedid will help to destabilise a neoliberal discourse of unplanned pregnancy as a spectacle of irresponsible and irrational female sexuality. It is my hope that Seedid contributes a testimony to the value of reproductive freedom and its need for protection. It is also my ambition that Seedid can reach listener-viewers who are not usually open to feminist messages. In using the 'Jingle-Doc' form to evoke the moralising against female sexuality, the spectacle of pregnancy, and the freedom to choose not to give birth, I intend to make this spectacle strange and to contribute a helpful disruption of the stereotype of riskiness. Finally, I hope that Seedid may serve as a centrepiece for discussing these issues in a non-judgemental way, helping to raise awareness.

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Biography

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Before the Czarny Protest: Feminist activism in Poland
Kasia Narkowicz

Abstract

Abortion in Poland was legal during Communism and became illegal (with a few exceptions) after the political shift to democracy. Since then, feminists have been active in resisting the abortion law but with little success in gaining public support or influencing legislation. This changed in 2016, when hundreds of thousands of Poles across the country took to the streets in what became known as the Czarny Protest, or Black Protest. They opposed a bill that would remove some of the exceptions and impose criminal sanctions on abortion. The scale of the protest meant that the proposal was stalled, even with the newly elected conservative populist government in power. It was a victory for the feminist movement and came as a surprise, especially after a similar proposal in 2011 received almost no public attention and failed to mobilise even within the feminist movement. This paper looks back at the pro-choice movement at that point, before the mass mobilisation in 2016. It draws on interviews and focus groups conducted with pro-choice activists in Poland between 2011 and 2012. It captures a moment when the feminist movement failed to mobilise support for the liberalisation of abortion, because it was predominantly active online rather than on the streets. The paper concludes by posing questions about the success of the mass mobilisation that took place five years later in 2016 and was, in contrast, largely mobilised online. Has there been a shift within the pro-choice feminist movement? Is there a sudden interest in feminist politics among the Polish public? Or was the Czarny Protest rooted in a broader dissatisfaction with the current regime? And lastly, what does that mean for feminist activism in Poland and the wider resistance against right-wing politics?
Key words: Abortion, Poland, Pro-choice, Czarny Protest, Feminist Activism

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Introduction

The conflict around abortion is a long-standing issue in Poland. Historically, sexual politics have been the unruly companion of significant shifts in the political and social make-up of the country, from de-Stalinisation to the political transition, the enlargement of the European Union and, most recently, the 2015 elections and their aftermath, which culminated in what became known globally as the Czarny Protest, translating to 'Black Protest', in 2016 (Narkowicz 2016; Korolczuk 2017).

Poland's current abortion law, also referred to as the abortion compromise, is less than three decades old. This legislation was swiftly enacted as part of the democratisation processes that began in 1989. After the fall of the Communist system in 1989, Central-European governments took measures towards the 're-familisation' of their societies, including changing the legislation on termination of pregnancy (Gal and Klingman 2000). In 1993, abortion in Poland became almost completely illegal, after having been legal during Communism (Fuszara 1993; Nowicka 1997; Kramer 2003). From having one of the most liberal abortion laws in Europe, the country suddenly enacted one of the most stringent anti-abortion laws. Abortion in Poland is permitted in only three circumstances: when the pregnancy constitutes a threat to the woman's life or health; if the foetus is irreversibly handicapped; or if the pregnancy was the result of a forbidden act such as rape or incest (Czerwinski 2003).

Historically, Poland was among those countries in Europe that pioneered legal abortion. Early debates around the legalisation of abortion formed part of the wider debate regarding the formation of a Polish criminal code in the 1920s (Grzywacz 2013). The gynaecologist, poet, playwright and vocal pro-choice supporter of women's rights, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, and prominent pro-choice feminist and writer Irena Krzywicka, campaigned against what they called 'back-alley abortions' and their associated health complications (Grzywacz 2013). When

popular support for the legalisation of abortion grew in Poland, it was eventually signed into law after the death of Stalin. Maria Jaszczuk, then parliamentarian and rapporteur for the Bill on Conditions of Pregnancy Termination, in which abortion was made legal for Polish women in 1956, remembered that time as one of massive public pro-choice opinion and little resistance:

[There were] women's activists in Warsaw and in consultation with the Health Minister we started to prepare the abortion bill. I only received one letter in opposition to my proposal to introduce legal abortion (a letter with a religious picture asking why I was doing it). But other than that [legal abortion] was met with approval. (Jaszczuk 2009, my translation)

From the mid-1950s onwards, legal abortion was widely available in Poland. While most Western European countries did not legalise it until the late 1960s or 1970s, Poland and other Communist states in Central and Eastern Europe had liberal abortion laws, which meant that women from Western countries such as Sweden, where abortion was illegal, travelled to Poland for their terminations (SOU 2005). As one pro-choice activist reflected in a film about illegal or 'underground' abortions:

My generation got the right in 1956 to decide about themselves. And we still had more children than women have today! (Podziemne Państwo Kobiet [The Underground Women's World] 2009)

The sudden change in legislation at the time of transition in the early 1990s caused mass opposition among women, who took to the streets protesting against state interventions to control their bodies. The criminalisation of abortion proposed by right-wing and religious groups came as a shock to many women, whose rights were suddenly about to be taken away at the same time as the country was transitioning to democracy after the long rule of the Communist Party (Gal and Klingman 2000). This changed women's activism. During Communism, women were predominantly active in the wider struggle for democracy as part of the trade union Solidarity, which formed the largest opposition to the Communist government (Regulska 1992). Women's role in the Solidarity movement became especially crucial during the 1980s, when women continued the pro-democracy struggle after the mass imprisonment of Solidarity's male members (Penn 2006). Immediately after transition, Solidarity's Women's Section had 10,000 members. It was when they started voicing opposition to the proposed de-legalisation of abortion that a rift took place with Solidarity's men, who were closely attached to the Catholic Church (Aulette 2008). With Lech Wałęsa, the leader of the opposition movement, who always had the figure of the Virgin Mary pinned to his chest (Płatek 2004), the Solidarity movement represented a certain vision of Polishness, one that was not comfortable with a feminist-centred politics. When Solidarity's women were pushing against the ban on abortion, the union refused to support them, arguing that women's moral views on abortion were unsatisfactory (Einhorn 1993). It is in the context of the abortion ban of 1993 that women's activism in Poland became more concretely focused on feminist issues.

Abortion became one of the first issues debated in the new democracy, signalling the symbolic and material importance that the new democratic government attached to the control of women's bodies and reproduction. The debates held then regarding reproductive rights, the role of the Church, healthcare and social policy, were instrumental in the construction of a Polish political imagination and in the shaping of the women's feminist movement post-1989 (Fuszara 1993; Gal and Kigman 2000). Consequently, feminist activism became central to broader democratic claims to the public sphere in the 1990s (Fuszara 1993). Reminiscing about the feminist protests in the early days of illegal abortion, one of my interviewees told the story of her own feminist awakening:

From 1980 until 1989 I was basically busy raising children, working at the university and other things more to do with entertainment, but not so much politics. But there was this moment, when I went to do the grocery shopping and saw a note saying 'if you disagree with the project

put to Parliament about criminalising abortion and also a two-year punishment for a person who helps a woman end her pregnancy meet at the Copernicus Monument'… well, then I dropped everything, left the kids with an uncooked meal [laughs] and went to the Copernicus Monument. The protest in May under the Copernicus Monument is like a milestone in my activities. I left my previous roles and… in 1989… across Poland there were a myriad of organisations and movements being set up. We set up [name of Basia's pro-choice group] in June that year.

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice activist, 60+)

The women's protests of the late 1980s gave rise to a prominent women's movement in post-Communist Poland (Chełstowska 2008; Gal and Klingman 2000), leading to the formation of around 30 women's groups across the country (Einhorn and Sever 2001). These newly formed women's groups directed their protests against the Catholic Church when they took to the streets chanting slogans such as: '*This is Poland, not the Vatican!*', '*Fewer churches, more day care*', '*God save us from the Church!*' and '*Poland was enslaved, now Polish women will be enslaved*' (Hauser, Heyns, and Mansbridge 1993: 259). These marches were not dissimilar to the protests held almost three decades later in 2016. Over time, abortion, then at the centre of women's activism in Poland, became a more marginal issue, with decreasing public support and increasing stigma attached to it.

This article draws on primary data gathered in 2011–2012 during fieldwork in Poland that lasted for one year and was part of my PhD research on conflict in the Polish public sphere. I conducted interviews, focus groups and participant observations with pro-choice and pro-life activists in Warsaw. I am not including interview data from the pro-life participants in this paper because my focus here is specifically on pro-choice activism. The article draws from six individual interviews, two paired interviews, one focus group and four participant observations with pro-choice activists. The interviewees were all women, mostly 30–40 years old, with a couple of younger and older women participating as well. Most of the participants were educated and middle class. Most were employed in various non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including feminist ones, one was an academic and one a politician. All the women were also activists. Their views ranged from liberal feminism through radical feminism to anarcha-feminism. To maintain anonymity in what is a closely-knit feminist community in Warsaw, I have changed all the participants' names and will only refer to them by pseudonym and approximate age. Apart from the interviews, I attended various feminist events, meetings and marches – insights from which informed this paper as well. All the fieldwork was conducted in Polish and subsequently translated.

2011: Before the Czarny Protest

At the time of my fieldwork in Warsaw in 2011–2012, abortion was again on the agenda, as happens every few years. Then, both pro-choice and pro-life[1] movements were gathering support for their citizen initiatives among the public in the hope of gathering 100 000 signatures and putting forward their proposals for more liberal versus more restrictive abortion laws in parliament with the aim of changing the current legislation. While the pro-life initiative was successful in gathering 100 000 signatures, their petition was eventually rejected by the then centre-liberal government. The pro-choice citizen initiative, however, was largely a failure, and was unable to reach the 100 000-signature threshold. The women I interviewed were all involved in this initiative, yet not all of them were active in collecting signatures. Some of them felt strongly that 'Facebook is not enough' and urged activists to mobilise offline (Desperak 2011: 1). But this was not easy in 2011. The feminist pro-choice movement that had entered the public sphere over two decades previously had become demotivated and, as some of my interviewees put it, dead (interview with Basia).

There were about 70 of us active and then fewer and fewer, and now we're only a handful of people. You could say that some people just died out, literally, because we're all over 60 now... sometimes I do get burned out and tired.

(Basia, individual interview, 60+)

Basia collected signatures for both the 1989 and the 2011 citizen initiatives. She remembered that, back in 1989, they collected a million signatures against the criminalisation of abortion, while this time around, in 2011, the pro-choice movement failed to collect the 100 000 signatures required:

I'm very happy that it [the citizen's initiative] is going on, we're collecting signatures wherever we can. But this is still very different from when I worked at the cultural centre in the Ochota neighbourhood and people who didn't even know me but knew what I was doing would find me and want to sign the petition. And now we have to go and find the people.

(Basia, individual interview, 60+)

Through talking to Basia and other pro-choice activists during my fieldwork, it became clear that the days of the mass influx of women's groups taking ownership of the streets of Warsaw – which occurred in the early 1990s – were past. The feminist activists had observed a slow erosion of pro-choice activism in the public sphere. Street activism, according to them, was rare among pro-choice activists at that time, in 2011–2012. This indicates a slow, but drastic change from the earlier days of feminist protest in Poland. In feminist circles, through the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s, abortion politics was discussed, as Aneta remarked: 'ad nauseam'. During my interviews, many participants reminisced about the radical actions of feminists at that time, with a hint of nostalgia and a certain sense of resignation:

Kasia: And when was all this?

Aneta: It was a long time ago...

(Aneta, paired interview, women's NGO worker, 30+)

There's a defeatism dominating. It is, I must admit, quite justified if we look at what's going on.

(Iga, individual interview, activist, 30+)

Before, there was much more of this protest... these kinds of street actions, there was more of that.

(Jagoda, paired interview, women's NGO worker, 20+)

In interview after interview, the pro-choice participants spoke of a decline in the movement of which they were a part. This was captured well in a film made by one of my participants, in which an interviewee describes the shift in the feminist movement in Poland:

From the tens of thousands who were active... and this drop happened within only a few years. There was the '89, '93... and then in 1994... we were standing outside the US embassy because it was some Global Day for Women and there was only me standing there and Wanda Nowicka. It

makes me sad when I remember so many people turning up on the streets, full of anger and willing to commit and engage in the [abortion] issue. And then there was a withdrawal, everyone retired to their homes, their work. We got the sense that our activity was pointless, nothing happened. And this is how it looks now. (Podziemne Państwo Kobiet 2009)

This lack of street presence has been analysed by the senior figures in the movement with disappointment and defeatism. A key figure in the pro-choice movement, and also a politician, mourned the passing of the pro-choice activism of the 1990s:

I doubt that such a movement [referring to the early 1990s] would be possible today because many former pro-choice activists have slipped back into conformity and passivity. (Nowicka 1997)

The lack of 'street-feminism'

A major hindrance to the pro-choice group gathering support under their initiative in 2011 was the fact that the required 100 000 signatures could not be gathered online but rather had to be collected on paper due to the petition's status as a citizen initiative, which, in order to be formally lodged, requires every citizen to physically sign the petition, adding their identification number. This was difficult because the pro-choice movement had gradually moved away from the streets and was operating predominantly online.

Scholarship on feminist activism has shown that online spaces can have a democratising effect, facilitating new social engagement and opening up new possibilities for political activity (Puente 2011; Keller 2011; Soon and Cho 2013; Kember 2003). As Puente (2011) has shown in Spain, when there was already a solid grounding in offline feminist organising, online feminist spaces complemented and facilitated face-to-face organising and direct action. In contrast to the Polish case, the Spanish online portals became political tools that contributed to legislative change (Puente 2011). In the Polish case, however, the pro-choice movement went online not primarily to facilitate offline activism, but almost to replace it. Public opinion in Poland had shifted so radically to a pro-life stance that feminist pro-choice activists faced a public backlash. This meant that many feminists were reluctant to go out on the streets and instead organised predominantly online. Unfortunately, their online activism did not translate into street activism at the time of the 2011 citizen initiative to liberalise the abortion law.

Kasia: And how were you involved [in the citizen initiative for liberalisation of the abortion law]? What did you do?

Jagoda: We collected signatures.

Kasia: And did you collect among people you knew, or did you go out on the streets?

Jagoda: No, no, it was more that there were petitions laid out here in the office and we announced that people can come to us and sign it… more in this way.

Kasia : You didn't go out on the streets?

Jagoda: No.

Kasia: Ok, and you, Aneta?

Aneta: Um… I collaborated with the initiative as well… in the beginning I helped out with the graphics as well and made some posters or things like that, and later we did some events with UFA, I don't know, it was more cultural and music events where it was important to have a stand where signatures could also be collected.

Kasia: And what was the interest like? Do you remember any conversations among people who signed or didn't sign the petition?

(Pause)

Kasia: Any voices of opposition among your group maybe?

Jagoda: On the contrary, actually, but perhaps that's because people who attend these kinds of events or come to this kind of organisation already have a grounded worldview.

(Jagoda and Aneta, women's NGO workers, 20+ and 30+)

The way in which the citizen initiative took off, within familiar and seemingly safe spaces, also meant that the initial work involved groups and individuals who were already supportive of the proposed initiative. Jagoda and Aneta, both of whom started their activism in the early 2000s on the street and have both since retired to semi-private and online spaces, said of online spaces:

Kasia: And is it successful, does it work, that the work has moved online?

Jagoda: I'm not sure…

Aneta: I would not be so sure about that…

(Jagoda and Aneta, women's NGO workers, 20+ and 30+)

As other pro-choice activists confirmed, the collection of signatures initially took place among groups already deemed sympathetic to the cause:

We were gathering a bit among our own group; these conferences are attended by the same people all the time and these people have usually already signed the petition.

(Agata and Gizela, paired interview, 30+ and 40+)

For a movement that has been less active in material spaces and increasingly active in virtual spaces for a decade, the task of mobilising in the material sphere proved challenging. There was a distinct lack of people who were willing to go out onto the streets:

We didn't have enough people to go out there.

(Iga, individual interview, 30+)

The key to gathering signatures is to get out on the streets. And we lacked people who would be willing to give up their time, stand on the streets, approach strangers, actively engage them in conversation and ask them to sign…

(Gizela, paired interview, activist and politician, 40+)

Edyta: What we didn't manage to accomplish was to gather a large group of people to collect signatures, simply.

Kasia: On the streets?

Edyta: Yes, on the streets. It didn't translate into a mass movement.

(Edyta, individual interview, activist and academic, 30+)

The difficulty for the pro-choice movement lay in utilising 'traditional methods' in their activism. That is, moving away from activism within the group itself and establishing methods to 'reach ordinary people' using methods such as standing outside metro stations with petitions the way that the pro-life movement did. The lack of street presence was understood by several of the pro-choice activists as the biggest issue and the ultimate reason why the citizen's initiative did not reach its target of gathering 100 000 signatures:

Gizela: The thing that we fell flat on was… these more traditional methods of gathering signatures. The conferences and debates we had were exhausted, so we had to go out on the streets because we needed to reach ordinary people, especially as we couldn't count on the media. So suddenly it turned out that we had no people who we could stand on the streets with.

Kasia: How many people were involved in collecting signatures?

Gizela: You know… it's so different… We needed at least 15 people to register the Committee… There were those who were very active but didn't join the Committee. I must say that when it comes to the most active people, those who were really involved… few of them were long-term activists in women's organisations or feminist organisations, I would even say that these women [from the feminist organisations] were least active.

(Gizela, paired interview, activist and politician, 40+)

I had this thing that I would like to take part in such an action and I see that many people around me also have this feeling that they would want to, but they're a little bit afraid…

(Aneta, paired interview, women's NGO worker, 30+)

I was also out on the streets… it was very unpleasant. I hate it and every time I went out on the street I wanted to bite my own finger…

(Edyta, individual interview, activist and academic, 30+)

I understand that not everyone can do it. It's one thing to stand with a banner and wait for people to approach us, and that would only happen if the media would constantly be on the issue

reporting that there is such and such an initiative going on, and then people would recognise us. But here the job was to catch people, to go up to them and say good day I come from Yes to Women, I'm gathering signatures.

(Gizela, paired interview, activist and politician, 40+)

…and not under a petition for protecting dolphins but under a petition for protecting women! Women are afraid to speak up during lectures at university, not to mention going out on the streets and asking for a signature. [It] is an important matter for our movement to teach girls assertiveness and run courses so that a woman who hears that she's a bitch and a murderer when she's collecting signatures won't run home and cry but treat this as something that's bound to happen, and she must move on and ask for another signature, that's what I think.

(Magda, individual interview, activist and writer, 30+)

Even though the women who did go out on the streets, such as Gizela, Agata and Edyta, reported on their experiences as ultimately being surprisingly positive, most of the established pro-choice activists to whom I spoke did not go out at all. The lack of feminists out on the streets was a disappointment to one of the organisers of the pro-choice citizen's initiative, who linked it to a 'lack of commitment':

I will tell you honestly as a person who comes from the feminist movement where I'm active, to me a big disappointment is the organisations, women's and feminist organisations… We've never tried this kind of thing and this really demands a real commitment and declaration like 'ok we'll give this much and we'll give this much', so, I don't know… maybe we're living in some sort of mythical future. But if we could try it again, then it could have been different.

(Gizela, paired interview, activist and politician, 40+)

They did try again, five years later, and the results were radically different. This time around, in contrast to 2011, the internet was used to facilitate the offline protest. Because the Polish feminist movement was supported by many different actors, it managed to marry traditional forms of organising offline with new forms of organising online (Korolczuk 2017).

2016: The Czarny Protest
In 2003, feminist activist, writer and academic Agnieszka Graff emphasised the task of bringing 'reproductive freedom back into the public sphere' as a priority for feminists (Graff 2003: 113). Judging by the atmosphere almost a decade later during my fieldwork, the possibility of putting abortion back into the public sphere as it had been in the 1990s seemed – if anything – to be ever more remote. But this changed in 2016 when feminist protest gained significance again with the Czarny Protest, following a new proposal to restrict the abortion law even further.

In 2016, following the election of the right-wing PiS party, abortion legislation was once again threatened with more, and severe, restrictions. The change in the current abortion legislation was proposed in 2016 by Ordo Iuris, a group of conservative lawyers. This organisation proposed a total ban when at the time abortion was permitted under some circumstances; for example, when the woman's life was endangered. These exceptions in abortion provision would be further restricted, including potential criminal prosecution for a woman who undergoes abortion. This was not the first time the current abortion legislation had been threatened, but it was the first time since 1993 that it caused such public outrage (Narkowicz 2016). Since the 2015 elections and the rise to power of the conservative Law and Justice party, women's protest in Poland had once again become relevant, mobilising thousands of women (and men) onto Polish streets, in

the cities and the countryside as a response to the new proposed bill that would restrict the abortion law further (Korolczuk 2017). After an unprecedented national and international protest, the government voted against the proposal.

The feminist protest came after several general public protests had already been held against the new government since 2015. Within this climate of intensified civil societal awakening, the Czarny Protest was perfectly timed. As such, the feminist protest in Poland became an important battle in a nationwide resistance against the populist government. A crucial reason for its success was that, in contrast to the 2011 citizen initiative, the pro-choice movement managed to get out onto the streets. This happened because they were no longer just a handful of women as before; now, they were hundreds of thousands of women, outraged and ready to fight a battle they had not fought since the early 1990s.

Accompanying the Czarny Protest was a citizen initiative that, much like the one in 2011, aimed at liberalising the abortion law. Just as in 2011, there were two competing proposals that sought to get 100 000 signatures in order to be put forward for discussion by the government. The pro-life proposal that sought to criminalise abortion managed to get 450 000 signatures, but was eventually rejected by Parliament. The pro-choice proposal for the liberalisation of the law managed to gather over 200 000 signatures this time, which is 150 000 more than in 2011. Despite the fact that the 2016 mass protests were largely mobilised in online spaces, they succeeded in getting women out on the streets. Perhaps this suggests that online activism has become more important in Poland and that, when coupled with public dissatisfaction, it can facilitate the still-needed street activism that is crucial for legislative change.

Conclusion

Feminist protest in Central and Eastern Europe was historically closely intertwined with the political transformation from Communist rule to a capitalist democracy. Today, it is again at the centre of a political shift in the country and the resistance to it. 2016 was an especially important year for the Polish pro-choice movement. The then newly elected right-wing party, Law and Justice, allowed a proposal from a right-wing group to be discussed and voted upon. The right-wing government, with the support of the Catholic Church, wanted to back this proposal, which would restrict abortion further by introducing punishment for women who terminated their pregnancies. But, in contrast to the previous time that a similar proposal was introduced, in 2011, the 2016 plan to introduce a full ban on abortion was met with fierce protest by Polish women, who took to the streets demonstrating against this plan (Narkowicz 2016). This mass mobilisation was a surprise to many feminists (Korolczuk 2017), especially those who remembered how hard it had been to get the public engaged in these issues.

Drawing on data collected with Polish pro-choice activists in 2011–2012, this paper has mapped out feminist protest before 2016, in order to better understand the mass mobilisation that culminated in the Czarny Protest [Black Protest]. As Korolczuk (2017) has argued, the Czarny Protest is both an example of revolutionary feminist politics and a symptom of ongoing changes in Poland. And, as I have argued elsewhere (Narkowicz 2016), while there is scope for optimism about the ability to once again mobilise Polish women to protest for their abortion rights on a mass scale, it is necessary to recognise that the mass feminist protest in October 2016 was not necessarily indicative of a sudden eruption of feminist and pro-choice attitudes among Polish citizens. This is because, as I have shown in this paper, the pro-choice movement failed to gather public sympathy under similar legislative proposals only a few years earlier, in 2011, when they did not succeed in collecting 100 000 signatures.

Since 2011, the political context has changed. Public dissatisfaction with the ruling conservative party, which has undermined democracy since its election in 2015, has allowed the feminist movement to involve people from outside, much like in the early 1990s, when ordinary women

from both cities and villages dropped everything and walked out onto the streets; something feminists felt unable to do during the last decade. This time around, the pro-choice citizen initiative managed to get over 200 000 signatures, despite later being rejected by the largely right-wing government. The role of the internet was significant. In contrast to 2011, when pro-choice online activism meant that the protest did not go offline and ultimately failed, in 2016 the internet functioned as a facilitator of the major offline demonstration that became the Czarny Protest (Korolczuk 2017). This recent shift in Polish pro-choice politics corresponds to literature that stresses the ability of online activism to open up opportunities and become politically significant (Puente 2011; Keller 2011; Soon and Cho 2013; Kember 2003).

So what does all this mean for feminist activism and the power to resist anti-abortion legislation in Poland? It suggests that feminist protest in Poland, in order to be effective, needs to engage broadly and be present on the streets if it is to challenge the largely public presence of the right-wing pro-life movement. And it needs to tap into deeper societal discontents in order to find alliances. Crucially, it also needs to mobilise horizontally in cities and villages, because, to a large extent, this was its failure in 2011 and its success in 2016.

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[1] I use the terms 'pro-choice' and 'pro-life' here, because that is how the activists describe themselves and because these terms are well-known. However, I want to acknowledge that these terms are also contested within the movements. Within the pro-choice movement, it is common to refer to the 'pro-life' movement as 'anti-choice', arguing that it cares little for the lives of women while prioritising the life of the foetus.

Biography

Kasia Narkowicz is a human geographer working in the intersections of gender, race/islamophobia, religion and postcoloniality, and focusing on Poland and the UK. Kasia holds a PhD in Human Geography from the University of Sheffield and has since held posts at University of Södertörn, University of Cambridge and University of York. Her publications include: "Refugees Not Welcome Here: State, Church and Civil Society responses to the refugee crisis in Poland" (International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society), "Unmaking Citizens: Passport removals and the reorientation of colonial governmentalities" (Ethnic and Racial Studies, with Nisha Kapoor) and "Saving and Fearing Muslim women in a post-communist context: Troubling Catholic and Secular anti-Muslim narratives in Poland" (Gender, Place and Culture, with Konrad Pedziwiatr).

Kasia's Twitter

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Punk Prayers and Topless Protest: Feminist Challenges to Patriarchal Orthodoxies

Zora Simic

On 21 February 2012, five members of Pussy Riot performed less than a minute of their Punk Prayer, or *moleben*, 'Mother of God, Chase Putin Away!' on the *soleas* of Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior before being escorted away by guards. Their intention, they later elaborated, was not blasphemy but protest; specifically against the Russian Orthodox Church's support of Vladimir Putin's election campaign, the Church Patriarch Kirill's obedience to the state above God, and the state's co-option of Orthodox religion.[1] Three members – Nadezhda (Nadya) Tolokonnikova, Maria (Masha) Alyokhina and Yetkaterina (Kat) Sumutsevich – were arrested, detained and on 17 August 2012, charged with hooliganism motivated by religious hatred and sentenced to two years in prison. Sumutsevich was released in October 2012 following an appeal, while Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina remained imprisoned until December 2013 when they were freed as part of a state amnesty granted to select prisoners to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of Russia's constitution.[2]

During the high-profile Pussy Riot trial, the Ukrainian feminists Femen expressed their solidarity with the Russian activists by attempting to accost Patriarch Kirill at Borispol Airport. Yana Zhdanova, topless and with the inscription 'Kill Kirill!' scrawled on her chest, was intercepted by the Patriarch's bodyguards as she shouted out the words of an Orthodox exorcism in his direction. The authorities sentenced her to fifteen days in prison and temporarily shut down the group's webpage.[3] When the Pussy Riot verdict came down in August, preparations for Femen's protest were already underway. In a carefully orchestrated stunt, Inna Shevchenko chain-sawed down a seven-metre wooden cross (while topless and wearing protective goggles) in a small park in central Kiev. They later shared that their intention was "to deliberately offend the Orthodox Church for its incitement to hatred of these three young women, vilified and threatened with prison."[4] The protest made international headlines, consolidating Femen's reputation as sensational(ist) provocateurs. In the aftermath, Shevchenko, shaken by new levels of state surveillance, fled Ukraine to Paris where she set up a Femen training centre for new recruits.

Femen's topless chainsaw protest fuelled an already blazing controversy about the motivations behind Pussy Riot's Punk Prayer. In Russia, the state-controlled media blamed a wave of copy-cat 'cross protests' on Pussy Riot supporters. It was also alleged that the actual cross Shevchenko demolished had been erected on public land by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in memory of Soviet state victims.[5] Femen countered that it had been erected by Polish activists during the Orange Revolution pro-democracy protests of 2004-2005,[6] but whatever the case, such crosses were laden with historical and political significance in the post-socialist world. Crosses had sprung up all over Russia and other former Soviet states after communism's collapse as a symbol of anti-communist feeling and to mark the resurgence of public faith after decades of official oppression of religion.[7]

When the anti-Putin protests broke out in late 2011, approximately 70 per cent of Russians identified as 'Orthodox', roughly double what it had been at the time the Soviet system had collapsed in the early 1990s.[8] Religiosity rates have been even higher in Ukraine over the same period, but Ukrainian Orthodoxy is complicated by asymmetrical Ukrainian-Russian relations and internal diversity; while the majority of Ukrainian believers declare themselves part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church headed by the Patriarch of Moscow, significant minorities are adherents of a rival Ukrainian Orthodox Church with its own Kiev-based Patriarch which claims to be the national church or the Ukrainian Catholic Church.[9] Successive Ukrainian governments have been described as relatively liberal desecularising regimes that have encouraged competitive desecularisations from below, in contrast to Russia where

desecularisation has worked from the top-down to promote a nationalistic and increasingly illiberal form of Orthodoxy to the exclusion of other strands.[10] In each country then, the Orthodox Church has been a crucial player in post-Soviet nationalism and politics, while also used by the Russian government as an instrument of both Russian nationalism and Russian hegemony over Ukraine.

Pussy Riot and Femen, two collectives of young women who had grown up in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's demise, shared a negative view of the increasing proximity of church and state in their region, but the chain-saw protest also marked their political and tactical distance from each other. When asked by a Russian newspaper about Pussy Riot's relationship to Femen, Alyokhina emphasised that while they "share the same sudden appearance and protest against authoritarianism", Pussy Riot also "look at feminism differently, especially the type of our actions. We have never stripped and never will. The latest action cutting down the cross unfortunately doesn't create any feelings of solidarity."[11] For Femen, Pussy Riot's behaviour during their trial – in particular, statements "that they were believers and prayed" – was "ridiculous" and a "disappointment." Cutting down the cross, they claimed, had been not only an act of support, but also "an anti-clerical act, the act of militant atheists."[12]

This article begins with this necessary sketch of the emblematic Pussy Riot and Femen moments of 2012 in order to begin to push a now well-established comparison between them in new directions. Images of these protests – and in particular Pussy Riot's – circulated throughout the world, attaining iconicity as new feminisms, yet such coverage was more often than not only marginally interested in the specific cultural context that prompted these protests in the first place. The bulk of feminist scholarship and commentary, outside of that focussed specifically on the post-Soviet world, has most often centred on comprehending each group, in terms of historical and existing feminisms, as media sensations in terms of their body politics and, in the case of Femen, their problematic or confounding politics, including evidence of palpable Islamophobia. Some of this work necessarily informs this study, yet as a historian of feminism, the questions that drive this analysis relate to the context in which each group emerged and the potential wider salience or location of their critiques of religion in particular. Given that Pussy Riot and Femen each developed their feminisms in post-socialist contexts marked to varying extents by desecularisation, I am interested in the ways in which each collective advances a feminist politics of religion, especially in relation to the state. How do their origins in the post-Soviet world inform their critiques of religion and political power? To comprehend the emergence and development of both collectives, it is important to keep the following in mind: First of all, each emerged within a particular historical and cultural context in which any oppositional politics was necessarily obliged to engage with religion as an influential facet of the state, as intrinsic to national identity, and as revitalised in the aftermath of the Soviet Union. Secondly, as explicitly *feminist* activists, Pussy Riot and Femen also made their interventions in cultures in which feminism was negatively associated with western influence and/or was marginal. And lastly, each group is also part of a new generation of activists that make gender and sexuality central to, or at least a discernible feature, of their opposition to authoritarian rule. As I point out, these shared circumstances produced markedly different feminist politics – from each other and from western feminisms – and one key marker of this difference is their respective approaches to religion.

More broadly, while there have been many reasons Pussy Riot and Femen have captured and maintained global media attention – their novel modes of protest, youth, whiteness, good looks and media savvy to name a few – their ascent has also been understood as part of a global wave of protest and dissidence that includes the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement in which gender politics have been hotly contested. The two collectives belong to a period defined as 'post-secular' or 'neo-secular' – broad terms meant to encompass a series of intersecting and contemporaneous developments including the War on Terror and the resurgence of public religiosity, fundamentalist regimes, 'militant' atheism, and patriarchal, authoritarian governments of which Russia is an exemplar. The reaction of feminist scholars and scholars of

feminism to this global post-secular turn runs the gamut from betrayal to excitement, as many Western feminisms have been resolutely provincialised, while new feminisms have arisen to knock on the door of a post-secular world.[13]

This article is thus an attempt to locate Pussy Riot and Femen in relation to this terrain, cognisant throughout of both similarities and differences between the two collectives, particularly as examples of feminist critiques of religion. Femen's favoured mode of protest – the shouty topless ambush – has been directed at targets beyond the politics and religion of their region, including the Roman Catholic Church and Islam, but the effects of this have understandably confounded observers and critics and collectively do not cohere into a sustained feminist critique of religion that goes much deeper than slogans and shock tactics. Further, as will be seen, while Femen's politics have gone global insofar as they have attracted new recruits, expanded their protest targets and increased their general visibility, it has also been the case that Femen have driven away sections of their own constituency for various reasons, including their tone-deaf attacks on an undifferentiated Islam, as well as their exclusionary aesthetics. Pussy Riot meanwhile have developed and refined their politics throughout, reiterating and clarifying that it is the authoritarian and masculinist use of religion against the interests of democracy and freedom that has fuelled their activism, not 'hooliganism motivated by religious hatred' as charged. In this regard, most evident in their ongoing protest against Russian President Vladimir Putin and his ever-escalating power, Pussy Riot have been both remarkably consistent in their target, while extending their core critique to other contexts, including Trump's America.[14]

Given the volume of legitimate criticism against Femen on a number of fronts from multiple directions, it perhaps goes almost without saying then that Pussy Riot offer a more robust and useful feminist critique of religion and masculinist authoritarianism, but each are ripe for further analysis that considers how their specific cultural contexts encouraged new feminisms directly concerned with the resurgence of patriarchal orthodoxies in former socialist societies that have since been described as post-secular. Each have also explicitly positioned themselves as products of post-socialist, pro-democratic 'revolutions', in Femen's case the two months or so of pro-democracy, anti-corruption protests that came in the wake of the heavily compromised 2004 Ukrainian election and came to be known as the 'Orange Revolution'. Though most members were children at the time, Femen would later incorporate references to the street protests and populist campaigns of the Orange Revolution in their early Ukraine protests, inaugurating a noisy if 'ambiguous' stance against "all dictatorship and religion".[15] In some contrast, Pussy Riot emerged directly as part of what Maria Alyokhina has described and elaborated in her 2017 memoir *Riot Days* as the 'Snow Revolution' of 2011, the protest movement that arose in opposition to the unprecedented political machinations of Putin and his closest allies, including the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church.[16] To better comprehend the divergences and overlaps between Femen and Pussy Riot, the first two sections detail the politics of each collective, as defined by themselves and as received within their societies of origin and beyond. In the final section I pan out to the wider field of feminism and religion and ponder what a post-socialist perspective can bring to ongoing feminist debates about religion, the state and gender.

I: Femen

Since moving their headquarters from Ukraine to Paris, Femen have become a global movement (of sorts)[17] dedicated to the initiation of "women's mob law over patriarchy as the historically first, and last, existing form of slavery." Their 'Sextremism' manifesto – a mash-up of the rhetorical histories of radical feminism, national liberation movements and socialist fronts, overlaid with their distinctive claims for topless protest ("Female nudity, free of patriarchal system, is a grave-digger of the system") and undergird by Ukrainian phrasing – lists "the fundamental institutions of patriarchy – dictatorships, sex-industry and church" as their key targets.[18] Constant updates on their newsfeed testify to these abiding commitments. Since the Pussy Riot protest, the most highly publicised actions have included an International Topless

Jihad Day in April 2013 and a sensational action in St Peter's Square in Vatican City in November 2014 in which three Femen activists simulated anal penetration with crucifixes to protest against what they saw as the Pope's meddling in politics. The effects of what has now been a decade of protest range from the punitive[19] to the celebratory: in secular France, Femen have a strong cultural presence and in 2013 their most 'iconic' member Inna Shevchenko (chain saw protester) was the acknowledged inspiration for a new French postal stamp of Marianne, the national symbol of the French Republic.

Specifically *feminist* effects are harder to measure and are at least highly contested. Femen's topless in situ protests and body politics have been ambivalently received, or outright rejected.[20] On their official webpage and other social media, striking and sometimes alarming images of their protests – in which semi-naked Femen activists are routinely chased, pinned to the ground and/or carried off by men in uniforms – add up to a substantial and unique archive of feminist protest, but the images also dwarf the written content that is meant to illuminate the issues at stake. The Femen Facebook page has over 90,000 likes,[21] but it is difficult to determine their membership beyond the core of approximately forty active protesters. To date, Femen's most ardent supporters in the media have been men, purportedly drawn to their defiant anti-clericalism.[22] There are also now Femen defectors, including Exit Femen, a collective of ex-members who claim Femen privilege marketing over politics, pressure activists to protest topless, are fatphobic, nationalistic and homophobic, and have no interest in engaging with the sex workers they purport to be fighting on behalf of.[23] This latter charge is especially notable given Femen have accounted for both their origins and their distinct aesthetic as protests against the Ukrainian sex industry that has flourished since the collapse of Communism and includes prostitution, sex tourism and sex trafficking. Yet while Femen have consistently reasserted their opposition to sex work, the dissonance between their radical feminist rhetoric on this point and their mode of protest has meant most accounts of this campaign focus on this fact rather than proper coverage of the issue.[24]

Perhaps even more so than their topless feminism, Femen's ongoing protest against Islam has provoked the most negative responses. Femen's most high profile defector remains Tunisian activist Amina Sboui, on whose behalf Femen launched their International Topless Jihad after her own online topless protests generated such a backlash (including a fatwā by a Tunisian Iman calling for her to be stoned to death) that she had to go into hiding. Sboui was eventually arrested for spray painting 'Femen' on a wall as a protest against the radical Islamist group Ansar Al-Sharia. Sboui's self-portraits, in which she marked herself with the words 'Fuck your morals' and in Arabic, 'My body belongs to me, and it is not anybody's honour', inspired a wave of similar feminist actions (or 'microrevolutions') in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, and the formation of Femen Morocco,[25] but the feminist backlash against Femen's ongoing Topless Jihad has been far more visible and sustained and includes the formation of Muslim Women Against Femen, a transnational coalition that objected to what they labelled Femen's "white, colonial" presumption that Muslim women need saving or will be liberated via unveiling.[26] Sboui left Femen because they would not answer her questions about how they are financed ("What if it is financed by Israel?") and because of provocative actions, such as burning the black Tawid flag in front of a mosque in Paris. Such actions offended her Muslim friends and in her view amounted to Islamophobia.[27] Since Sboui's disavowal, criticism of Femen's Islamophobia, and related charges, have become so voluminous they now constitute an identifiable corpus of critique and contribute rich material to ongoing scholarship about western feminism's problematic reckoning with Islam globally, with the complicating twist of Femen's Ukrainian/ Eastern origins. It is beyond the scope of this article to properly examine Femen's position in relation to these debates or to critical accounts of 'Muslim Women Need Saving' feminist projects, but it is nevertheless essential to foreground here that Femen's protest against Islam was ultimately a failure for the same reason it was initially a partial success – it captured the interest of some young women in Muslim-majority countries and/or Muslim women then failed to sustain or harness it, preferring to maintain a myopic anti-Islam stance rather than evolve their politics via their expanded constituency and their specific concerns and locations.

However, while there is much evidence to support critiques that label Femen 'western' and 'imperialist'[28] – including their own statements in which they present themselves as defenders of European secularism against an undifferentiated Islam that uniformly victimises women[29] – Femen's Ukrainian origins also saturate their politics and complicate any claims they have to a western (European) standpoint, or any critiques that situate Femen as emblematic of imperialist White Feminism. Agata Pyzik, in her recent book examining culture clashes between Eastern and Western Europe, suggests western intersectional feminists who have dismissed Femen for "cypto or even open racism and nudity-obsession" are as guilty as Femen of misunderstanding the "delicate circumstances" that produce certain feminisms, be they Islamic or Ukrainian. The "very specific reality that Femen are fighting", writes Pyzik, is the "post-communist desert of sex industry, sex clubs, girls at your wish every day" and "the post-communist neglect or permissiveness of the worst kinds of women abuse".[30] Developing this theme, Jessica Zychowicz notes two important historical precedents to and frameworks for Femen's politics: the Orange Revolution, which the group continue to identify with, and post-September 11 western 'missions' and discourses about 'rescuing' Muslim women. The former legitimated their basic right to protest,[31] while the latter "created the conditions" for Femen's misguided critique.[32]

While they sit in peculiar distance to the majority of other Ukrainian feminist organisations, Femen nevertheless belong to the second wave of feminist activism to have emerged in response to the resurgence of neo-traditional ideology in post-Soviet Ukraine. The first wave, drawing on the resources and discourses of western feminist organisations (particularly the European Union model), championed a series of legal and political reforms to eradicate gender discrimination and advance women's rights, but enjoyed only limited success and influence – not surprising, considering the long-standing hostility to western-style 'feminism' in Ukraine.[33] The next wave of activists, many of them mobilised by the Orange Revolution, were younger and generally more radical in approach, including Femen, who formed in 2008 as a university reading group called 'New Ethics'. The inauguration of a Soviet-style, anti-democratic government in 2010 further spurred the second-wave. As formal avenues for political influence narrowed, street protests and acts of civil disobedience became the preferred modes of activism.[34]

Women's rights were the impetus for Femen's formation: Anna Hutsol, the founding member of Femen, says what sparked her activism were stories of Ukrainian women being duped by false promises from men abroad. 'Ukraine is not a Brothel' – later the title of a 2013 documentary by Australian film-maker Kitty Green in which Victor Syvatski was 'outed' as Femen's patriarchal mastermind (or 'Rasputin')[35] – was the group's first and most enduring slogan. Their first protests against sex tourism, while theatrical, were not dissimilar to earlier modes of feminist activism against the sex industry – pickets outside embassies, marches through red-light districts and targeted appeals to politicians – but by 2010 topless protests were firmly established in their repertoire. For Femen, dressing as a prostitute (their words)[36] and/or protesting with their breasts bared serve to both combat the negative image of Ukrainian women arising from sex tourism and reclaim women's bodies for themselves.[37] Adding to their subversive effect as self-defined Ukrainian women, Femen also reclaimed the Ukrainian floral crown on the basis that they were traditionally worn by young unmarried women and "symbolize freedom and independence."[38]

Not all members of Femen protest topless (including Hustol), but of the majority who do, Femen's topless protestors are uniformly young, slim and desirable, a tactic Hustol has defended as "the only way to get heard in this country" and also necessary to ensure and maintain iconicity and media attention.[39] Further, she has argued that Femen's aesthetic is recognisably Ukrainian ("[t]o make yourself unattractive in Ukraine is to consign yourself to the margins"); appeals to younger women and alienates feminists who do not sanction "eroticism" in "approach and dress".[40]

Femen's original focus on protesting the limited options for Ukrainian women was maintained and extended to include, for example, protests against international surrogacy and sexism in higher education. Their actions were also increasingly broadcast outside of the Ukraine, such as their numerous protests against the European World Cup, co-hosted by Ukraine and Poland, recast by Femen as a catalyst for sex tourism and domestic violence rather than a premiere sporting event. With this critique – summarised with the words 'Fuck Euro 2012' written on their chests – Femen activists manifested "their rebellion against the nation-state and its privileging of [Euro] over the interest of those it would affect negatively."[41] Yet, as Athanassiou and Bury have pointed out, while Femen's strategic use of 'sexiness' was effective in the context of the World Cup where the target was heteromasculine sexual privilege and the gender politics of the nation-state, the topless tactic revealed its limits at the 2012 London Olympics where Femen used the event to protest against violence against women in the undifferentiated 'Islamic states'. Using the neo-colonial and Orientalising logic of post-September 11 interventions, Femen in this instance – and many others since – rebelled against patriarchy at the same time as they enforced other forms of domination, that is, by "failing to acknowledge how [patriarchy] intersects with other systems of oppression."[42] More recently, since Femen's Topless Jihad has dissipated, the growth of sex worker activism and feminism in Ukraine – evident in the first ever public sex worker protest held in Kyiv on International Sex Workers' Rights Day 3 March 2017 – has cast fresh light on the limitations of Femen's anti-sex work stance, including their lack of affinity with other feminist organisations in the region more directly concerned with the welfare, safety and rights of women in sex work.[43]

Femen presently occupy a curious space within wider international feminism, in relation to Ukrainian feminism and indeed in relation to the term 'feminism' itself, which Hustol for instance has variously repudiated and claimed to rehabilitate.[44] While an avowedly international organisation, their militant atheism and in particular their targeting of "theocratic Islamic states" as the epitome of patriarchy at its worst[45] ultimately seems to have ostracised more women than it has attracted to the Femen cause. The four original members who moved from Ukraine to western Europe report they have struggled to find new recruits as committed as themselves and that their radicalism has sometimes been lost in translation or reduced to entertainment. In the Netherlands, for example, they were asked to cut down crosses as part of an art exhibition: what had been a courageous political act in Kiev morphed into a "parody".[46] Shevchenko has stated that she would like to "keep our 'Made in Ukraine', identity, our kicking and fighting spirit".[47]

The observation from one of Femen's most astute observers back in 2015 that Femen are at a crossroads remains pertinent – they can either choose to continue along the route of mass media performance art or they could politically legitimate their image, for instance by working with social activists in Ukraine; a move which would mean a reckoning with their feminist critics.[48] The same critic also cautions against a straight-forward assessment of Femen "as an actual social movement." On such grounds, they have failed on a number of fronts, but as a "feminist brand", Femen have generated productive contestation about feminism and all that it entails and through their body politics have helped expose "the underlying cultural mythologies that differentiate women from men, and East from West, in competing discourses which signify progress differently."[49]

II: Pussy Riot

Pussy Riot began in August 2011 as an off shoot of the anarchist art collective Voina, whose memorable actions included *Fuck for the Heir Puppy Bear* – an orgy of five couples (among them Tolokonnikova and her husband Petya) held in the foyer of the State Biology Museum in 2008 as a protest against the latest development in Russian political life: the pending election of Putin's heir apparent Dmitry Medvedev as his Presidential successor.[50] Once in power, Medvedev appointed Putin as his Prime Minister and in an unprecedented series of political manoeuvres enabled Putin to return as President in 2012 – a move endorsed by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). This was the backdrop and impetus to Pussy Riot's formation and from

the outset, the collective merged art, feminism and politics in a series of strategically curated public performances. With each action Pussy Riot gained in membership and notoriety; prior to the Punk Prayer their "clearest and most spectacular action" was belting out 'Putin Zussil' (translation: 'Putin has pissed himself') atop the Lobonoye Mesto in Red Square in freezing temperatures in January 2012. [51]

The Punk Prayer, Pussy Riot's fifth performance, like their earlier ones was carefully planned, but unlike those actions, this one was staged in a sacred and politically charged space: Christ the Saviour Cathedral, the "politically most important temple of officially Orthodoxy"[52], where Russian leaders come to celebrate religious holidays and from which the ROC generates huge tax-free revenue from its underground parking lot.[53] The Punk Prayer was thus, according to a statement on their website published a month later, "a political gesture to address the Putin government's merger with the Russian Orthodox Church", officially marked by Patriarch Kirill publicly endorsing Putin for President. The altar of the temple, rather than the street outside, was chosen because it is "place where women are strictly forbidden."[54] Guards cut short the Christ the Saviour performance so the video that was later loaded onto YouTube was augmented with footage from an earlier uncontroversial action at the lesser-known Bogoyavlensky Cathedral[55] and some explanatory notes from Seraphima, the most religious of the punk feminists.[56] The song itself was performed in two registers – confrontational punk when addressing Putin and Patriarch Kirill (addressed as 'Gundyay', a diminutive form of his secular name) and in the evidently sincere manner of a Russian Orthodox liturgical song when addressing Virgin Mary. The Prayer was staged during *Maslenitsa,* the last week before Orthodox Great Lent and it was on that basis that some of their supporters interpreted the Punk Prayer as an alternative prayer in the Orthodox holy fool tradition[57], a history of Orthodoxy invoked in various ways in courtroom statements by Nadya and Masha. Their prosecutors saw it differently, and they were officially charged in March 2012 with "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" and of maliciously humiliating the feelings and beliefs of Orthodox Christians and "disparaging the spiritual foundations of the state."[58]

Later Pussy Riot would speculate that the punitive treatment they received was vengeance for the Red Square protest rather than the Punk Prayer per se.[59] Other commentators have argued otherwise – that in Orthodox nationalist Russia, it was naïve to assume that the message of their feminist punk prayer would not cause widespread offence or at the least some confusion about their intent or target.[60] Orthodox opposition to Pussy Riot was by no means uniform or total (their defenders included high profile Orthodox figures and also ordinary believers who called for leniency), but public opinion polls conducted in Russia during the Pussy Riot trial demonstrate that the official interpretation of the Punk Prayer – as blasphemous and immoral with the protestors branded 'enemies of the state', a view advanced by the law, the government, the ROC and the state-controlled media – prevailed over Pussy Riot's own account of their actions as political protest, as feminism, and as art. Further, 47 per cent of respondents found the charges commensurate with actions deemed a gross violation of the 'moral norms of society'.[61] Analysis of public opinion suggests that the line Pussy Riot crossed was not protesting against Putin, but speaking out in a critical manner against religion and/or churches[62] or, more particularly, criticising the ROC as self-professed atheists rather than from a foundation of sincere faith.[63]

During the trial – later evaluated as more scandalous than the Pussy Riot action itself by the Russian Legal and Court Information Agency, given the alarming extent to which procedural norms and legal rights of the defenders were violated[64] – 'feminism' became one of the key measures of offence,[65] and according to their opponents (the purported 'Orthodox majority'), one of the most vivid markers of their foreign, liberal 'other-ness', along with their support for and from the LGBT community,[66] their prior activism (especially the 'orgy in the museum') and even their name, written in most newspapers in English letters rather than Cyrillic script.[67]
The escalating scale of the Pussy Riot crisis – unprecedented in post-Soviet Russia in terms of public attention, the level of politicisation, the broad involvement of Orthodox Christians and the internationalisation of the conflict[68] – revealed the true character of Russia's

desecularising regime. As Karpov has traced, while constitutionally Russia is still a secular state, an alliance of religious and ruling elites has brought religion back into the public sphere to shore up a church-state power monopoly that has increasingly marginalised minority faiths and punished public protest and dissent, including and perhaps especially, public expressions against religion.[69] Karpov predicts that this model of desecularisation – which does not concern itself with private life and faith and, above all, promotes Orthodoxy as a national affiliation – is unsustainable, partly because it will hold increasingly less appeal for younger Russians.[70] The Pussy Riot case certainly revealed a generational chasm but, whatever the case, since the trial, Russian parliament has introduced a law banning homosexual 'propaganda' and another that increases jail sentences for up to three years for "offending religious feelings". The introduction of these laws was aided by enduring representations of Pussy Riot as "militant atheists" and "sexual perverts working in cahoots with homosexuals"[71].

At some distance from Femen's stance on religion, Pussy Riot have consistently affirmed that their intention was never to insult believers or espouse religious hatred, but to protest against the merging of political and religious elites.[72] After the Punk Prayer, they continued to protest against Putin and the state, while de-emphasising their critique of the ROC, removing religious imagery from their actions and distancing themselves from knock-on protests, including the Femen chainsaw protest and the inking of an icon in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour by a 62-year-old male supporter in September 2012. Since leaving prison, Nadya and Masha have joined other Pussy Rioters in anti-Putin protests at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi (where they were attacked with whips and tear gas by Cossack militia employed as security), accepted speaking invitations around the world and committed themselves to prison activism.
Yet Pussy Riot's actions divided rather than consolidated the opposition movement in Russia. Some liberals, for instance, lamented that the Prayer and popular reaction to it empowered authorities to enforce a conservative social agenda with even greater force,[73] while others, such as eco-activist and Orthodox believer Yevgenia Chirikova, lamented that Pussy Riot were now the unchristian face of the opposition for ordinary Russians.[74]

As a feminist action, the Punk Prayer has been persuasively interpreted as an important challenge to state power. While the authorities certainly used Pussy Riot's feminism to mock and discredit them, their imprisonment revealed the state as "fearful" of the political repercussions of "an explicit feminist critique of the illegitimate and anti-democratic state and its clerical allies", as Judith Butler suggested when she shared the stage with Nadya and Masha in 2014.[75] For Johnson and Saarinen, Pussy Riot succeeded in using feminism to further underscore the expanding authoritarianism within Putin's Russia; prior to the Punk Prayer the debate about the regime and its effects had been largely "gender blind" – even though gender politics had been central to regime change.[76] Pussy Riot brought issues of gender and sexuality to the forefront of anti-Putinism. These issues had never been in the mainstream of the opposition movement and were previously more typical of small dissident groups (including Voina).

Post-Pussy Riot, Patriarch Kirill attracted international headlines when he declared feminism "very dangerous", with the potential to destroy Russian society,[77] though this was hardly the first time a leader of the ROC had made such a statement.[78] Pussy Riot's unapologetic feminism may have allowed their opponents to label them as 'foreign' and 'immoral', but they have succeeded in expanding what had been an increasingly contracting space for feminist discourse, while also influencing LGBT protests such as the 'Send Putin a Dildo' campaign. However punitive the short-term effects of the Punk Prayer episode have been, including new repressive measures against organised feminist organisations since 2012, longer term effects may well be far more transformative. As Janet Johnson compellingly predicts, in the Russian political space, Pussy Riot's "carnivalesque feminism might make other feminisms more palatable in the long run, as did Black Power for civil rights in the USA".[79]

III: Feminism, Secularism, and Religion

Pussy Riot have on numerous occasions cited an eclectic range of western feminist influences and, since the Punk Prayer, have themselves been cited as influential and at the vanguard of contemporary feminisms. Yet they have also taken care to emphasise that, firstly, their feminism is a unique product of and response to Russian society and secondly, their feminism, in Russian terms, is new. One anonymous member told feminist journalist Laurie Penny in June 2013 that "[t]here are two reasons why we frighten people. The first thing is that we're a feminist, female group with no men in it, and the second is that we don't have leaders." In Russia, she added, where political power is emphatically masculine, "this activism comes from a place people do not recognise."[80]

If a collective of women protesting a desecularised and increasingly undemocratic state *as women* is hard to recognise for Russians, the presence of churches and prayers in their protests together with their respect for devout believers is also foreign to the secular west and more specifically to secular feminism. Modern feminism's origins are both secular and religious, but as it has developed and diversified, the gulf between secular and religious feminisms has increased. Many western feminists in the twentieth century came to regard religion as antithetical to any feminism worthy of the name, but in the twenty-first century this position has become difficult to maintain given increasing cultural diversity and that the majority of women in the world engage in religious and spiritual practice.[81] The post-secular turn in the contemporary global political landscape has intensified the need for a more wide-ranging feminist critique of religion. Notable feminist responses to some of the developments that come under the broad banner of 'post-secularism' – such as the rise of religious fundamentalism and the shifting demographics of secular societies – have included affirmations of feminism's commitment to gender equity over and above multiculturalism[82] and extended debates over whether or not feminism and Islam can ever be compatible.[83] While responses such as these reiterate feminism's assumed secular orientation and thus maintained a gap between 'western feminism' and its 'others',[84] contemporaneous developments have also included a resurgence of Islamic feminisms and powerful feminist critiques (from religious, agnostic and atheist perspectives) of the 'macho' atheism[85] that has also been a feature of this period. Western feminism has, in turn, been renovated by these developments – over the last decade, key feminist thinkers Joan Wallach Scott, Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti have questioned western feminism's affinity with secularism and the axiomatic link between secularism, modernity, gender equality and human rights.[86]

In 2011, Niamh Rielly drew on Butler and Scott for an important essay in which she continued the call for a "rethink" of the interplay between feminism and secularism. Intellectually and politically, Reilly sought to find some feminist common ground in response to the persistence and spread of the 'clash of civilisations' thesis, the expansion of postmodernist critiques of the Enlightenment to religion and sustained critiques of the secularisation-as-modernity thesis. As Rielly points out, feminism can be found within the genealogies of all these intellectual and political projects, either as part of the critique or in response to it, and Reilly sought to bring these feminisms to the surface to get past some of the cul-de-sacs or blind spots in feminist theorising on religion. One noticeable tendency is an implicit alignment between feminist political theory and secularism, played out along a North-South axis in which it is assumed that however important religion is to some women in some places, it will inevitably diminish as a result of modernisation. Further, there is little proper dialogue between feminists working and thinking from 'within' religions and 'secular' feminist academics and activists. The challenge, as Reilly sees it, is to find ways of speaking across this divide, to identify a non-oppressive feminist politics committed to women's equality, human rights and democracy that was also under no illusions about secularism as the end-of-history *or* of the harmful consequences of the fusion of authoritarian religious forces and the state.[87]

While wide-ranging and attentive to the politics of location, Reilly's essay largely overlooks the post-socialist world,[88] which is understandable given that one of her goals is to destabilise the 'clash of civilisation' thesis and its essentialist premise that the west is secular and rational in

contrast to an irrational and oppressive Islam.[89] Yet, as Jennifer Suchland has argued, the relative absence of post-socialist societies, and more particularly second-world women, from the global turn in Anglo-American women's studies towards transnational feminism has produced its own essentialisms: the Global South/Global North axis has supplanted the three worlds paradigm while maintaining or expanding a double essentialism about second and third-world women, underpinned by notions of racial and ethnic difference.[90] On these grounds, transnational feminism has not been immune from the 'end-of-history' logic that greeted the collapse of communism in the first world and, accordingly, second-world women are often assessed in terms of the shift to democratisation and Europeanisation rather than as (for example) critics of their own governments, of western feminism and/or of neoliberal globalisation.[91] Further, as Nanette Funk has argued in a comprehensive appraisal of key feminist concerns and projects across the post-socialist world during the transformation period, "the struggles, timetables, and priorities of women in the region differ from those in the United States"[92] and are characterised by distinctly 'eastern' forms and critiques of liberalism in which, for example, the Anglo-American public/private split has not had the same salience in feminist thought and activity.[93]

While it is obvious that Pussy Riot and Femen have become international phenomena and are duly comprehended as such – indeed in 2014 Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina shared a stage and conversation with Butler and Braidotti who each made speeches about the enduring global significance and politics of Pussy Riot[94] – both collectives also bring a distinctly post-Soviet perspective to so-called 'global' feminism and to feminist debates about religion, secularism and post-secularism. As I have hopefully established, there are crucial differences between them – differences in ideology but perhaps most markedly, differences in terms of their stances towards religion, necessarily taken in their post-Soviet societies. One of the key points of this article has been that without some analysis of their origins and post-Soviet emergence, whatever politics each group seeks to convey is diluted. While both Femen and Pussy Riot have generated enormous attention globally, they have also inspired political debate within their own countries about what freedom means within authoritarian, post-secular societies. Each do this explicitly as *feminists*, though Femen's activism, given their provocative statements such as a 'Muslim feminist is an oxymoron', have brought their feminism into question. For Pussy Riot, there can be no proper freedom if church and state are aligned, including religious freedom. What they share is a resistance to the patriarchal, neo-traditional gender ideology embodied by Putin's hyper-masculinity, hence their startling body politics. Both collectives have been spurred by their insistence that moves towards authoritarianism in post-socialist states has set women back, constituting a "gender regime change"[95] – the shoring up of political power with religious authority is a striking feature of the neo-masculinism of these societies. Both collectives offer fresh examples of feminism's ever-imaginative and nimble capacity to mobilise against patriarchal orthodoxies – be they cultural, political, or religious. While western feminism most broadly put has been provincialised by the presence of religion in these battles with patriarchy, major feminist theoriticians in the west have responded by pondering what an effective political engagement on behalf of women might look like in a desecularising, transnational landscape. The native feminisms of the post-soviet world are breathing examples of just such a feminism.

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[11] Ian Bateson, 'On Femen, Pussy Riot and Crosses', *Kyiv Post,* 5 October, 2012, http://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/op-ed/on-femen-pussy-riot-and-crosses-313994.html

[12] *Femen*, 149

[13] For more detail see Rosi Braidotti, 'In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism', *Theory Culture Society*, 25:1, 2008, 1-24, 18; Niamh Reilly, 'Rethinking the interplay of feminism and secularism in a neo-secular age', *Feminist Review* 97:2011, 5-31

[14] In November 2017, Pussy Riot released a song titled 'Police State' taking aim at the authoritarianism of both Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump.

[15] For details and further critique see Jessica Zychowicz, 'Performing Protest: Femen, Nation and the Marketing of Resistance', *Journal of Ukrainian Politics and Society*, Vol 1:1, 2015, 79-104, 79-80

[16] Maria Alyokhina, *Riot Days,* New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017, 3-12

[17] Femen claim membership outside their key locations in Ukraine and France, including in Brazil, the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Italy, Bulgaria, Turkey, Tunisia, and their international protests frequently incorporate local women. In January 2013, a third national branch opened in Germany and there are also active branches in Turkey and Israel.

[18] http://femen.org/about

[19] Members of Femen are arrested on a regular basis, usually for vandalism or charges of a similar ilk. In June 2013, three Femen members were charged with indecency and sentenced to four months in prison for a topless protest in Tunis in solidarity with Amina Sboui. The Femen members served a couple of weeks in prison before the convictions were lifted.

[20] For example, Theresa O'Keefe, 'my body is my manifesto! Slutwalk, FEMEN and femmenist protest', *Feminist Review*, 107, 2014, 1-19

[21] https://www.facebook.com/femenmovement/ – viewed 19 March 2018.

[22] Jeffrey Taylor, 'Topless Jihad: Why Femen is right', *The Atlantic,* 1 May 2013, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/05/topless-jihad-why-femen-is-right/275471/ ; Jonathan Jones, 'A gloriously crude topless 'jihad' from a Femen activist', *The Guardian,* 6 April 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/05/femen-topless-protest-gloriously-crude

[23] https://www.facebook.com/pages/EXit-FEMEN-The-truth-about-Femen/ – Exit Femen were founded on February 22, 2013 and their Facebook page at the time of writing had not been updated since May 2014.

[24] See for example, Homa Khaleeli, 'The nude radicals; feminism Ukrainian style', *The Guardian,* 15 April 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/apr/15/ukrainian-feminists-topless-campaign

[25] Following Saudi blogger Nora Abdulkarim's theorisation 'personal revolutions' to describe the new feminisms that are made possible by cyberspace, Zakia Salime has persuasively argued that these new feminisms mark a departure from the old feminism that appeals to the state and the 'return of the repressed: the body and sexuality' in North Africa, post-Arab Spring. Zakia Salime, 'New Feminism as Personal Revolutions: Microrebellious Bodies', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* Vol. 40:1, August 2014, 14-20, 18

[26] Sara C. Nelson, 'Muslim Women Against Femen: Facebook group takes on activists in the wake of Amina Tyler topless jihad', 10 April 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/05/muslim-women-against-femen-facebook-topless-jihad-pictures-amina-tyler_n_3021495.html

[27] Huffpost Maghreb, Amina Sboui Quits Femen, 'I do not want my name to be associated with an Islamophobic organisation'. *The World Post,* 20 August 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/20/amina-sboui-quits-femen_n_3785724.html

[28] For example, Bim Adewunmi, 'The inconsistency of Femen's imperialist "one-size-fits-all" attitude, *New Statesman,* 5 April 2013, http://www.newstatesman.com/bim-adewunmi/2013/04/inconsistency-femens-imperialist-one-size-fits-all-attitude

[29] See the chapter 'Naked rather than in a niqab!' in *Femen,* 128-149

[30] Agata Pyzik, *Poor but sexy: culture clashes in Europe East and West,* (London: Zero Books, 2015), 141

[31] Jessica Zychowicz, 'Performing Protest: Femen, Nation and the Marketing of Resistance', *Journal of Ukrainian Politics and Society,* Vol 1:1, 2015, 79-104, 90

[32] Ibid., 97

[33] Marian Rubchak, 'Seeing pink: Searching for gender justice through opposition in Ukraine', *European Journal of Women's Studies,* 19:1, 55-72, 56

[34] Rubchak, 57

[35] Femen have acknowledged Syvatski's formative role – 'he showed us – in a practical model – what a patriarch was' – but have since kicked him out of the organisation. Milene Larsson, 'Femen: We're not run by men', *Vice*, 5 September 2013, https://www.vice.com/read/talking-to-femen-about-their-shadowy-leader

[36] 'We protested against prostitution, dressed as prostitutes', *Femen*, 56

[37] *Femen*, 65

[38] *Femen*, 61

[39] Jessica Zychowicz, 'Two Bad Words: Femen & Feminism in Independent Ukraine', *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 29 (2), Fall 2011, 215-227, 219

[40] Natalia Anatova, 'Femen's Anna Gustol on sex tourism and short skirts in Ukraine', Global Comment, September 11, 2009, http://globalcomment.com/femens-anna-gutsol-on-sex-tourism-and-short-skirts-in-ukraine/#

[41] Cerelia Athanassiou and Jonah Bury, 'On caretakers, rebels and enforcers: The gender politics of Euro 2012, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 21:2, 2014, 148-164: 159

[42] Ibid., 160

[43] One report of the International Sex Workers Rights protest in Ukraine noted that the spokespeople were feminists from NGOs and social workers, while sex workers themselves wore masks as a 'symbol of social stigma'. Kateryna Semchuk, 'Sex Workers March in Ukraine: "We Have the Right to Work", *Krytyka Polityczna and European Alternatives*, 7 April 2017, http://politicalcritique.org/cee/ukraine/2017/sex-workers-march-ukraine/

[44] Zychowicz, 2015, 90

[45] *Femen*, ix

[46] *Femen*, 154

[47] *Femen*, 151

[48] Zychowicz, 2015, 95

[49] Ibid. 99

[50] Masha Gessen, *Words Will Break Cement: the passion of Pussy Riot*, (London: Granta Books, 2014), 40

[51] Gessen, 104-107

[52] Rachel L. Schroeder and Vyacheslav Karpov, 'The Crimes and Punishments of the 'Enemies of the Church' and the Nature of Russia's Desecularising Regime', *Religion, State and Society*, 2013, 1-28, 9

[53] Bennetts, *Kicking the Kremlin*, 137

[54] Pussy Riot, 'Art or Politics?', 23 March 2012, in *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom: Letters from prison, songs, poems, and courtroom statements, plus tributes to the punk band that shook the world,* New York City: The Feminist Press, 2013

[55] Schroeder and Karpov, 2013, 9

[56] Gessen, 121

[57] Yngvar B. Steinholt, 'Kitten Heresy: Lost Contexts of Pussy Riot's Punk Prayer', *Popular Music and Society,* 36:1, 2013, 120-124, 123

[58] Miriam Elder, 'Pussy Riot sentenced to two years in prison colony for hooliganism', *The Guardian,* 18 August 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/aug/17/pussy-riot-sentenced-two-years

[59] Pussy Riot, 'Art or politics?', 23 March 2012 in *Pussy Riot! A Punk Prayer for Freedom: Letters from prison, songs, poems, and courtroom statements, plus tributes to the punk band that shook the world,* (New York City: The Feminist Press, 2013), 15-17

[60] Marina Yusupova, 'Pussy Riot: A Feminist Band Lost in History and Translation', *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity,* 42:4, 2014, 604-610

[61] A July 2012 poll conducted by the Levada Centre found that 42 per cent of Russians who had heard of the action regarded it as blasphemy or a sacrilege of a holy place; 29 per cent as 'hooliganism'; 17 per cent as a politically motivated act against Putin. See Schoeder and Karpov, 19

[62] Ibid, 21

[63] Steinholt, p. 124

[64] Schroeder and Karpov, 'The Crimes and Punishments of the 'Enemies of the Church' and the Nature of Russia's Desecularising Regime', 14

[65] For example, two witnesses, candle seller Lubov Sokologorskaya and security guard Sergey Beloglazov, claimed to be insulted, as Orthodox believers, by the word 'feminist' used in church. *Pussy Riot!,* 49-51

[66] Ilya Yablokov, 'Pussy Riot as agent provocateur: conspiracy theories and the media construction of nation in Putin's Russia', *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity,* 42:4, 2014, 622-636, 628

[67] Bennett, *Kicking the Kremlin,* 145

[68] Schroeder and Karpov, 9-13

[69] Karpov, 'Social Dynamics of Russia's Desecularisation', 272

[70] Karpov, 274

[71] YabloKov, 633

[72] Excerpts from appeal statements, *Pussy Riot!,* 117-118

[73] Bennetts, 200

[74] Chirikova told journalist Marc Bennetts, 'it was really disgusting what they did. ...But it was also disgusting to detain young mothers over this. That's also unchristian'. Bennetts, 146

[75] Judith Butler, Oslo, 12 May 2014, 6

[76] Janet Elise Johnson and Aino Saarinen, 'Twenty-First-Century Feminisms under Repression: Gender Regime Change and the Women's Movement in Russia', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* Vol. 38: 3, Spring 2013, 543-567, 546

[77] Miriam Elder, 'Feminism could destroy Russia, Russian Orthodox patriarch claims', The Guardian, 10 April, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/09/feminism-destroy-russia-patriarch-kirill

[78] For example, in 2011, high-ranking Church official Archpriest Dmitri Smirnov claimed that "thanks to feminism, we have 40 million women who do not have husbands and experience deep unhappiness". As cited in Johnson and Saarinen, 585

[79] Johnson, 588

[80] Laurie Penny on Pussy Riot: 'People fear us because we're feminists', New Statesman, 22 June 2013, http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/06/pussy-riot-people-fear-us-because-were-feminists

[81] Dawn Llewellyn and Marta Trzebiatowska, 'Secular and Religious Feminisms: A Future of Disconnection?', *Feminist Theology,* 21:3, 2013, 244-258

[82] Susan Moller Okin, et al. Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard and Martha C. Nussbaum, eds. *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)

[83] V. M. Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* Vol. 27, No. 4, 2002, pp. 1135- 1171

[84] To draw on Chandra Mohanty's important and enduring epistemological distinction first made in 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Boundary 2,* 12.3-13.1, 1984, 333-358

[85] For example, Ashley F. Miller has drawn out a longer history of patriarchal dominance of organised atheism or the 'non-religious movement'. See Ashley F. Miller, 'The Non-Religious Patriarchy: Why Losing Religion has not meant losing white male dominance', *Cross-Currents,* 63:2, June 2013, 211-226

[86] Judith Butler, 'Sexual politics, torture, and secular time', T*he British Journal of Sociology,* 59: 1, 2008, 1-23; Joan Wallach Scott, 'Sexularism: On Secularism and Gender Equality' in *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 91-116; Rosi Braidotti, 'In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism', *Theory Culture Society,* 25:1, 2008, 1-24,

[87] Niamh Reilly, 'Rethinking the interplay of feminism and secularism in a neo-secular age', Feminist Review 97:2011, 5-31

[88] One exception is Poland, which is grouped with Ireland – rather than former socialist countries – as an example of the enduring Catholic influence on the state. Reilly, p. 20

[89] Reilly, p. 24

[90] Jennifer Suchland, 'Is Postsocialism Transnational?', *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society,* 366: 4, 2011, 837-862, 839

[91] Suchland, p. 846

[92] Nanette Funk, 'Feminist Critiques of Liberalism: Can they travel east? Their relevance in Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 29:3, 2004, 695-726, 716

[93] Funk, 713

[94] The First Supper Symposium, Symposium debate 12 May 2014 with Pussy Riot, Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti and Viktor Misiano, http://www.thefirstsuppersymposium.org/index.php/en/program-2014/43-pussy-riot-meets-judith-butler-and-rosi-braidotti

[95] See Johnson and Saarinen, *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 2013, 547-549

Biography

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Black Lives Matter – Toronto

Gloria Carissa Swain

March 26, 2016, was the beginning in a show of solidarity against anti-Black racism in the city of Toronto; Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO) spent 15 days out in the cold, at Toronto Police Headquarters, in protest for the killings of Eric Garner, Michael Brown and Toronto's Jermaine Carby and Andrew Loku, at the hands of police officers.

On the second day of the protest, police officers removed tents and doused a fire that was set up to keep the protesters warm. The two week protest ended with the demonstrators meeting with Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne outside of the provincial Legislative Assembly in Toronto. The Premier acknowledged anti-Black racism and agreed to a public meeting with BLMTO leaders. The demonstration led to a coroner's inquest into the death by police shooting of Andrew Loku, a 45-year-old black man with a history of mental illness.

The last day of the occupation ended with the protesters erecting a giant, white-on-black banner outside of Toronto police headquarters, as a reminder of what had taken place. The sign read, "You are on notice. Your anti-blackness has been exposed. We are not finished." These images connect people, especially people who live with barriers that prevent them from being on the front line, to the BLMTO movement.

This photo essay looks at systemic anti-Black racism in Toronto.

Biography

Gloria Swain is a Black feminist artist and activist whose work has been met with critical acclaim. She holds a Master's Degree in Environmental Studies and Community Arts Practice Certificate. Growing up in an era deeply rooted in racism, Gloria's work addresses anti-black racism, mental health and violence against black women.

Black Lives Matter Toronto occupation of Toronto Police Headquarters

Images of Eric Garner, Michael Brown and Toronto's Jermaine Carby and Andrew Loku are displayed in front of Toronto Police Headquarters, 40 College Street
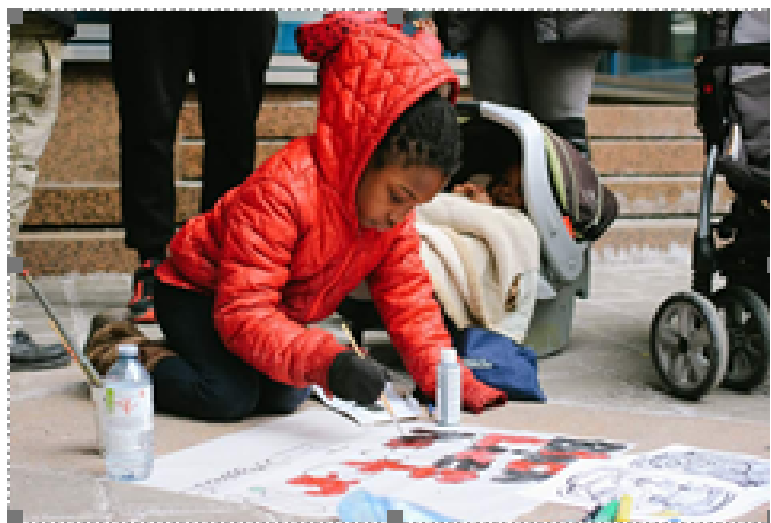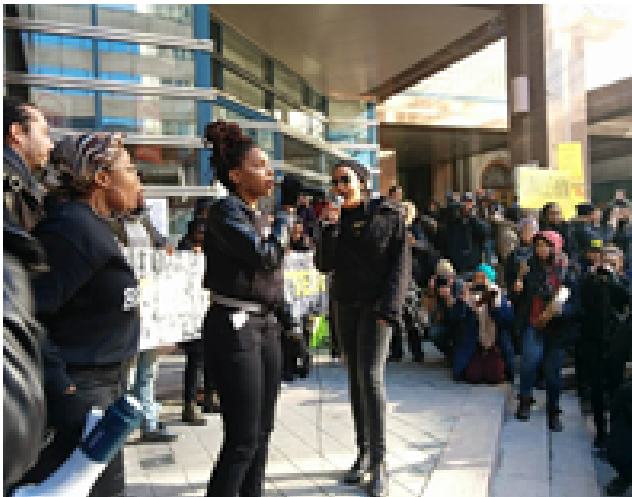
Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO) protesters in front of Toronto police headquarters

The Ingidenous community stand, in solardarity, with BLMTO at Toronto police headquarters

As an elder, artist and activist, I took part in the BLMTO occupation at Police Headquarters

On day fifteen, BLMTO take the protest to Queens Park, Toronto

Premier Kathleen Wynn, surrounded by police, walks out of Queens Park to meet BLMTO protesters

I took part (far left) in a celebratory dance in front of Queens Park after meeting with Premier Wynn

"You are on notice. Your anti-blackness has been exposed. We are not finished."

'Feminism was never meant to be a dictatorship': A discussion of intersectionality as an ethical orientation amongst feminist activists in London

Elspeth Wilson

Abstract

This article contributes to the emerging understanding of how intersectionality operates as an ethic and ideal amongst feminist activists. Intersectionality as a theory dates back to the 1980s, and I explore how it informs the praxis of activists in 21st century UK, mainly London. It emerges as a source of conflict and ideological cleavage between younger and older feminists; a difference that can be situated in the historical exclusion of women of colour and queer women. Ultimately, the most notable finding is the unusual pedagogy of intersectionality and the lack of pedagogical tools for those wishing to learn more about it. This article suggests that intersectionality has some elitist aspects, and questions how it will expand as an ethic when there is no teaching relationship.

'Like the Puritanism once familiar in New England, intersectionality controls language and the very terms of discourse' (Sullivan, 2017). One could be forgiven for thinking that this author is describing a kind of mind-controlling cult, rather than a feminist theory formulated to provide insight into the mutually constituted oppressions faced by black women, and many others. However, this was not the first time – nor I imagine will it be the last – that I have heard intersectionality described in such terms. While attending a political discussion group a few months earlier, I heard intersectionality described as being 'like a religion' by a speaker debating the motion: 'This house has lost faith in generation snowflake.' There was a genuine fear that the 'minority who shout the loudest' could threaten freedom of speech with their championing of 'safe spaces' (online or physical spaces that are open only to a certain group of people based on identity and/or viewpoint) and 'trigger/content warnings' (notations on online posts indicating content that could potentially be distressing or 'triggering').

Yet, intersectionality is not only a point of contention between the left and the right, but also within the feminist movement itself. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the celebrated author and feminist, was recently criticised for making comments about trans women that were perceived by intersectional feminists as questioning trans experiences of womanhood (O'Hagan, 2017). Her suggestion that trans womanhood and cisgender womanhood are different lived experiences was seen as a failure of intersectionality, although she clarified that she 'of course' sees trans women as real women (Smith, 2017). Adichie responded by criticising the 'language orthodoxy' of the left, describing intersectionality as an academic term that it is hard to engage with (O'Hagan, 2017). This incident, involving a black woman who practises intersectional feminism in many other ways, exposed the fault-lines within feminism to a much wider audience than usual and illustrated antagonisms within the movement. As will be discussed, intersectional feminism is a movement that remains niche and somewhat inaccessible; therefore, the coverage this incident garnered is an interesting example of mass exposure.

The term intersectionality was coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, p. 139) to counter the 'tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis'. Crenshaw et al. (2013, p. 307) note that 'prototypical subjects of antidiscrimination protection were Black men (with respect to racism) and White women (with respect to sexism)'. Intersectionality posits that individuals do not experience oppressions as discrete but rather as constructed together: black women, for instance, experience racialised sexism *and* sexualised racism, sometimes termed 'misogynoir' (Bailey, 2010).

Crenshaw lent theoretical weight to a sentiment that had been voiced for some time by many women of colour. The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977), written by a Bostonian group of queer black women, outlined the multiple oppressions black women face: 'We struggle

together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism'. The issue of exclusive, classist 'white feminism' was simultaneously felt in Britain as Green's (1997) discussion of lesbian feminists in London during the 1980s indicates. Anthropology was not immune to problematically viewing aspects of identity like race, class and gender as distinct, with Moore (1988, p. 190) arguing:

… gender as difference is privileged over all other forms of difference. Other forms of difference, such as race, may be acknowledged, but if they are they tend to be treated as additive, as variations on a basic theme. To be black and be a woman becomes to be a woman and to be black. Black feminists make the point that the issue of race is not additive, that the experience of race transforms the experience of gender, and that it brings into question any feminist approach which suggests that women should be treated as women first, and only after that as women differentiated by race, culture, history and so on.

The need for intersectionality arose partly from problems with what has been termed 'white feminism', which at best focused solely on gender and ignored other oppressions and at worst was explicitly racist. The Combahee River Collective (1977) lamented: 'As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism'. The theory has had a significant impact in academic disciplines and in the language and practice of feminist activists internationally, including in London, where my fieldwork mainly took place. My interlocutors who advocated intersectionality repeatedly criticised 'white feminism' – a problem that they saw as very much alive and well – as well as feminists whom they saw as failing at intersectionality. This raised the question of how feminist activists in London operate with large ideological cleavages within the movement and the differing value systems that inform different strands of feminism.

My research took place in 2016 with both feminists who described themselves as striving for intersectionality and those who did not – indeed, many criticised certain aspects of intersectionality, particularly its inclusive stance towards sex work and trans women. I conducted participant observation with a feminist group for older women, a 'fourth-wave' feminist group and a solidarity group campaigning for abortion rights in Ireland. I also visited the Feminist Library. I interviewed numerous activists whom I met through events, and others to whom I was introduced by my contacts. Most of the activists with whom I spent time were London-based, although I conducted three in-depth interviews in Scotland as, until recently, I was involved in the feminist community in Edinburgh. Having some geographical breadth revealed the broader networks within which London-based activists are embedded as I discovered similar hopes and concerns amongst their Scottish counterparts.

This article considers the nature of intersectionality as an ethical project. I take positionality as an ethnographic concern on the part of my interlocutors as well as a methodological one on my own part. I later consider positionality analytically, problematising both it and the contrasting ethic of detachment. Considering a kind of feminism based on a difference of identity but not opinion links to an exploration of the ways in which intersectionality is an ethical orientation – albeit a pedagogically unusual one. I argue that, ethically speaking, intersectionality is uncommon in that there is a distinct lack of pedagogical tools for the uninitiated, thus complicating the view that it is 'like a religion' because, unlike more traditional ethical stances, it can often be structurally inaccessible to the uninitiated (Sullivan, 2017).

Positionality

Discussions of positionality in anthropology centre around the anthropologist's place in the field and beyond and what effects this has on how they describe their ethnographic material (Watson, 1999). As Watson (1999, p. 4) notes, 'we use ourselves and our own personal experience as primary research tools'. This recognition has recently produced much self-reflection, leading

to accusations of self-indulgence and opaqueness (Lindholm, 1997). However, discussions of positionality are an unavoidable ethnographic aspect of my area of study. Positionality relates to intersectionality and to feminist activism more generally because of the debates that have arisen out of the shift away from an emphasis on the sameness of women towards a focus on their differences. Intersectional activists foreground the position of the subject through ideas of privilege and oppression, believing that the world is experienced differently depending on one's identity. Ideological cleavages are accentuated, particularly regarding sex work and the inclusion of trans women, often playing out between generations. Highlighting the differences between women has heightened a situation in which activists make demands on themselves and others about what kind of feminist they are, meaning that positionality became at once an ethnographic and an analytical concern in my fieldwork.

On a sunny July afternoon, I attended the monthly meeting of Sage[1], an activist group for self-described 'older feminists', where the topic of discussion was pornography. As this was one of the first events I attended, I was (naïvely) keen to try and remain as 'neutral' as possible and to perform my role as an ethnographer 'properly' – a concern that became a key focus in my research. I had been in touch to gain permission to attend as a younger woman and to let them know about my intended research topic, yet it was clear as soon as I arrived that any attempt to remain a 'step back' would present challenges.

Having arrived early, I sat on a bench in the outside area and was accosted immediately by a confident woman who introduced herself as Maria, a 'Marxist from Islington' and was keen to know 'what kind of feminist' I was. She questioned me about my views, particularly on transgender women – although she used the word 'transsexuals' – and wanted to know more about my research, astutely identifying herself, rather than just feminism as a concept, as the object of study.[2] Upon hearing that I was interested in solidarity and conflict, she asked if I had interviewed 'Germaine', referring to Germaine Greer, the famous 'second-wave' feminist who has angered many other feminists by refusing to accept trans women as women. Greer had been at the centre of a 'no-platforming' controversy at the Cambridge Union, where the university's Women's and LGBT+ Campaigns wanted her invitation revoked because of her contentious views, and she represented a symbolic touchstone in the ideological cleavages I wanted to explore (Morgan, 2015). For some, she was a heroine who had devoted her life to helping 'biological' women whilst to many others she represented all the negative aspects and closed-mindedness of 20th century feminism. Maria informed me that her daughter was involved in activism too, with a spiritual, feminist organisation named 'Scarlet Tide', which she implied also did not see trans women as women – a claim I found interesting, given that most of the younger women I encountered welcome women to the movement regardless of the gender assigned to them at birth.

When more women had arrived – about twelve in total, ranging from their 50s to 94 – we moved inside to a slightly stuffy room with chairs in a circle. Like everyone else, I paid £5 to contribute to the venue, inducting me into the group as a contributing participant. The meeting lasted all day, with an 'outside' speaker, Clara, occupying the morning by giving a talk on internet pornography and its harmful effects. During her talk, the revulsion at the topic became palpable, with several attendees threatening to leave if Clara continued to read graphic extracts from Gail Dines' (2010) controversial book *Pornland*. As online pornography is a relatively recent phenomenon, the women were keen to hear a younger person's point of view – how had porn affected my life, were the statistics true, did prepubescent children really get exposed to hard-core sex scenes? Melted into the background I had not and it became clear to me that my ethnography of activism would see activists demand that I situate myself within the ethnography. Earlier notions of 'neutrality' suddenly seemed problematic – although, upon reflection, they would point me towards a deeper consideration of why positionality and detachment were of such central concern to my interlocutors.

Positionality was also foregrounded by those who proudly professed their commitment to intersectionality as I found out from my fieldwork that occurred after this initial visit to Sage.

This was unsurprising given that at the heart of intersectionality is the idea of reflecting on one's privilege; it is a rejection of the idea *and* ideal of detachment.

Having been involved in feminist activism in Cambridge and Edinburgh, I had built up a circle of contacts before I embarked upon my research. I was invited to a workshop on 'blackness' at a feminist political conference by Honor, an acquaintance who had recently undertaken a short-term contract conducting research for a political organisation working towards 'gender equality'. She was very open about her frustration with the 'white feminism' on display and felt that within the organisation the term 'woman' was homogenised and race ignored, as were the needs of men of colour, particularly black boys. Whilst she clearly wanted me 'on side' as an ally against the members and colleagues who had been a sorry disappointment, her negative experience and the damage caused by 'white feminists' also made me consider my place as a white woman writing about a black feminist theory.

As Moore (1994, p. 116) notes, focusing extensively on the ethnographer's place in the discourse risks navel-gazing and poses a 'danger of hearing about the anthropologist at the expense of hearing about others'. Yet, when informants not only wanted me to align myself with their views but also saw any attempt to remain above the fray as impossible, failing to reflect on my place as an ethnographer would mean failing to properly engage with an ethnographic discussion around intersectionality that I wanted to explore. In the current feminist activist climate, a failure to consider my position, especially given recent criticism of 'white feminism', would be to miss an opportunity to engage with how my informants saw the world. To them, I could never be merely an observer because there was no such thing. Intersectionality as a theory posits that everyone exists in a web of cross-cutting lines of privilege and oppression; there is no way of existing outside the web.

Green (1997, p. 4) argues that representing events 'exactly' as they happened is:

impossible to achieve perfectly, as I will have always seen things and heard people with my eyes and ears, which are inevitably attuned to paying more attention to some factors than others in my efforts to untangle the complexity of things going on around me. This kind of limitation, however, should not stop one trying.

Although my indebtedness to black feminism in being able to write about intersectionality at all must be acknowledged, striving for an ethic of detachment is still methodologically important and is of ethnographic interest because my interlocutors repeatedly brought up their belief in its impossibility.

I am definitely included in the Combahee River Collective's statement, as are all feminists (and indeed all people) who are white, regardless of whether they or others would identify (them) as 'white' feminists. Inescapably, there are knotty issues when writing an article as a white woman that is only possible because of the intellectual labour of black women. This adds an extra layer to any discussion of positionality, although I hope I am pointing out problems with engagement with intersectionality rather than the important, and indeed, crucial critique of the feminist movement's historical and continued exclusivity and racism.

As will be discussed, many feminist activists strive for an ethic of intersectionality that is fundamentally at odds with the idea of detachment. In engaging in a discussion about positionality and ethics, I hope not to be too navel-gazing but tentatively aspire to what Watson (1999, p. 14) suggests is the most important aspect of reflecting on one's position in the field: 'the information it contains about the changing circumstantial context in which the discipline continues to operate which in turn affects the nature of the discipline itself'. My attempts at detachment revealed insights into intersectionality as an ethical orientation that would not have arisen had I not also deeply considered my position in the ethnography. It was ultimately

through the contrast between detachment and positionality that I came to see the structural differences between an attempt to remain 'neutral' and an attempt to constantly situate oneself.

Intersectionality and its ethical orientation

The majority of the younger activists I spoke to regarded intersectionality as something for which one is constantly striving but which can never be fully achieved. I noticed repeatedly how closely activists' rhetoric fitted with the theoretical discourse surrounding intersectionality. Crenshaw et al. (2013, p. 304) explain, 'Put another way, there is potentially always another set of concerns to which the theory can be directed, other places to examine which the theory might be moved, and other structures of power it can be deployed to examine'. Jasmina was a well-known young activist who had been frustrated by the 'white feminism' displayed in high-profile campaigns. They described intersectionality as a gradient where the end goal could never be reached – or perhaps more accurately one which lacked an achievable end goal as lines of oppression are always shifting and thus so is activists' intersectional praxis. Their thoughts mirrored those of the academic literature, using similar language to describe a work in constant progress. Partly this was because of practical concerns – it was a continual struggle for activist groups to find accessible, affordable venues – but it was also an ideological viewpoint because, for Jasmina, no-one could ever 'truly understand' intersectionality. Because no-one's lived experience can include all possible axes of oppression, there is an ever-present learning curve. Yet, just because one can never properly understand this does not mean that there is no onus on the individual to *try*. Indeed, the further away they are on the gradient in terms of privilege and lack of understanding the more they should strive to correct this – in so far as this is possible.

For the activists I met, intersectionality was an ethical orientation; something that there was a moral imperative to work towards and a value that was dearly held. Green (1997, p. 144) discusses how, amongst lesbian feminists, failing to have the 'correct' discourse could lead to social sanctions, with one informant remarking 'there was a strong tendency that if you put one foot wrong, you were damned for the rest of your life. And of course, that's very frightening'. Similarly, my interlocutors felt a fear of 'getting it wrong', suggesting that there was a social and moral duty to try to be as intersectional as possible. People's fear of sanctions was not always viewed positively by activists (although this worry was largely expressed privately). Nadia, an author and expert on violence against women, voiced discontent about what she saw as a form of demonisation within the feminist movement, and described her preference for 'calling in' rather than 'calling out'. By this she meant attempting to educate someone if they made an error in their language or expressed an idea that was 'problematic', rather than just 'calling them out' on their mistake – in other words, pointing out the issue without offering help to improve.

Roshini, who continued to work on the anti-street-harassment campaign that Nadia had once been involved in, and worked for a male-dominated technology start-up as her day job, expressed similar sentiments. She described how the campaign was experiencing a lull in terms of numbers on the committee, but that a new young woman was enthusiastic. Roshini noted that she often did not use the 'right' language, particularly on trans issues, but was eager to be educated and thus the more experienced activists were willing to help without reacting too harshly. Whilst many activists expressed concern or embarrassment about making mistakes, there was a certain level of willingness to forgive as long as the person in question was committed to self-transformation and fashioning along intersectional lines. Whether it was displayed more or less severely, there was a motivation amongst activists to get others to think about intersectionality and to shape their discourse, their thinking and ultimately themselves in ways that were more acceptable. Yet, as will be discussed below, the unusual nature of intersectional pedagogy meant that often the directionality of this change had to come *from* individuals rather than being taught or explained. This was largely because activists

did not want to expend energy educating those who were already seen as privileged when they felt that they had the tools to educate themselves; activists made demands of others that were rooted in their own need for 'self-care'.

Like all ethical orientations, intersectionality is not something that one acquires overnight; it requires much work and effort. McDonald (2014) discusses how medical students acquire an ethic of 'objectivity' when dissecting human bodies. They learn to 'distance' themselves and see the bodies as cadavers in the classroom, an ethic that teachers – and other students – foster, telling anyone who is not detached enough to 'get a grip'. Similarly, Candea (2010) describes how behavioural biologists at the Kalahari Meerkat Project cultivated an embodied detachment in an attempt to influence the animals' behaviour as little as possible with human engagement.

Clearly, detachment is something that is taught and learnt. In the same way, activists devote time and energy to learning how to make their activism as intersectional as possible. Yet here, the pedagogical focus is on the self working on itself to achieve ethical transformation, rather than interacting with other people or institutions. Laidlaw (2014, p. 11) remarks that anthropology has highlighted 'the ways in which ethics as the making and remaking of the self are interactive social processes, and therefore equally and at the same time the making and remaking of others'. However, many of the intersectional activists I spoke to had become 'socially aware' – or, as they often put it using African-American vernacular English, 'woke' – through digesting information on intersectionality from the internet.

Samira's experience of learning from a high-profile Twitter argument illustrates that social media is often not that 'social' when used for educational purposes. She had been involved in feminist activism at her university and was now involved with working-class feminist groups in London, and saw the incident as a 'critical juncture' in her feminism which caused much internal reflection. The disagreement involved feminist author Caitlin Moran, who had interviewed Lena Dunham, creator and star of *Girls*. When asked if she had queried Dunham about the lack of racial diversity in the programme, Moran replied: 'Nope. I literally couldn't give a shit about it.' This incident remains well-known in what my informants described as 'social justice circles' (those with an interest in liberation politics) and gathered some media coverage at the time, bringing the concept of 'white feminism' into the mainstream – at least for a moment (Adewunmi, 2012). Whilst there was engagement with other media, both social and otherwise, the focus was on an individual acting by themselves, on themselves. Indeed, there was often an explicit emphasis on the importance of *not* expecting an interactive educational experience because this was thought to place unreasonable demands on others' time and energy.

This type of self-education is different from what occurs in other activist circles. Howe (2013) describes the discussion groups run by lesbian activists in Nicaragua in the hope of helping other lesbian and bisexual women to become *bien educada* on topics including gender, sexuality and rights. Not all the debate Howe witnessed was at a particularly high academic level, but lesbian activists genuinely wished to impart knowledge to others, even – or especially – those with less educational privilege. For the Nicaraguan activists, this commitment of time and energy was viewed positively, whereas for intersectional activists this expenditure of personal resources is the very reason why many do not want to educate others. Although sometimes feminist activists interested in learning about intersectionality had sympathetic and patient mentors such as Roshini, often people were left largely independent until they had acquired the knowledge to, as one activist put it, 'get in the room' without being 'problematic'. The same activist, Tilly, suggested that the pedagogical tools of intersectionality contribute to a kind of educational elitism, because, to be able to engage in self-education, a certain level of pre-existing education is at the very least helpful in understanding what are often complicated concepts.

The advantage of educational privilege was especially apparent in relation to language, where many activists used words such as 'demisexual', 'cissexism' and 'cultural appropriation', which are not necessarily readily understood upon first hearing. Indeed, an activist for LGBT+ rights told me that they had once been told to Google a term they did not know, only to be unable to find clear information on its definition even online. For a practice so concerned with language and terminology, amongst the intersectional feminists with whom I worked there was a surprising lack of emphasis on dialogue as a way of learning. As will be discussed further below, detachment provides an interesting contrast because 'rational' debate is an important part of learning to be detached. Where there are explicit teaching opportunities, such as in medical schools, detachment, ironically, is arguably less structurally inaccessible than intersectionality. Certainly, some groups, such as white men, find it far easier to be read as 'objective' but the irony remains that some activists felt that intersectionality had become what it never wanted to be in the elitism of its lack of pedagogy.

Laidlaw (2014, p. 216) states that: 'Ethics, as self-formation, intrinsically includes a practice of inquiry, and presupposes … an initial disjunction or difference between the self and one's teacher or exemplar, but this must be a disjuncture or difference of a kind that is capable of being transcended through learning'. Intersectionality differs from this image in two ways. Firstly, there are no clear teachers because people engage in teaching only when they have the inclination and the energy. It is not the sanctions for missteps that are unusual but the fact that there is a distinct lack of pedagogical tools to help the uninitiated acquire the ethic. Indeed, at times, practices such as 'no-platforming' create an inverse pedagogy by which people are actively blocked out. Secondly, the very point of intersectionality is that difference cannot be transcended, as standpoint theory states that one cannot achieve true comprehension of the lived experience of an oppression which does not affect oneself (Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1987).

Whilst people's experience of the world undoubtedly differs depending on factors such as gender, race, and class, there is a question of how intersectionality will expand as an idea and an ethical practice if there are few pedagogical tools to help the uninitiated engage – particularly those without educational privilege. It is thus an ethical orientation that risks floundering on the tension between activists' understandable wish to preserve their energy and resources and their simultaneous desire to expand the movement.

Detachment

Intersectionality as an ethical orientation contrasts with my initial attempt to represent my time spent with feminist activists in a relatively detached fashion, as introduced at the beginning of this article. This contrast is important because of the extent to which intersectionality foregrounds positionality, but also because the contrast (itself arguably the artefact of a somewhat detached anthropological voice) allowed me to gain greater insight into intersectionality as an ethical position, and its similarities to and differences from detachment than I would have if I had abandoned the project of ethnographic detachment altogether.

It is not simply detachment as a method, with all its acknowledged weaknesses, that helped my understanding of the thinking and actions of my informants but the process of striving for it. This both mirrored and at times clashed with their own striving – such as when I tried to avoid labelling my position on trans inclusion with members of Sage. Both intersectionality and detachment are ethical orientations that take work to (attempt to) achieve, yet they are also, in many ways, opposed. As Anderson (2003, p. 6) notes, 'When I refer to the cultivation of detachment, I am referring to the *aspiration* to a distanced view' – in the same way that activists are aspiring to an intersectional view. However, it is not just that intersectionality rejects neutrality as impossible – because anthropologists like Green (1997) recognise it is problematic too – but rather that intersectional theory argues that there is no point in aiming for this ideal even in imperfection. As Anderson (2001) suggests, detachment has been seen by many

feminists as a masculine ethic that hides privilege under the idea of the 'view from nowhere' (Nagel, 1986, cited in Anderson, 2001, p. 5). An ethic of detachment is therefore anathema to intersectional activists because intersectionality is premised on the idea that everyone's view comes from *somewhere*, depending on their privilege, and that this should never be denied. This is the essence of intersectionality, both in theory for academics and in practice for activists; it demands a discussion of positionality due to the constant reflection on one's place in discourse and in life generally.

In describing her intention to examine detachment, Anderson (2001, p. 4) states that, with regards to works of Victorian literature, she will 'explore in a sustained way what it means to cultivate a distanced relation toward one's self, one's community, or those objects that one chooses to study or represent'. Whilst attempts at detachment have been derided, Anderson (2001) argues that it has its virtues and just because it must be situated does not mean that it should be dismissed altogether. As she notes, following Taylor (1989, cited in Anderson, 2003, p. 32), detachment is one stance amongst others, but it usefully allows for disengagement in an attempt to see clearly – although it is a very different way of seeing clearly than that envisaged by intersectionality, where clarity comes not from distance but from coming closer to others' experiences.

For me, detachment has been important in providing insight into the process of ethical self-transformation in which intersectional activists are constantly engaged; detachment is not just something that allowed me access to ethnographic content, but the ethical process of trying to be detached enables a structural contrast between two forms of ethical practice. Attempting to inhabit a detached stance allowed the contrast to emerge. As Robbins (2015, p. 123) notes, a sense of detachment occurs when anthropologists fail 'to participate, or to participate fully' in the field – yet this failure can help make one a better ethnographer. 'Anthropologists quite self-consciously have to balance detachment and attachment' (Robbins, 2015, p. 123) and thus, even when striving for detachment, there is an awareness that it is not fully realisable when living and working in the field. In a sense, this awareness results in being somewhat detached from detachment too, meaning that both positionality and detachment are objects of analysis, allowing insight into how intersectionality operates as an ethical orientation at odds with detachment.

Candea et al. (2015) argue for the need to take detachment seriously in ethnographic terms, but it is possible to do this whilst using it as a tool to examine something else ethnographically, in this case positionality. Carrithers (2015, p. 172) describes the 'doubleness – or duplicity? – of consciousness characteristic of fieldwork, where one participates with apparent sincerity but also stands apart inwardly to observe'. For me, this standing outside highlighted the difference between detachment and intersectionality because of the unusual lack of pedagogic tools in the latter.

Just as activists have striven for intersectionality, the ethic of detachment that I have in part tried to cultivate methodologically was acting on myself, as I consciously tried to maintain distance from the activists I worked with (although, just as my interlocutors were never fully intersectional, nor was I ever fully detached). Dave (2012, p. 25) notes that 'For an ethnographer of activism, the space between participant and observer is a highly perilous place – the expectations are high, as are the research consequences of not meeting them'. Yet, for me, the research consequences of looking at positionality ethnographically by means of partial detachment were positive because it allowed the pedagogical contrast that I have outlined to emerge. Laidlaw (2014) argues that ethnography can mirror the structure of pedagogy, with the ethnographer learning from, as well as about, their informants. Ironically, I learnt how difficult it can be to learn about intersectionality and thus interact with it as an ethical project without a significant amount of educational privilege.

Conclusion

The ethnographic centrality of positionality to my research was apparent from the moment Maria looked at me suspiciously before the Sage meeting and demanded that I place myself within a strand of feminism. This was further evidenced by my intersectional interlocutors in their discussion of the privilege and identity of themselves and everyone around them. Ideological cleavages centred around the gender identity of trans women and the morality and legality of sex work. Whilst these debates were important for activists in and of themselves, they were also proxies for wider value-laden considerations about how one should live and practise feminism. These arguments were frequently ascribed by activists to differences between 'waves' of feminism, but with hindsight they are better characterised as differing ethical stances.

Understanding the ethical orientation of intersectionality can help unravel conflict and solidarity within the feminist movement because it provides insights into the moral nature of the debates with which activists are engaged. The stakes are high because intersectionality makes moral claims, not only on activists but on everybody, to reflect on their privilege and work to counteract its effects as far as possible. To fail at intersectionality (or to fail to try) is to be unethical. What makes intersectionality a particularly interesting ethical practice is its unusual pedagogy, which results in difficulties in engagement, particularly for those who exist outside university/academic feminist circles.

Thinking about detachment as an ethical project in itself allowed me greater insight into how intersectional activists engage in ethical self-transformation. The structural contrast between the two positions became clear due to the lack of interactive educational opportunities for my interlocutors, and illuminated the unusual pedagogy that is apparent in intersectionality, in contrast to practices of detachment. Although intersectional feminist activists wanted to transform the world through their self-transformation, the conversion of others was often difficult and, indeed, not an explicit aim of many activists.

Anthropology has recently started to understand detachment not just as an analytical concern but also as an ethnographic one (Candea et al., 2015; Stasch, 2009). My discussion of intersectionality contributes to this, not only by taking the opposite of detachment – positionality – as an ethnographic object, but also by contrasting the two. A key area of future interest is the examination of how an ethical project with such a conception of pedagogy will grow despite being hostile to mistakes and providing few avenues to learn how to correct them. Considering positionality through detachment is one way to think about this because it throws what is strange and interesting about intersectionality – the lack of pedagogical engagement with other people and institutions – into sharp relief in comparison to another ethical project that is both similar and different. Ultimately, both intersectionality and detachment are constructed and cultivated as ethical ideals but exist in opposition to each other, with the latter in an unachievable struggle to transcend and the former in an unachievable struggle to situate.

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Footnotes

[1] All names of activists and organisations have been changed, and any identifying features left out or changed.
[2] 'Transsexual' has generally been replaced with the word 'transgender' in trans-inclusionary feminist circles, and I have never heard feminists who expressed a commitment to intersectionality using the former term. Guidelines provided in 2014 by the US National Centre for Transgender Equality suggest that 'transgender' should be used more widely as many trans people find 'transsexual' to be 'overly clinical'. It must be noted that some trans people continue to use 'transsexual', with Serano (2007) sticking to the word because she thinks that any new term will probably also come to be regarded as problematic.

Biography

Having graduated from the University of Cambridge last year with a BA in Social Anthropology and Politics, Elli is currently studying for an MPhil in Gender Studies at Trinity College Dublin. Her main research interests lie in medical anthropology with a gender focus and she is keen to pursue a PhD looking at the criminalisation of HIV transmission. In her spare time she volunteers for causes such as campaigns for reproductive justice and improved sex education, and eventually hopes to become a non-clinical expert in public health.

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