

Women's Activism and "Second Wave" Feminism

Transnational Histories

Edited by Barbara Molony & Jennifer Nelson

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Introduction

Barbara Molony and Jennifer Nelson

This volume grew from a workshop on the history of women's activism in various countries from the middle of the twentieth into the early twenty-first centuries that we chaired at the 2014 Berkshire Conference on the History of Women in Toronto, Ontario. Themes of transnational feminisms, intersectionality, and challenging the appropriateness of periodizing women's activism in "waves" emerged from the workshop's discussions. Following the workshop, most of the participants wished to expand their papers with these categories of analysis in mind, and thus the book was born. The editors next invited leading scholars from around the world to contribute additional studies that probed transnational feminisms, women's activism, and intersectionality, both in practice and as analytic categories.

What scholars in the past two decades have referred to as transnational feminism and intersectionality had long existed, although they were not so designated. Feminists worked with counterparts across national borders—for example, as activists across the Pacific in organizations like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the YWCA, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the Pan Pacific Women's Association; and across the Atlantic as abolitionists and for women's suffrage at times when women did not enjoy full civil rights in their own nations—more than a century before cross-border collaborative associations came to be viewed as one way of enacting transnational feminism. Intersectionality, while also not named for over one hundred years, was articulated, for example, by the American antislavery activist Sojourner Truth in 1851 in her "Ain't I a Woman" speech, in which she stressed her identity as both a woman and an African American. Transnational feminisms and intersectionality were preformed, but they were neither named nor theorized as such. Women's activism existed in practice, and thus historians can create a narrative of activism; but unlike transnationalism and intersectionality, activism is not itself an analytic category. Transnationalism and intersectionality emerged as analytic categories in the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, in part as a reaction to the limitations of the "wave" model of periodizing women's movements. How, then, can a volume that employs these categories retain the wave paradigm, even if we use quotation marks to suggest that we are calling it into question?

Challenges to the wave metaphor

A central theme of this collection is the reimagination and re-periodization of the "second wave" of feminism, which in the past has been described as occurring between the early 1960s through the 1970s.¹ There has been much discussion about the usefulness of the "wave" metaphor first used by feminists active in women's movements in those decades. When American activists claimed they were a "second wave," they used the term to distance themselves from a "first wave," often perceived of as a narrow struggle for suffrage that began in Seneca Falls in 1848 and terminated in 1920 with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution. As Nancy Hewitt writes, "The decades excluded from the waves—before 1848 or from 1920 to 1960—are assumed to be feminist-free zones, an assumption belied by recent scholarship."² In the United States, the period immediately after women won the vote until the 1960s was viewed as devoid of feminist activism and dominated by conservative beliefs steeped in rigidly dichotomous gender roles. This view of the "doldrums" has changed,³ as have historical accounts of the period that followed the "second wave" (the 1980s and the era of Reagan), which had also been described as an era of conservative backlash against feminism and devoid of activism, which in turn gave rise in the 1990s to a self-described "third wave" of feminist activism.⁴ As Hewitt remarks, each "wave" is presumably an improvement upon the last in a "script ... that each wave overwhelms and exceeds its predecessor."⁵

The "third wave" was identified by younger feminists in the early 1990s who, in their criticism of their feminist forebears, attempted to go beyond "dichotomous notions of gender toward consideration of the multiple identities of age, class, race, and sexual preference,"⁶ which many scholars now see as "third wave" feminists' adoption of intersectionality developed earlier by scholars and activists of color in the United States and elsewhere throughout the world. The wave metaphor, even one that includes a more expansive consideration of intersectional identities (i.e., intersectionality), suggests that women's activism occurs in discrete phases led by individuals who prioritize gender/sex inequality. In the United States, this has generally produced a notion of the importance of activism led by middle-class white women. For most historians, this view has now become far too narrow.

Although groundbreaking historical work focusing on the lives of women of color and working women emerged in the early 1980s, historians writing about feminist movements in the United States have, since the 1990s, turned their attention to the contributions of women of color and working-class women to those movements, demonstrating that feminist activists have not spoken with a singular voice or articulated a set of homogenous demands.⁷ Nor did women of color and working-class women merely react to an already constituted set of white and middle-class feminist demands. Instead, scholars point out that women of color, working-class women, and middle-class white women have been in dialogue with each other, although they have not always articulated the same set of priorities, agreed with each other, or worked easily together.⁸ Focusing on how the movement for sex equality intersected with demands for racial and economic justice in the post-Second World War period has

prompted historians to, once again, rethink the traditional historical periodization of the history of feminism that rested on the “wave” metaphor. To be sure, studies of heterogeneities in feminist movements have not been limited to North American scholarship, nor have they been limited to those of race or ethnicity.⁹

Periodization of the history of feminist and women’s activism has been further complicated by transnational feminist activism. The wave metaphor has been both embraced and challenged by feminists outside North America. It was adopted widely outside North America in the 1980s as a convenient way for historians to “explore change over time and to compare one time period with another,”¹⁰ not to mention their need to find appealing parallels with movements in other countries. For example, after its approval by the United Nations General Assembly at the end of 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was lauded by feminists in country after country as an indication of their nation’s temporal convergence with global feminism (i.e., being part of the progressive “second wave”).¹¹

Yet, as is evident in several of the chapters in this volume, feminisms emanating from transnational NGOs or the United Nations World Conferences on Women—first held in Mexico City in 1975 and culminating in the Beijing World Conference in 1995—continued to bear the imprint of white Western feminism that superimposed itself on existing but largely overlooked women’s movements. Some of these movements traced their roots to the trough of the supposedly “feminist-free zone” between the “first” and “second waves” and continued after the “second wave” presumably ended. Although this volume of histories continues to use the wave metaphor (albeit in quotation marks) because of its historical significance—it was used by feminists in many global settings in the late twentieth century—we recognize the need to modify it. One way to do so would be to expand the time period under consideration to embrace the decades immediately following the Second World War and into the early twenty-first century. Many of the chapters in this volume take this long view of “second wave” feminism. This view has a historical precedent as well. After all, the “first wave” was generally viewed as occupying three-quarters of a century, from the 1850s to the 1920s; why could a “long-second wave” not enjoy the same kind of endurance? Establishing the beginning of the “second wave” in the 1940s and 1950s and extending it into the early twenty-first century (thereby subsuming both the trough after the original “second wave” as well as the “third wave”) would encompass the work of activists not included in the narrow band of US and European feminism confined to the 1960s and 1970s.

This expanded periodization allows us to include women documented in this book: women who fed children in the Bronx (Povitz); reimagined *Chicanismo* to counter racism in Silicon Valley (Estruth); fought apartheid as exiles from South Africa (Sandwell); resisted colonial and neocolonial domination in Quebec (Ricci); exposed paternalistic rhetorical contradictions to reveal the brutality of a repressive dictatorship in Chile (Pieper Mooney); led movements for global (later transnational) as well as local feminisms in socialist and post-socialist nations (Ruthchild and Grabowska); connected sexuality, antiracism, and feminism in historically black colleges and universities (Haynes); strategically forged a language of “difference” against hegemonic feminism in India whose dominant feminists considered *themselves* ignored by white

global "North" feminists (Mehta); struggled for recognition of female Indian informal sector workers who had suffered from a historical lack of labor organization (Boris); worked to bring recognition and justice to women oppressed by sexual violence in Japanese-occupied areas during the Second World War (Mackie and Kim and Lee); debated long-held values of secular feminism in France (Chetcuti-Osorovitz), and rejected a discourse of "global sisterhood" that rested on the supposed degradation of Indian women by Indian men (Jha). This expansion of the historical period of the "second wave" makes particular sense when we go beyond the borders of the United States; in addition, it does not exclude the white middle-class American women whose foregrounding of gendered inequality did play an important though not the only role in inspiring women in the United States and elsewhere.

An additional way of embracing a broader view of women's activism is to think of it as "women in movement" rather than exclusively as "women's movements."¹² The latter suggests that feminism prompted activism; the former allows for feminism to grow organically from activist responses to marginalizations and oppressions. As several of the chapters in this volume argue, women who were activists for antiracism, political freedom, community well-being, and nationalist justice developed a strong feminist consciousness while working for these other causes. Women did not cease to be "in movement" just because their initial focus was not women's rights. Even in the troughs between the "first" and "second waves" and after the "second wave" presumably ended, women were involved in community, politics, and other forms of activism, creating a more fluid trajectory of feminism than that suggested by more rigidly defined wave patterns.

The articulation of transnational feminist studies as well as the historical study of transnational feminism has also prompted conversations and debates about the meaning of feminism and its relationship to women's activism that is not perceived as necessarily feminist. This volume addresses these conversations by including scholarship on both feminism and women's activism, at times in the same chapter. Amrita Basu, drawing on the formative work of Maxine Molyneaux, explains that one way to distinguish between feminism and women's activism has been to separate women's practical and strategic interests. "Strategic interests, which are commonly identified as feminist, emerge from and contest women's experiences of gender subordination. Practical interests, by contrast, emerge from women's immediate and perceived needs."¹³ Because the latter (practical interests) often gives rise to the former (strategic interests), the concept of "women in movement" can help to recognize how these types of activisms can coexist at the local, national, and transnational levels and to underscore continuity (while also recognizing local specificities) among activist movements of various time periods, rather than occurring only in discrete waves.

Rather than abandon the wave metaphor, this volume tries to fill in the troughs and find ways to better connect women in movement across time and place. As Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor point out, the wave metaphor may still be useful "as long as we understand that the lulls between the waves are still moving, that, from a transnational perspective, there may be choppy seas rather than even swells, and that waves do not rise and crash independently of each other."¹⁴

Transnational feminisms and intersectionality

Conversations and writings about the relationship between colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, transnationalism, and feminism began to emerge in the late 1980s and 1990s and consolidate into an interdisciplinary field of study referred to as transnational feminist studies. In one of their foundational works, Inderpal Grewal and Karen Kaplan explain that transnational feminist studies are the “study [of] the relations between women from different cultures and nations.”¹⁵ This differs from much of feminist studies that preceded their work in that gender inequality and relationships between gender and power are studied across national boundaries and among women operating in transnational feminist networks across those boundaries. Furthermore, the emphasis is not only on imbalances of power structured by gender, but also on relationships of power structured by global economic and political relations that cross borders, for instance, imperialism, and the “legacies of imperialism,”¹⁶ neo-imperialism, and globalization.

Those relationships of power are not only among the “West and the rest”¹⁷—that is, “sisterhood is global” Western-centric relationships that many practitioners of transnational feminist studies have sharply criticized¹⁸—but also among non-Western countries and within nation-states. For example, in this volume, the *practice* (as distinct from the *theorizing* of transnational feminist studies) of transnational collaborations among Asian feminists or among African feminists, as well as among South Asian and African American feminists, downplays national borders. Paradoxically, even within a nation-state, transnationalism can also play a role, as in the case of First Nations people in Quebec, Canada.¹⁹ In short, transnational feminist activism can both reify and unsettle the nation.

Transnational feminist analysis came to dominate the study of global feminism about a decade after another type of analysis—Third World feminism—developed in “opposition to white second-wave feminists’ single-pronged analyses of gender oppression that elided Third World women’s multiple and complex oppressions in their various social locations.”²⁰ Ranjoo Seodu Herr notes that transnational feminist analyses consider “nation-states and nationalism as detrimental to feminist causes, whereas Third World feminists are relatively neutral to, and at times even approving of, nation-states and nationalism.”²¹ Rather than focusing on the problems of the nation-state, as does transnational feminist analysis, Third World feminism focuses more intently on local and national contexts. Because Third World feminist analysis has lost its appeal in the past decade, Herr argues for a reclamation of that paradigm in order to bring greater attention to people on the ground rather than to the networks of organizations highlighted in transnational feminist analysis. The chapters in this volume show that these two types of analysis need not be mutually exclusive; most of the chapters focus on individual case studies (or the local in the local/global paradigm) to “pay attention to individual women’s agency and voices,”²² a prime feature of Third World feminism. The essays are grounded in the “histories, contexts, and preoccupations of the specific locations being studied,” rather than being too dependent on theory—a critique of transnational studies put forward by Leela Fernandes.²³ As local histories, the chapters recognize what Uma Narayan has asserted in her critique of the notion

that feminism is necessarily a Western import: "feminist perspectives are not foreign to ... Third World national contexts."²⁴ At the same time, the chapters also recognize the effects of global economic and political forces on women's lives, which may necessitate transnational networked responses from feminists inhabiting different regions of the world. As opposed to internationalism focused on international alliances among already established nations, transnational feminist studies attend to "transnational circuits of information, capital, and labor, [to] critique a system founded on inequality and exploitation."²⁵

The concept of intersectionality, first articulated by women of color in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s and coined as a theoretical term in 1991 by Kimberlé Crenshaw,²⁶ has been a powerful analytical tool in feminist and antiracist studies that allows for the theorization of "the dynamics of difference and sameness," including along overlapping axes of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. An "intersectional frame of analysis" allows us to examine the historical "mutually constituting" operation of identity categories that have produced complex relationships of power that defy simple dichotomous statements, such as men oppress women. In addition, activists may undertake "political interventions employing an intersectional lens."²⁷ All the essays in this volume consider their feminist subjects through an intersectional frame of analysis.

Jennifer Nash asserts that although the contemporary academy conflates intersectionality and transnationalism with diversity and difference, respectively, as a way of addressing important contemporary issues, intersectionality and transnationalism are not inherently at odds.²⁸ Indeed, transnational feminist studies have deepened intersectional analysis by shifting the focus away from the United States and Europe. Instead, the focus of transnational feminist studies has been on how power moves across historically shifting borders that both separate and generate nations and political regions and how this movement of power operates to structure inequalities in relation to mutually constituting categories (such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality). Along these lines, Vrushali Patil argues that transnational feminists "encourage an examination of how categories of race, ethnicity, sexuality, culture, nation, and gender not only intersect but are mutually constituted, formed, and transformed within transnational power-laden processes."²⁹

Chandra Mohanty, another central theorist of the first articulations of transnational feminist studies, has written critically of US and European feminisms grounded in the notion of a monolithic patriarchy that oppressed an equally monolithic "third world woman." She explains, "An analysis of 'sexual difference' in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive notion of ... that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all women in these countries."³⁰ She has emphasized that a feminist theory based on this type of cross-cultural generalization exercises its own power to erase—Mohanty calls it "discursive homogenization"—the complex and heterogeneous lives and histories of women around the world. She argues that the scholarly "view from above of marginalized communities of women in the global South and North" fails to attend

“to historical and cultural specificity in understanding their complex agency as situated subjects.”³¹ The authors included in this volume of essays also seek to recover the complexity and heterogeneity of histories of marginalized women’s lives in multiple contexts around the globe by situating them in transnational and local historical contexts.

Structure of the book

We have grouped the fourteen chapters in this book into three parts, reflecting three primary themes of the collection: Redefining Feminism; Reconsidering “Second Wave” Feminist Genealogies; and Transnational Feminist Linkages. Taken together, these themes emerge from the title of the collection—*Women’s Activism and “Second Wave” Feminism: Transnational Histories*—and the germinating presentations and conversation that occurred in the 2014 workshop that developed into many of the chapters you will read here.

All the chapters in this collection redefine feminism in some capacity. Yet, the first three chapters listed in Part One, “Redefining Feminism,” do so by focusing on the dynamic relationship between practical and strategic gender interests as expressed earlier by the concept of “women in movement.” These three essays tell of women who identified challenges in their communities and developed an intersectional feminist response linked to their particular experiences. Transnational considerations also played an important role in each of these cases despite their grounding in women’s local experience and strategic activism. Many women activists, however, did not claim feminism explicitly, as we see in Chapter 1, “Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation: The Food Activism of United Bronx Parents.” In this essay, Lana Dee Povitz reveals that Puerto Rican mothers in the Bronx (a borough of New York City)—most of whom were poor and without much political influence—utilized individual “women’s work” as food providers for their families to collectively press public schools to provide nutritious meals. In Chapter 2, “‘Sex-Ins, College Style’: Black Feminism and Sexual Politics in the Student YWCA, 1968–80,” April Haynes demonstrates that in the late 1960s, black college women in the American South utilized the YWCA to connect antiracism and positive sexual expression as fundamental demands of women’s liberation at a time when many historians have presumed that feminist agendas were dominated by white women’s demands and that black women did not speak explicitly about sexuality. Political debates over the banning of the “headscarf” worn by Muslim girls in public school in France are at the center of Chapter 3, “Contemporary Feminisms and the Secularism Controversies: A Model of Emancipation,” in which Natacha Chetcuti-Osorovitz traces the reconfiguration of French feminist thought and activism as necessarily linked to secularism in an increasingly multicultural French society.

The last two chapters in this part redefine feminism by tracing its independent emergence in non-Western contexts. Eileen Boris in Chapter 4, “SEWA’s Feminism,” chronicles “women in movement” among home-based and self-employed workers organized in the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad, India. Her chapter reveals that women from the most marginalized positions utilized

collective action and cooperation to empower themselves and improve their daily lives. Rochelle Ruthchild in Chapter 5, "Feminist Dissidents in the 'Motherland of Women's Liberation': Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory," the last chapter in this part, writes of Russian dissident feminists who critiqued gender-based oppression in Russia. Forcefully opposed by the Soviet state, and also by many of their male dissident comrades, they continued to produce uniquely Russian feminist writings as exiles that in some cases differed markedly from European or US feminisms, such as in their open embrace of Russian Orthodox Christianity, and in other cases found a home within transnational feminism.

The four chapters in Part Two, "Reconsidering 'Second Wave' Feminist Genealogies," expand the periodization of the "second wave." The first two chapters—Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney's Chapter 6, "On the 'F'-Word as Insult and on Feminism as Political Practice: Women's Mobilization for Rights in Chile"; and Magdalena Grabowska's Chapter 7, "Beyond the 'Development' Paradigm: State Socialist Women's Activism, Transnationalism, and the 'Long Sixties'"—link women's mobilizations and feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970s to earlier decades of the century. Pieper Mooney takes a long historical view of maternalist Chilean female activism that begins in the first decades of the twentieth century when women demanded changes that would improve family and community life and continues through the 1980s women's protests against Pinochet's dictatorship, which they said violated its supposed reverence for mothers and families when it caused the disappearance of individuals opposed to the state. Grabowska argues that Polish feminists embraced state-socialist feminism in the immediate post-Second World War period to foster an international feminist movement of Women's Congresses well before transnational feminist movements were founded by Western feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. Priya Jha's Chapter 8, "Making a Point by Choice': Maternal Imperialism, Second Wave Feminism, and Transnational Epistemologies," interrogates the effects of historical amnesia on claims to "global sisterhood" by US "second wave" feminists. Jha argues that Mary Daly's claims (in the 1970s) to women's universal oppression rested on racist misrepresentations of Indian women by American journalist Katherine Mayo in her 1927 book *Mother India*. The failure to recognize the historical genealogy behind claims to "global sisterhood" reinforced false understandings of women's oppression in the "global south" that had nothing to do with their own experiences. The last chapter in this section by Seung-kyung Kim and Na-Young Lee, Chapter 9, "Shared History and the Responsibility for Justice: The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan," also makes connections across the twentieth century from Japan's sexual exploitation of Korean women during the Second World War to the 1980s and 1990s when Korean women activists took advantage of increased democracy in Korea to build a case before international human rights organizations to provide justice for surviving "comfort women."

The last part, "Transnational Feminist Linkages," includes five chapters that represent women's organizing and activism that crossed borders, often both conceptually and physically. In Chapter 10, "Visions for the Suburban City in the Age of Decolonization: Chicana Activism in the Silicon Valley, 1965–75," Jeannette Alden Estruth highlights conceptual border crossing among Chicana women activists

in the Santa Clara Valley (now Silicon Valley) who embraced transnational Third World decolonization movements to demand community control over their local suburban housing and transportation. Purvi Mehta in Chapter 11, “Dalit Feminism at Home and in the World: The Conceptual Work of ‘Difference’ and ‘Similarity’ in National and Transnational Activism,” examines the strategic use of the concept of “difference” among Dalit women activists to distinguish their experiences of marginalization from other Indian feminists and Dalit men. Furthermore, she uncovers the transnational activist ties built by Dalit feminists with women outside India—for example, black American women—whose intersectional experiences of oppression and marginalization by both US white feminists and black men similarly shaped their social justice struggles. Also documenting the movement to demand justice for the Korean “comfort women,” Vera Mackie in Chapter 12, “One Thousand Wednesdays: Transnational Activism from Seoul to Glendale,” employs both transnational and intersectional frameworks to narrate how feminists from different regions built coalitions to demand recognition and retribution for survivors of wartime sexual slavery. Considering women’s assertions of national identity across regional and national borders, Amanda Ricci in Chapter 13, “Contesting the Nation(s): Haitian and Mohawk Women’s Activism in Montreal,” shows how both Indigenous Mohawk and Haitian immigrant women in Montreal engaged civically, claimed citizenship, and contested territorial dispossession shaped by colonial historical legacies. In addition, she raises the issue of transnationalism within the context of a single nation-state. Finally, in Chapter 14, “If Not Feminism, Then What? Women’s Work in the African National Congress in Exile,” Rachel Sandwell chronicles the development of “gender conversations” critical of gender norms among exiled African National Congress women in three separate locations outside of South Africa—in Dar es Salaam and Morogoro, Tanzania; and in Maputo, Mozambique. She also shows how ideas about feminism traveling from the United States and United Kingdom were transformed among South African women fighting apartheid in exile.

Notes

- 1 Sarah Evans, *Personal Politics* (New York: Vintage, 1980) and Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) were the two most influential books on the history of Women’s Liberation or the “second wave” US feminist movement previous to the explosion of writing on Women’s Liberation history in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Activists from the movement began to publish firsthand accounts of the movement in the late 1990s, which included Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Barr Snitow’s *The Feminist Memoir Project* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998) and Susan Brownmiller’s *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1999). A collection of documents from the movement, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), edited by Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon.
- 2 Nancy A. Hewitt, ed., *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 2–4.

- 3 Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford, 1987).
- 4 See, for example, Astrid Henry, *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Krista Jacob and Adela C. Licona, "Writing the Waves: A Dialogue on the Tools, Tactics, and Tensions of Feminisms and Feminist Practices over Time and Place," *NWSA Journal* 17, 1 (2005): 197–205; Amber Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism," *NWSA Journal* 16, 3 (2004): 124–53.
- 5 Hewitt, *No Permanent Waves*, 4.
- 6 Kathleen A. Laughlin, in Kathleen A. Laughlin et al., "Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor," *Feminist Formations* 22, 1 (Spring 2010): 77.
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Part One

Redefining Feminism

Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: The Food Activism of United Bronx Parents

Lana Dee Povitz

Introduction

In the late 1960s and 1970s, United Bronx Parents (UBP) was one of New York City's most respected and effective antipoverty agencies. Comprised largely of poor Puerto Rican mothers with little formal education, it may have been less glamorous than the Young Lords, the *Independentistas* of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, or other Puerto Rican leftist organizations from the period, but it had a lasting impact on the South Bronx and set into motion a chain of events that would forever change the face of school food in New York City. By organizing the city's first sustained grassroots campaign to improve public school lunches in notoriously awful South Bronx cafeterias in 1969 and 1970, and then by administering New York's first ever citywide free summer meals program in 1971, UBP leaders took "traditional" women's work—food provision—and transformed it into an effective organizing tool. The two projects mobilized and politically empowered hundreds of people who, because of poverty, language barriers, and, often, relative newcomer status to the United States, were unaccustomed to making demands on the city's institutions of power.

UBP was founded in the South Bronx in 1966 by the charismatic Evelina López Antonetty. What began as a grassroots community organization in the poorest congressional district of the United States grew, via a steady stream of foundation, state, and federal funding over the next two decades, into a nonprofit agency with a small but well-managed bureaucracy. Still in existence today, UBP's accomplishments have included organizing free day care, working with parents to advocate for change in their children's schools, establishing job training programs for youth, and developing in-patient drug rehabilitation for mothers that allowed their children to remain with them during treatment. In recent years, historians such as Sonia Song-Ha Lee and the late Adina Back have written about UBP and the importance of Antonetty's leadership during the War on Poverty.¹ Yet, scholars have ignored the organization's work around school lunches and free summer meals. In addition to increasing low-income children's basic access to food, UBP reconfigured school lunches from a neglected federal program into a measure of the city's investment in poor Puerto Rican and Black communities.

Both the school lunch campaign and free summer meals program were also crucial to building the organization's reputation as a responsive and effective force. This was true not only within the South Bronx, but also throughout the city, in New York State, and, for a time, in the offices of the federal government. To overlook the importance of food is to continue to miss an important organizing spur for traditionally oppressed groups: women, immigrants, poor people, and people of color.

Evelina Antonetty and UBP in the South Bronx

Puerto Ricans living in the South Bronx in the late 1960s comprised a relatively new community within New York City. Because of structural unemployment and social dislocation caused by Operation Bootstrap, Puerto Rico's major industrialization effort, Puerto Ricans had migrated to the United States en masse from the early 1940s through the 1950s. Eighty-five percent made their home in New York City. By the end of the 1950s, approximately 900,000 New Yorkers had either been born in Puerto Rico or were of Puerto Rican parentage; more than one-third of the island's population transferred to the city between 1943 and 1960. The vast majority of immigrants came from poor, rural environments to work in industrial jobs.² With industrial decline and greater economic and racial segregation in the second half of the 1960s, Puerto Rican communities across the United States grew more militant. The anticolonial uprisings and establishment of newly independent nations in Africa, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia encouraged Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican movements in the United States to articulate their struggles in colonial terms.³

Evelina López Antonetty arrived in New York City before major migration began. She was born on September 19, 1922, to Eva López, a single mother, in the small, poor, fishing village of Salinas, Puerto Rico. She moved to East Harlem to live with her aunt in 1933. Her mother and younger sisters, Lillian and Elba, joined her a couple of years later. Both her aunt and mother were involved with the laundry workers' union in the 1930s, where they organized alongside Black and Jewish women.⁴ Antonetty would later continue this tradition of multiracial organizing in UBP, whose storefront sign depicted two clasped hands: one light, one dark. Antonetty's daughter Lorraine described her mother as *una hija de Maria* until she was politicized by her future husband, Binaldo Montenegro, whom she met as a teenager.⁵ When she was fifteen, in 1937, Antonetty was among the tens of thousands who gathered in Central Park to mourn the deaths of nineteen Puerto Rican National Party protestors who had been shot by police in Ponce, Puerto Rico. She supported the antifascist forces in the Spanish Civil War and was a member of the International Workers' Order.⁶

Antonetty attended Wadleigh High School, a prestigious all-girls public school in Harlem whose alumni included Dorothea Lange and Lillian Hellman. As one of the few Puerto Rican students, she, along with her Black peers, was encouraged to participate in dancing and singing, rather than take up more intellectual pursuits. In spite of the discrimination she faced, she was academically successful. Although her mother valued education enough to support her high school education, Antonetty lacked the financial resources to attend college. Much of her education, therefore, took

place in her community, where, immersed in the rich interwar Puerto Rican subculture of El Barrio, East Harlem, she was schooled in Depression-era progressive politics. She helped her neighbors handle evictions, translating between Spanish and English, and brought packages of government surplus food to those too sick or too proud to retrieve it themselves. Her mentors included the Puerto Rican nationalist writer Jesús Colón, who paid her membership costs for the International Workers' Order, and Vito Marcantonio, East Harlem's Communist-supported Italian-American congressman.⁷

At sixteen, Antonetty became part of the Young Communist League, the youth wing of the American Communist Party.⁸ Her Party training was practically as well as ideologically significant to her future work as an organizer. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Party trained thousands of people to mobilize, delegate, motivate, run a meeting, analyze an action, stick to a topic, be disciplined, seek accountability, and expect follow through. The Young Communist League had Marxist reading groups, which helped young people learn to process what they read and confidently articulate their ideas. Her involvement with the Party helps explain her lifelong emphasis on job creation. It may have emerged from a firsthand exposure to grinding poverty, but it was also filtered through an ideological lens of class consciousness.⁹ Like many of her generation who lived through the Red Scare of the 1940s and 1950s, Antonetty seldom, if ever, spoke of her Communist history, even to others with a similar background, but its hallmark was there in her efficacy as an organizer.¹⁰

In 1947, as a recently divorced twenty-five-year-old with a baby, she became one of the first Latinas hired full time by District 65, a militant union that organized small shops. She helped bring more than 4,000 Spanish-speaking workers into the union.¹¹ She remained with District 65 for ten years until 1957 when her second child, Anita, was born. By this time, Evelina was living in the South Bronx with her second husband, Donato Antonetty.¹² After her third child, Donald, was born in 1960, Antonetty worked toward the development of Head Start Programs, eventually becoming the supervisor of the first Head Start in the City.¹³ It was through this work that she first encountered parent associations. When, in 1965, her five-year-old Donald was suspended from kindergarten on so-called disciplinary charges (no one seems to remember what he had allegedly done), she transitioned into a full-time parent organizer. At around the same time, a teacher at the same school was accused of sexually abusing several students. Antonetty, having by now been elected president of the school's parent association, tried to have the teacher discharged. She also fought to dismiss the district superintendent who had been reluctant to investigate the teacher after parents complained.¹⁴

UBP and the school system

For Antonetty these events symbolized the unfair and arbitrary power that teachers and principals wielded over low-income Black and Puerto Rican pupils.¹⁵ Furious at the rampant inequality she saw plaguing the school system, she began drawing on her own experience as a labor organizer and day care coordinator to organize parents into an all-volunteer organization. UBP was a movement organization, both deriving

energy from and spurring on the citywide community control of schools movement in the late 1960s. It also quickly came to be a staff organization, albeit a small one, concerned with providing social services to an extremely deprived population; in the mid-1960s, more than half of all Puerto Rican families in the South Bronx lived below the poverty line.¹⁶

Except for two important paid staff members, Kathy Goldman and Ellen Lurie, both of whom were white, middle-class Jewish women, UBP was largely composed of low-income immigrant and first-generation Puerto Ricans, as well as an unspecified number of Black women.¹⁷ Most of its day-to-day activities were carried out by volunteers, although the organization was adept at fundraising and created paid positions for its most involved volunteers whenever possible. To a limited extent, UBP was also a member organization: the volunteer membership identified the problems, generated ideas for campaigns, and helped suggest tactics. But decisions about strategy ultimately rested with the leadership, which enjoyed remarkably uncontested support.

UBP was not the only militant Puerto Rican group leading community-based campaigns during the foment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but its methods were less challenging to the status quo than were those of the more brazen Young Lords, who "liberated" a city truck and took over a church to accomplish some of their projects.¹⁸ The Lords, many of whom were university students and American born, were more explicit than UBP about tying local economic and social grievances to larger critiques of structural racism and Puerto Rico's neocolonial relationship to the United States. The Lords offered political education, distributing a newspaper, *Palante*, and hosting a radio show on WBAI-FM by the same name in 1969.¹⁹ Members of UBP were to the Young Lords the older, more pragmatic aunts who lived a few blocks over but in the same neighborhood; while they basically shared values with their rowdier nieces and nephews, the aunts were slower to react, more patient, and more focused on creating change here and now than on the revolutionary possibilities of the future. Evelina Antonetty in particular shared the Lords' radical analysis, but she was running a nonprofit concerned first and foremost with the basic survival of its community: adequate food, the need for local jobs, and community control of local schools. Nevertheless, Antonetty served as a mentor to many Young Lords, including Juan Gonzales and Felipe Luciano. She supported them emotionally and at times financially, giving them money to set up a storefront in the South Bronx and allowing them access to the UBP office's mimeograph machine. They were different wings of the same movement.

In 1967, UBP received funding from the federal Office of Economic Opportunity and later received additional money from the private New York Urban Coalition and Ford Foundation to begin training parents to advocate for change in their children's schools. By this time, the push to decentralize school districts and concentrate power in the hands of more responsive local community school boards had largely eclipsed the unsuccessful movement for racial integration of the 1950s and earlier part of the 1960s.

It is significant that UBP was born from the struggle for better schools. Quality education was of the utmost importance to New York's Puerto Rican community. The 1960s and early 1970s was a time when many Black and Puerto Rican people throughout the city were coming to embrace a form of cultural nationalism that

pushed them to demand direct control over the institutions that shaped their lives, including decentralized, culturally affirming schools. In a letter drafted to fellow South Bronx Puerto Ricans, Antonetty reminded parents that keeping their rich heritage alive depended upon their receiving a decent education. She said: "It is up to us as parents to demand and get the school authorities, the legislators and city officials to give our children the education which is rightfully ours. Our children can become the educators, doctors and leaders of tomorrow. Don't let anyone tell us differently ... that our children are 'uneducable or mentally retarded.' ... We will not be satisfied with less."²⁰

Such galvanizing rhetoric was needed because parents tended to blame themselves for their children's lack of achievement in school.²¹ Indeed, although 65 percent of students in the Bronx's School District 7 were Puerto Rican, they made up only 3 percent of students receiving high school diplomas. Few could read at grade level and most were two years behind.²² Antonetty, along with Ellen Lurie, who had been organizing parents in public schools in East Harlem and Washington Heights since the 1950s, prepared a "treasure hunt" for "re-educating parents who have been turned around against their own." It involved taking parents into a middle-class neighborhood and asking them to look for resources which were absent in their own communities. Antonetty and Lurie beseeched parents to visit the public libraries to review their hours and titles; to seek out the nearest dime store and see what educational materials and toys were available for inexpensive prices; to drop by the nearest bank to investigate whether it had any school savings accounts or tuitions loans; to find whether there were any restaurants without a bar where families could get a decent meal for a low price; and to discover whether there were good-looking apartments with three, four, or five bedrooms.²³

One of UBP's main goals was to assure parents that low academic success rates were a systemic problem. As one UBP pamphlet pointed out, "If only one or two children are failing in each class, there is probably something wrong with these children. But if two thirds of the children are failing, THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE SCHOOL!"²⁴ This was not immediately clear to parents, who, in Puerto Rico, had been accustomed to treating teachers with respect and the principal with honor, as a real representative of the community. If children in Puerto Rico had problems in school, the teacher would make home visits to discuss issues.²⁵ In the South Bronx, however, teachers and principals were usually not from the community and had little cultural literacy or understanding of their students. Overwhelmingly, those in positions of power (superintendents, principals) were white, while those working menial jobs (janitors, cafeteria workers) were Black or Puerto Rican.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, the most experienced and highest-paid teachers in New York City tended to teach at schools with a whiter student population. Conversely, the least experienced teachers were paid lower salaries and usually taught in schools with a higher percentage of students of color.²⁷

To overcome academic disparities, UBP advocated for community control over hiring and for the idea that districts should receive their fair share of the education budget. They also promoted a new educational ideal: a "school without walls" where academic learning would be continuous with the struggles of the home and the

community.²⁸ Unlike white teachers and principals, UBP understood that students faced an enormous discrepancy between school and home life. Most Puerto Rican pupils faced some degree of poverty, and many were forced to live in overcrowded apartments, where they lacked adequate study space, proper diets, and privacy. While teachers expected students to go home after school to do homework, it was not uncommon for Puerto Rican students, by their sophomore years, to be their family's main breadwinner.²⁹ Puerto Rican immigrants typically viewed the home as a social space for welcoming visitors and relatives. It was often difficult to be able to go home, close the door to "one's room," and simply study. Through bilingual promotional material, UBP encouraged parents to fight for culturally representative teachers, classroom aides, and administrators; an accurate representation of Puerto Rican and Black history and culture in the classroom; a fair disciplinary system; decent cafeterias; and improved school food.³⁰

This vision drew deeply from contemporary discourses among Black educators, activists, and intellectuals living in New York City in the mid-1960s, such as Harold Cruse, Milton Galamison, Babette Edwards, and Kenneth Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark.³¹ These discourses attacked the idea of a "culture of poverty," popularized by Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1964 report for the Office of Policy Planning and Research in the Department of Labor, as an explanation for low student achievement. They also rejected the moderate cultural pluralism guiding educational policy at this time, most publicly embodied by Al Shanker, the teachers' union president and perhaps the greatest opponent of community control. They sought to replace the Board's purportedly race-blind approach that focused on individual merit, competition, and materialism with radical democracy, racial consciousness, and social responsibility that devolved power downward away from bureaucrats toward students and parents.³²

United Bronx Parents offered this framework to a population of people who were not intellectuals but who were quickly coming to realize that their children were getting a raw deal. Parents, most of whom had grown up in rural poverty in Puerto Rico, could trust an organization whose staff was largely the product of its own parent training process, and which had no major class, ethnic, or educational differences between most of its staff and the people it served. UBP worked to produce a politically sophisticated cadre of parents who could agitate effectively for change, governed by the principle that "[t]he parent is the professional when it comes to the education of their children."³³ Their community education materials emphasized parents' own ideas and priorities as the main content.

A large part of UBP's success rested on the credibility of Antonetty herself within the community.³⁴ Typically, representatives from local parent associations would approach her at the UBP office on 791 Prospect Avenue with a grievance, and if the issue seemed large-scale enough, she would call a neighborhood meeting, advertised through posters in schools and phone trees. In the late 1960s, these meetings, especially when they were about food, could attract hundreds of people. Rooms would frequently fill to overflowing as Antonetty facilitated in Spanish or English, and decisions would be reached by the vote of anyone who was in attendance. At large meetings, particularly when politicians and other elites were present, UBP made sure to provide simultaneous

translation, a real rarity in those days. This ensured that Spanish-speaking parents could always understand and be understood.

Multiracial leadership and UBP's school lunch campaign, 1969–70

A concrete example of neighborhood women approaching Antonetty with a problem occurred in January 1969. An unusually large group of ten mothers appeared at UBP headquarters and asked for a meeting. They came from PS 25, the elementary school two blocks away, to discuss the appalling conditions of school lunch. Lunchrooms were crowded, noisy, and overheated, they explained to Antonetty. Students had no place to hang their coats, so they had to eat with them on. The food was trucked through traffic across two boroughs from a central kitchen in Queens, a facility that used to be a Depression-era soup kitchen. It often arrived late, compressing the time in which students had to eat. Soups were cold and greasy. Sandwiches—typically baloney, peanut butter, or cheese on white bread—were dry and stale. There was tremendous waste. Lunch monitors yelled at students. Cafeteria cooks had no way to sterilize dishware and had to buy soap out of pocket if they wanted to properly clean things.³⁵ The list of grievances went on and on. Kathy Goldman, who, along with Ellen Lurie, worked as a parent leadership training coordinator for UBP, became especially caught up in this campaign.

Before any more can be said about the school lunch campaign, a brief digression is needed to discuss the role of Lurie and Goldman: the two Jewish women were the only white people in the organization, and yet they occupied the two most important positions in those early years, second only to the executive director herself. This was a strategic choice on Antonetty's part. Although she must have been aware of the irony of positioning two white people directly under her, their competence, savvy, connections, and devotion outweighed their race. Lurie and Goldman had met earlier in the 1960s in EQUAL, a militant group of white parents struggling for school integration, and had come to work for UBP in 1966 after Antonetty recruited them.³⁶ The working relationship between these three women was extremely productive, although there was sometimes disagreement between Antonetty and Lurie, who was already a citywide leader in her own right even before coming to UBP. According to Luis Caban, who came to work for UBP under Lurie's supervision when he was twenty-three years old, the two women "really hashed things out. This was why so many of the things that UBP did worked: the only thing to come out of it was something that was very doable. The love between them oozed out of their pores, but when they sat down to talk about ideas it was very tense." Caban's wife, Maria, who also helped out with parent training at the time and later assisted Kathy Goldman in administering the summer meals program, added that "Ellen and Evelina were like a married couple, the way they argued . . . They got done what needed to be done."³⁷

The Cabans' recollections may have been filtered through a slightly rose-colored lens. Or, perhaps, in a hierarchical organization such as UBP, the Cabans were simply

not privy to the extent of interpersonal tensions at the higher echelons. Goldman mentioned feeling increasingly caught in the middle, and the stress of navigating between these two epic personalities almost led her to a nervous breakdown.³⁸ Lurie finally resigned in 1971 to work for the Community Service Society, but she remained close to the organization. Following her departure, Lurie wrote to Antonetty: "I notice I keep saying 'we' and 'us' [in this letter]. The separation from UBP is coming very hard. But I have heard that the project is moving forward wonderfully and I know you and the staff will produce a remarkable [parent training] manual. As I told you, if there is anything I can do to help, please let me know."³⁹ The parting was amicable, and the two women remained allies until Lurie's death in 1978.

Goldman, younger than Antonetty by a decade and two years Lurie's junior, was an altogether different kind of leader, happiest working behind the scenes. The American-born daughter of Eastern European Communists, she had participated steadily in progressive causes since joining the Labor Youth League (a later iteration of the Young Communist League) in the late 1940s. After a legal scare when she was eighteen years old, she disaffiliated from Communist Party connections but continued to work on education and housing issues. Goldman had grown up down the street from UBP's 791 Prospect Avenue office in what had been, at the time, a largely Jewish neighborhood; though, like many other middle-class Jewish families, her family had relocated to the West Bronx in the 1940s. Goldman's various paid positions and time with EQUAL let Antonetty know that she was both committed to the cause of racial and economic equality and able to do the nitty-gritty work of coordinating parents. I can find no evidence of Goldman or Lurie's race and class privilege being a source of tension within the organization. It appears that, as they did with so much else, others who worked in the organization followed Antonetty's lead. Certainly all the narrators I interviewed about UBP only spoke about the women with warmth, fondness, and respect.⁴⁰

Goldman, for her part, was "totally bowled over" upon meeting Antonetty: "She was very smart, very erudite . . . She wore this big hat. She was really something."⁴¹ Goldman recalled that "Ellen was audacious . . . smart, very fearless. It was wonderful to work with someone like that. And Evelina was flamboyant in a smoother way. People would stop and listen to her. She was heavyset, but she was beautiful. Don't discount beauty and its impact."⁴² Antonetty's daughter, Lorraine Montenegro, told the following story to illustrate her mother's fierce outspokenness in the face of injustice:

She was attending a hearing in DC, and I hear different stories about what ignited in her—one was that a woman sitting next to her was trying to say something in English and my mother overheard [one of the Congressmen] say, "I wish that woman would shut up." And she stood up and said, "No, you shut up, and you listen!" Anyway, I got a call from a lawyer [who had been there], and at the end of the conversation he tells me, "I never met your mother but I'll never forget her . . . I heard her stand up and tell a United States Congressman to shut up and listen."⁴³

The moment has since been commemorated as a mural outside UBP's current building on 773 Prospect Avenue at 156th Street. Working together, Antonetty, Lurie,



FIGURE 1.1. Mural of Evelina López Antonetty, 773 Prospect Ave., South Bronx. Mural by Tats Cru Inc., 2011.

Source: Photograph by author.

and Goldman, with their different strengths and personalities, made for a fierce leadership team.

Goldman's experience with school lunches at UBP would set the stage for a fifty-year career as a food activist. At the first community meeting that UBP held about the issue, parents described to her not only how terrible the meals were, but also how dependent they were on them. There was severe poverty in the area and the mothers had no other way to guarantee that their children would eat lunch. But while these women may not have had money, many of them were also talented Puerto Rican cooks. Goldman could not help but notice that for discussions about school lunch more than a hundred parents attended. These were far larger numbers than when a meeting was called about reading scores. Clearly, food made sense as a medium for their political organization. For these women, food was a comfort zone.⁴⁴

At the time, New York City schoolchildren were allowed the option of leaving for lunch, and those who could go home, did, or else brought their own lunch. The tacit expectation that a "good mother" would be home to feed her children or be able to send them to school with a brown bag lunch kept those who could not do so—either because they were out working or because they had no food in the house—from questioning school food arrangements too vocally. Prior to UBP picking up the issue, there was the occasional critical report on school food from the white, liberal Citizens' Committee for Children and United Parents Association, two of the most active organizations in New York City around school issues. For the most part, school lunch was seen as a "poor kids program" and therefore received relatively little attention.⁴⁵

Following the initial community meeting, UBP organized parents to monitor and evaluate lunchrooms in twenty-five South Bronx schools over eight weeks, based on criteria such as menus, amount of food service, amount of waste, supervision, cleanliness, and physical setup of kitchens and cafeterias. One evaluation judged PS 25, the school from whence the original ten mothers came, to be "the worst of all the schools we have visited ... Most schools use a room such as this for storage of

old equipment. Here it is the lunchroom."⁴⁶ At certain schools, including JHS 98, the parent committee took the added step of asking students what they thought of their school's food situation. One student informed the committee: "Macaroni's no good, sour. I wish they gave me rice and beans and chicken. Always the same thing ... Lunchroom help is so slow—we wait a long time and have to leave without lunch. I like Spanish food but if they're going to cook it, forget it. They wouldn't know how."⁴⁷ UBP organizers took note of students' unsurprising preference for culturally familiar foods.

After trying but failing to win immediate remedies from Kevin Howard, the director of New York City Board of Education's Bureau of School Lunches, UBP organizers undertook a variety of creative and often whimsical approaches to effect change. For example, on April 10, 1969, UBP invited a group of elected officials for a lunch meeting. Among those present were state senators, assemblymen, city councilmen, aides of the governor, representatives from the mayor's office, and Bronx Borough President Herman Badillo. This impressive turnout owed much to Antonetty's own political clout; she was ensconced in a range of political scenes, from serving as the parent coordinator of the South Bronx's first Head Start program, being appointed by Mayor John Lindsay as the vice chair of the New York City Council Against Poverty, to sitting on the General Convention of the Episcopal Church (even though she was not Episcopalian, her social connections throughout the city were vast enough to justify her seat).⁴⁸ Taking the group completely by surprise, UBP members put the officials on a school bus, brought them to the notorious PS 25, and served them the lunch provided to the students there. On their way in, the delegation was greeted by a few hundred unamused parents, many of whom held picket line-style signs. This massive turnout was organized by UBP volunteer and PS 25 parent Juanita Hernandez, who used word-of-mouth, posters, and flyers to rally fellow parents. The fact that one assemblyman got sick from the experience only furthered their message that school food had to change.⁴⁹ Afterward, as was customary, organizers and parents debriefed the action, analyzing what they had learned in order to approach future actions with greater discipline and intuition.⁵⁰

One of the parents' demands that day was to have lunches prepared on site. They argued that having food made locally would provide much-needed jobs for community members who already knew how to prepare the kind of meals that Puerto Rican and Black children enjoyed.⁵¹ They would soon have the opportunity to put this idea into practice. As the officials left PS 25 after eating lunch there, UBP presented them with a rain check. Now that you have seen what school lunches are like, the rain check continued,

[W]e will be delighted to serve you a "real school lunch" the way it should be. We expect you, our elected representatives, to come on that date and tell us what you have done to achieve our demands. We are not interested in being told why these problems exist. We want solutions to the problems!! We will use every means of communication—radio, tv, newspapers, fliers, newsletter—to let the community know what you are doing for us now! We expect you to do everything possible to help our children.⁵²

Officials were invited to Herman Ridder Junior High School 98 on May 2 for a UBP production of school lunch as they envisioned it. Like PS 25, JHS 98 had a Puerto Rican principal who was allied with the parents. The model lunch constituted a direct and significant challenge to the Bureau of School Lunches' approach, so the principal was risking his own career in allowing UBP to come in. Two local people did the actual food preparation: a Black man who had been a cook in the army, and a woman who had been a cook in Puerto Rico. The flyer UBP made to advertise this lunch listed foods in English and Spanish that their community schools could make to appeal to their children. These foods included sliced pineapple and grapefruit sections, sweet potatoes, stewed beans, ham hocks, spare ribs, sweet plantains with butter, grits, scrambled eggs, black-eyed peas, farina, fried chicken, and roasted pork chops.⁵³

The demonstration was enormously successful and fed 500 people.⁵⁴ Being able to organize such a tasty meal gave parents the confidence that they could in fact do what was best for their children.⁵⁵ The Board of Education had repeatedly told UBP organizers that they did not have the money to make any changes to the school lunch program. To prove them wrong, UBP kept scrupulous track of their budget, and—lo and behold—they spent less money per meal than did the Board of Education.⁵⁶

Although parents felt this demonstration was successful, proving what the community was capable of if given some power, in fact the situation was worsening in some lunchrooms. This was due to the dreaded Meal Pack frozen lunches, which the Bureau of School Lunches had begun to push into schools in 1968 in the name of convenience and cost savings. Millions of dollars were invested in renovating kitchen facilities with "convenience kitchens," or kitchens with convection ovens. A UBP delegation of about forty mothers and a few fathers met with the Board of Education President, Joseph Monserrat, in November 1969 to express their displeasure. The Meal Pack portions were too small to satisfy the hunger of older children; the meals themselves were so hated that they generated more garbage than nourishment; none of this was leading to the creation of local jobs nor was it strengthening any local decision-making power.⁵⁷ The parents were promised an official report on frozen lunches, with facts and figures that would allow them to create a counterproposal, but the report never appeared. Frozen meals would continue to expand throughout the 1970s, but UBP was not willing to give up yet. Early in 1970 UBP coordinated a final major demonstration. To draw attention to the ongoing problem of waste in the school lunch program, they dumped full plastic garbage bags of food collected from school trash bins after lunch at a federal government building in downtown Manhattan.

Trying to engage with the Board of Education proved to be a frustrating and largely futile endeavor. Parents gained firsthand knowledge of the way the Board of Education was both powerful in its ability to keep passing the buck and ineffectual in its ability to solve problems. Ultimately, meaningful community control evaded UBP areas, but some positive material changes were made. Schools received proper dishwashers or disposable dishware, and the soups and sandwiches were, for the most part, no longer prepared offsite but were made fresh each morning on school premises. According to Kathy Goldman this change at PS 25 and other neighborhood schools was not just a material change. It also represented a change in people's conceptions of what was possible. In an interview, Goldman explained the power of people learning that

they could change things—coming to see themselves as agents of change rather than people to whom things happen. After experiencing a victory in one area, such as the realm of food activism, people gained the courage to fight for and win even bigger improvements. With the school lunch campaign, parents learned by doing, and moved from blaming themselves to struggling for community-wide survival within a system structured to work against them. This was a hugely important lesson.

Free summer meals, 1971

Now that UBP organizers understood the galvanizing power of food as an organizing tool and had a preliminary understanding of what it would take to run a meal program, UBP turned to the issue of bringing the free summer meal program to New York City.

Officially, money to support free meals during the summer months had become available in the United States in 1968 with an amendment to the National School Lunch Program.

The Summer Food Service Program, as it was called, represented significant federal acknowledgment of what food advocates had been saying for years: hunger doesn't take a vacation. Children needed food just as much when school was not in session. The amendment was an important first step, but on its own it did not guarantee a sudden implementation of free school meals for everyone eligible. It required the agitation of local groups to bring the program to their communities. During the first few years that federal money for summer meals was available, between 1968 and 1971, antipoverty activists and organizations in New York, UBP chief among them, lobbied the State Education Department in Albany to pressure the city's Board of Education to run summer meal programs. (The State Education Department was in charge of distributing federal money for summer meals wherever there was organized local demand for a program.) Looking to the Board of Education seemed to make sense because many schools had kitchens and cafeteria facilities that sat idle during the summer.

Despite countless letters and phone calls to secure the Board of Education's support, the Board refused, claiming it did not have the capacity to administer the program nor to cope with the additional costs that would be involved in opening up school buildings, such as the cost of custodial service.⁵⁸ Eventually, Richard Reed, the Chief of School Food Management of the State Education Department in Albany, suggested that UBP take on the task. Antonetty and Goldman discussed what it would mean to accept the challenge. They knew welfare benefits were being cut and the ranks of the unemployed were growing throughout the city. They already knew firsthand that nutritional health was poor in low-income neighborhoods such as theirs. Indeed, according to a 1970 study of low-income New York City children aged six years and under, 45 percent of those tested had vitamin A deficiencies; over 55 percent had hemoglobin deficiencies; almost half had thiamine deficiencies; and over 65 percent lacked sufficient riboflavin. Children with these deficiencies were more susceptible to contagious diseases and minor illnesses such as colds and earaches and were more likely to be irritable and tired.⁵⁹ UBP understood their organization was uniquely positioned to intervene, and

so they accepted. While all the decisions about the program ultimately rested with Antonetty, it was Goldman who did the bulk of the logistical work as coordinator. She liaised with state officials; found, contracted with, and supervised a food service provider; and oversaw distribution site monitoring, among other tasks.

Despite some daunting administrative difficulties, such as the fact that UBP's budget was not confirmed until eight days before the program was set to begin, they were able to feed over 150,000 children a day in all five boroughs, ultimately serving more than 6 million lunches in July and August of 1971. UBP was known as the sponsor, and it contracted with ARA Food Services (today Aramark) to be the vendor, producing food for all those children.⁶⁰ Then the lunches were distributed by volunteers at various sites—day cares, summer camps, churches, and block associations. Lunches tended to consist of cold milk, juice, a sandwich, and a fruit. UBP prided themselves on the quality of food, and indeed the organization received countless letters of praise. For example, Helen Marshall of the Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center in Queens observed: "At first we thought the lunches would be unappetizing because they were free, but much to our delight they are delicious; the fruits and milk are always fresh and of high quality."⁶¹ Jack Thomas of the Boys' Club of New York noted that "most of our children are use[d] to having candy and soda for lunch, so I fully appreciate the opportunity of giving them a nourishing meal."⁶²

Site organizers also thanked UBP for the opportunity it gave them to help their community, to meet neighbors, and to enroll more young people in services. They also praised the workers who made and delivered lunches. Workers were all hired from the South Bronx, as stipulated in UBP's contract with ARA. An important part of summer meals was providing jobs for community people—men and women—who badly needed employment. The program did not always go smoothly. Because of serious delays at the federal level in notifying UBP of its budget (\$3.2 million, ultimately), the program began only during the second week of July.⁶³ In a memo explaining to sites what was causing delays, Antonetty wrote:

This program has never been done before in New York City. It certainly has never been attempted through a community organization. We hope you will work with us to iron out problems the first week or so. [We also insisted that ARA] hire community people to package and deliver the food. (They wanted to hire off-duty policemen and firemen who are experienced drivers.) We said no. We told them we'd rather help train our own community people for jobs, even if the deliveries are a little rough at the beginning. So please, work with us on this.⁶⁴

Summer meals did not benefit children alone; they provided jobs and job training. In order to prepare so many lunches, a production plant was set up to run three assembly lines, operating twenty-four hours a day, with more than 300 people working three eight-hour shifts to keep up with demand. Workers spread fortified margarine on buns, placed on them two slices of meat or cheese, and sent the sandwiches into automatic wrapping machines, packing ninety-six at a time into a carton. Downstairs, dock workers unloaded trailer truck after trailer truck of meat, cheese, margarine, and buns for assembly lines, as well as orange, apple, pineapple, and tomato juice; fresh

fruits such as bananas, oranges, plums, and apples; and milk. Truck drivers worked from five in the morning to one in the afternoon, earning \$4.00 an hour "and the gratitude and respect of everyone in the program," according to an informational pamphlet UBP prepared for a Senate Committee hearing later that year. Once the lunches reached the sites, parents and neighborhood volunteers distributed lunches to local children.⁶⁵ Bearing in mind that the minimum wage in New York State in 1971 was \$1.85, \$4.00 an hour meant that these jobs were valuable economically as well as socially.⁶⁶

Being able to provide food for the whole city's children and socially useful jobs for an underemployed population gave UBP enormous power both materially and symbolically. People wrote such comments as, "If there's anything we can ever do for you, let us know," "Please add us to your mailing list," and "There's a reason why people talk about UBP as the number one anti-poverty agency in this city."⁶⁷ Clearly, organizing around food was an important way of building local power and gaining citywide recognition in these years.

Women's power, community strength

To associate United Bronx Parents with feminist activism, or even to say that it was led by feminists, is to risk anachronism. The feminist discourses that became prevalent after the late 1970s were not available a decade earlier when UBP was first gaining momentum. Moreover, with the exception of the three lead women, the majority of the volunteers and employees would not have identified as political activists, much less feminists. Over the course of my interviews, it became clear to me that most who worked with UBP in its early years associated "political work" with city politicians and the electoral system. Grassroots organizing with UBP was about doing what needed to be done, rather than enacting any kind of theory or political agenda.

Despite the lack of members' identification with "political" labels, UBP was absolutely part of a long tradition of women taking the lead to care for their children where they perceived official institutions and traditionally male leadership were falling short. All of the women I interviewed expressed a sense that *of course* women have a special strength and power. Interestingly, it was never associated with a desire to exclude men or work separately from men. In part, this speaks to the position of Puerto Rican men in the South Bronx at the time. They did not enjoy the same level of privilege as their white counterparts: they faced racial discrimination from employers and the police and suffered from drastically high levels of unemployment. Women also suffered from unemployment (in fact, women had a higher unemployment rate than men: unemployment for male Puerto Ricans was 6.27 percent in South Bronx, whereas for women it was 10.7 percent),⁶⁸ but under the male breadwinner paradigm that prevailed, this was not generally considered as serious. Puerto Rican men may have derived some social power within their own communities because of the patriarchal tradition, but they were losing far more than they were benefitting from the system at large.

The women of UBP understood their own power, within their families and within their community, but they did not wish to call attention to it. Elba Cabrera described

her sister Evelina Antonetty as “a feminist before it became popular. She tried to impress upon women the importance of understanding themselves, applauding their female strengths, but at the same time expressing her belief that these strengths should be used to be supportive of their men.”⁶⁹ Laly Woodards was a Puerto Rican immigrant to New York who worked for decades as Evelina Antonetty’s secretary. She recounted a story that successfully captures the supportive attitude toward men within UBP:

Sometimes [Evelina] would come to my desk and sit down. One time a man came through the door—and she says to me “Laly, when men come through that door, it takes *every-thing* they have because men are very proud. They don’t want to beg. And when a man comes through that door, we have to help them. We have to give them what they need.” People were coming in for all kinds of things . . . food, housing . . . They needed help with welfare . . . And I think that when she told me that, I remembered my father, and I remembered my brothers, and I said, God! It just clicked. So after that, men came through the door and I was gonna help. I always say I was blessed to work with a woman of such vision, of such wisdom.⁷⁰

Within this paradigm, men were not a distant “other”; they were fathers, brothers, fellow community members for whom the system was also not working.

The passage also exemplifies Antonetty’s remarkable power as a leader. In all six of my interviews, and from all of the evidence I have seen in the archives, it has been very difficult to find criticism of her, either personally or administratively. I have been forced to conclude that her charismatic leadership was responsible for much of UBP’s organizing momentum, as well as for establishing its moral imperative of community service.

It is also important that men contributed to United Bronx Parents, both as board members and as employees (though male employees were far fewer in number). Perhaps the most important male UBP worker was Luis Caban. Antonetty recruited Caban to UBP while he was working for a Montessori Head Start Program in the Bronx. Caban recalled that there were very few fathers engaged in parent associations: in five organizations at five different schools, there might have been two men. Still, he reflected, he never felt out of place at UBP and was somewhat familiar with women’s issues through his involvement with an on-campus student organization at New York University, which he was then attending. Caban served as Assistant Director of Education under Ellen Lurie. He was in his early twenties and recalled that he “loved working with her . . . She was a very deep thinker, very supportive of my ideas.”⁷¹ Evidently, the kinds of men who were drawn to working with UBP had enough respect for the mission and the leadership that their masculinity was not threatened. That men could and would make valuable contributions is perhaps why Antonetty named the organization “United Bronx Parents” rather than “United Bronx Mothers.” Without denying the overwhelming burden that women carried for childrearing, it would be a mistake to think that the only way men ever contributed to child welfare was through breadwinning.

This was particularly true in a context of persistent unemployment. Involvement in UBP provided useful skills and occasionally, in the case of employees, a source

of income. As importantly, it offered a way of contributing not only to the nuclear unit of spouse and children but also to the much more meaningful "extended Puerto Rican family." The idea of the extended Puerto Rican family reoccurs as a theme in UBP literature, evoked, for instance, in grant applications for programs intended to keep young people out of trouble with the law. For the majority of immigrant and first-generation Puerto Rican families in the 1970s, the all-American nuclear family structure did not apply. Rather than two parents, a mother and father, being the primary caregivers of one or more children, it was frequently not only parents and offspring but also aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins sharing both home spaces and caregiving work, often serving as foster families.⁷²

UBP understood the way that these alternative family arrangements were pathologized both formally and informally. A good example of the formal rejection of the extended family was public housing regulation. Housing projects forbade occupancy of anyone other than the nuclear family—parents and children—and contravening this arrangement was punishable by immediate eviction. On an informal, discursive level, much was being said in the media about the "problem" of single-mother households. In the early 1970s, seven out of ten homes in the South Bronx were headed by one adult only, and 98 percent of these were headed by women. Many women ended up taking on leadership roles in their community by virtue of the struggle to survive, and there were far *more* mothers active than fathers. But it is also important to understand that, in the absence of biological fathers, men could still take on important caregiving roles, whether as extended family members, community workers, or both.⁷³

In the end, the question is not so much whether UBP was feminist, but what the organization has to teach those of us interested in a more equal world: for women and men, for children and adults, for racial and economic as well as gender justice. An intersectional approach was never a matter of philosophical choice for marginalized communities like this one. UBP undertook community organizing within spheres that were traditionally gendered female—feeding, education, child care—and thus traditionally made politically invisible, and provided for their community when the city government failed. We need to view the decision to evoke *parenthood* rather than *motherhood* as a testament to the holistic vision of the women at the helm of United Bronx Parents: either the whole community was helped, or nobody was.

Notes

- 1 Sonia Song-Ha Lee, *Building A Latino Civil Rights Movement: Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Adina Back, "Parent Power: Evelina López Antonetty, the United Bronx Parents, and the War on Poverty," in *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964–1980*, ed. Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).
- 2 Johanna L. del C. Fernandez, "Radicals in the Late 1960s: A History of the Young Lords Party in New York City, 1969–1974," PhD diss., Columbia University, 2004, 16–19.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 20. See also Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "Internal Colonialism: An American Theory of Race," *Du Bois Review* 1, 2 (2004): 282.

- 4 See Jenny Carson and Nell Geiser, "'The Democratic Initiative': The Promises and Limitations of Industrial Unionism for New York City's Laundry Workers, 1930–1950," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of The Americas* 8, 4 (Winter 2011): 65–87.
- 5 Lorraine Montenegro, "Evelina (Titi) Lopez Antonetty," Lorraine Montenegro, private collection, Bronx, New York City. See also Lee, *Building A Latino Civil Rights Movement*, 153.
- 6 Back, "Parent Power," 188.
- 7 Ibid., 187; "The Story of U.S. Puerto Ricans—Part Three: Puerto Rican New York during the Inter-War Years," Centro—Center for Puerto Rican Studies 2010, <http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/education/puerto-rican-studies/story-us-puerto-ricans-part-three>, last accessed July 29, 2015.
- 8 "Historical/Biographical Note—Guide to the Lillian López Papers," March 2003, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, New York City, <http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/faids/lopezf.html>, accessed July 29, 2015.
- 9 Randi Storch, "'The Realities of the Situation': Revolutionary Discipline and Everyday Political Life in Chicago's Communist Party, 1928–1935," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* 1, 3 (2004): 19–44.
- 10 Kathy Goldman, interview by author, July 3, 2015. Goldman, Antonetty's employee at United Bronx Parents, had also been involved with the Party in a slightly later period, but she does not recall the two of them ever speaking directly of it, although they worked extremely close for more than five years.
- 11 "Founder—United Bronx Parents," United Bronx Parents, 2014, http://019cdc7.netsolhost.com/ubpwp/?page_id=9, accessed April 9, 2014; Lorraine Montenegro, interview by author, March 4, 2013; Nélica Pérez. "Antonetty, Evelina López, (1922–1984)," in *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Virginia Sánchez Korrol (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 48–49.
- 12 Back, "Parent Power," 189.
- 13 "Founder—United Bronx Parents." The Head Start Program began in the 1960s as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, and offered preschool classes, medical care, and nutritional and mental health services to children in low-income communities.
- 14 Back, "Parent Power," 190; Montenegro, "Evelina (Titi) Lopez Antonetty."
- 15 Kathy Goldman, "Winning Victories, Losing Power: Changes In School Food Programs, 1967–1981," Master's thesis, Queens College, CUNY, 1986, 15.
- 16 Statement of Herman Badillo, Establishing a Special Summer Lunch Program: Hearings Before the Select Subcommittee on Education, Eighty-ninth Congress, Second Session, on H.R. 9339, Washington D.C., March 9, 1966, 44; New York, March 18, 1966, Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 1966.
- 17 It is unclear exactly what proportion of UBP members was African American. Sonia Lee simply states that UBP primarily organized Puerto Rican mothers, though the group included "a number of black mothers." Lee, *Building A Latino Civil Rights Movement*, 154. The demographics of the South Bronx circa 1970 were roughly 60 percent Puerto Rican, 30 percent Black and 10 percent white, and according to Kathy Goldman, a key UBP organizer and the coordinator of the summer meals program, the demographic makeup of the group roughly mirrored that of the neighborhood as a whole. Of course, many people would have identified as both Black and Puerto Rican. See "Preparation for School Decentralization: A Proposal to Organize and Train Parent and Community Leadership for Effective School Decentralization in the South Bronx," United Bronx Parents, n.d., Appendix 1, p. 21, Box 4, Folder 1, United Bronx Parents Papers (hereafter UBPP).

- 18 See Alfonso Narvaez, "The Young Lords Seize X-Ray Unit," *New York Times*, June 18, 1970, 17; Fernandez, "Radicals in the Late 1960s," 200.
- 19 "Origins of the Young Lords," in *The Young Lords: A Reader*, ed. Darrel Enck-Wanzer (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 33.
- 20 Evelina Antonetty, "¡Despierta Boricua! Padres Unidos Del Bronx," . . . *Toward the Dream*, October, 1969, p. 4, Box 2, Folder 7, UBPP, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, New York City.
- 21 This is discussed in Back, "Parent Power," 193–4, and more extensively in Lee, *Building A Latino Civil Rights Movement*, 132–210.
- 22 "Built-In Discrimination Permeates School System," *NY Amsterdam News*, July 3, 1971, p. C9; Evelina Antonetty, "The Educational Needs of the Puerto Rican Child in New York City," Prepared for Presentation to the New York State Board of Regents, United Bronx Parents, March 25, 1971, Box 4, Folder 3, UBPP.
- 23 Evelina Antonetty and Ellen Lurie, "Parent Leadership Training Program Materials Kit #4," United Bronx Parents, 1967, n.p., Box 4, Folder 3, UBPP.
- 24 "Achievement Tests," United Bronx Parents, n.d., n.p., private collection, Kathy Goldman, New York City (hereafter KGC).
- 25 Kathy Goldman, interview by author, November 2, 2012.
- 26 "Do Black and Puerto Rican Students Get the Same Opportunities As White Students Get in the New York City Public Schools?" United Bronx Parents, n.d., 1, KGC.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 3, KGC.
- 28 "Chapter 4. United Bronx Parents," no author, n.d., p. 314, Box 2, Folder 14, UBPP.
- 29 This helps explain the low graduation rate, as young people were forced to drop out to work more hours. Michael Cappiello, "Can A White Middle-Class Teacher Effectively Teach Puerto Rican Students?" *The Puerto Rican Child in New York Schools*, May 15, 1975, Box 2, Folder 8, UBPP.
- 30 "Chapter 4. UBP" 365, UBPP; Frank Siaca, for Dr. Antonetty, "Continuity," *Puerto Rican Child in the American School*, Fall 1974, Box 2, Folder 8, UBPP.
- 31 Harold Cruse was a social critic and academic whose most influential work was *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. Milton Galamison, minister of Brooklyn's Siloam Presbyterian Church, led New York's school integration movement in 1964, initiating a boycott of more than 460,000 students. See Clarence Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Babette Edwards was a parent leader who advocated for school reform in Harlem. Kenneth Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark were Harlem-based psychologists whose work exposed internalized racism and the negative effects of segregation on Black children. The Clarks were the first African Americans to obtain their doctoral degrees in psychology from Columbia University. See "Featured Psychologists: Mamie Phipps Clark, PhD, and Kenneth Clark, PhD," American Psychological Association, 2016, <http://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/ethnicity-health/psychologists/clark.aspx>, last accessed January 28, 2016.
- 32 Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 50.
- 33 "Chapter 4. UBP" 365, 273, and 271, UBPP.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 285.
- 35 Goldman, "Winning Victories," 10.
- 36 Kathy Goldman, "Curriculum Vitae," n.d. but circa 1973, private collection, KGC.
- 37 Luis and Maria Caban, interview by author, October 21, 2013.

- 38 Kathy Goldman, email correspondence with author, February 3, 2014.
- 39 Letter to Evelina Antonetty from Ellen Lurie, October 27, 1971, Box 3, Ellen Lurie Papers (hereafter ELP), Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, New York City.
- 40 I have interviewed five other people about UBP aside from Kathy Goldman: Elba Cabrera, Antonetty's sister who worked in the office and on programming, and who took on the summer meals program when Goldman left the organization in 1972; Laly Woodards, Antonetty's secretary; Luis Caban, who worked under Lurie as Assistant Director of Education; Maria "Coqui" Caban, who held a variety of responsibilities in the UBP office including assisting Goldman with summer meals; and Lorraine Montenegro, Antonetty's daughter, then involved in helping with general operations and who eventually took over as UBP's executive director when Antonetty died in 1984.
- 41 Goldman, interview, November 2, 2012.
- 42 Goldman, interview by author, December 21, 2012.
- 43 Montenegro, "Evelina (Titi) Lopez Antonetty."
- 44 Goldman, interview, November 2, 2012.
- 45 Goldman, "Winning Victories," 11. For an example of one such report, see "Report of United Parents Associations' Lunchroom Study," May 1967, Box 1, Folder Lunch Oct 69, ELP, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, New York City.
- 46 Kathy Goldman, notes on the lunchroom at PS 25, March 20, 1969, n.p.; and Kathy Goldman, untitled notes, March 12, n.p., KGC.
- 47 Goldman, Notes on the lunchroom at PS 25, Feb. 21, 1969, n.p., KGC.
- 48 "Evelina López Antonetty, Biographical Information 1973—Executive Director," n.d. Box 2, Folder 7, UBPP.
- 49 Sara Slack, "Bronx School Lunchrooms Filthy," *New York Amsterdam News* (1962–1993), April 19, 1969, 1, 53, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Amsterdam News (1922–1993); Kathy Goldman, "Staff Meeting" notes, April 11, 1969, n.p., KGC; Teri Otero report, notes, n.d., KGC. The assemblyman who got sick was Seymour Posner. Congressman James Scheuer, who was also present, went on to demand an immediate federal investigation after what he saw in the Bronx. He wrote to Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Richard Lyng that the program was "operating under grossly inadequate and unsanitary conditions" and reasoned that, because the school lunch program was funded principally by the federal government, the conditions under which children were fed was a matter of federal supervision. He told Lyng that his office had been in contact with the Bureau of School Lunches, a division of the City's Board of Education, but it had shown no concern nor taken any remedial action. It seems that not much came from the federal investigation, perhaps because the local school board, not the federal government, had final authority over the school lunch program, but Scheuer stuck with the issue in years to come. He continued to advocate for improvements to the program, introducing in 1981 an amendment to the School Lunch Act that would have required participating schools to improve the quality of school lunches and establish their own nutrition councils to oversee improvements. Perhaps the awful experience at PS 25 remained in Scheuer's memory over the years. See "Congressman Scheuer Asks Bronx Lunch Program Probe," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 24, 1969, 36; Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 125.
- 50 "Chapter 4. UBP," 356, UBPP.

- 51 Sara Slack, "Bronx School Lunchrooms Filthy," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 19, 1969, 1, 53.
- 52 "To All Elected Officials: Luncheon Raincheck," United Bronx Parents, n.d., in Appendix B, Goldman, "Winning Victories"
- 53 "An Invitation to a School Lunch the Way It Should Be!" United Bronx Parents, poster, KGC.
- 54 "Dear Friend," letter to community from Evelina Antonetty, October 8, 1969, Box 1, Folder Lunch Oct 69, ELP.
- 55 Goldman, "Winning Victories," 22.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 57 Stephen Macdonald, "New York: The School Lunch Syndrome," *Wall St. Journal*, November 20, 1969, 20.
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- 60 ARA was the vendor for the first two years. Subsequently there were multiple sponsors and multiple vendors. The program continues to run today, although the Board of Education finally assumed responsibility for sponsorship in 1978.
- 61 "Dearest Friends," from Helen Marshall, Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center, August 10, 1971, Box 1, Folder 8, UBPP.
- 62 "Dear Sir," from Jack Thomas, Intermediate Director of the Boys' Club of New York, August 3, 1971, Box 1, Folder 8, UBPP.
- 63 "Buen-Apetito: The Story of the United Bronx Parents," 11, Hearings Before the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs of the United States Senate, Ninety-Second Congress, Second Session, Part 13 Funds: Summer Lunch—Pre-School Feeding, Washington, DC, April 17, 1972.
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- 65 "Buen-Apetito," 14–16; quotation on 15.
- 66 "History of the Hourly Minimum Wage," New York State Department of Labor, http://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/minimum_wage.asp, accessed April 15, 2014.
- 67 Letter to Evelina Antonetty from Richard L Detrich, Mott Haven Reformed Church, August 17, 1971, Box 1, Folder 8, UBPP; Letter to UBPP from Gloria Archer, Education Specialist, Stuyford Action Council Inc., Brooklyn, September 28, 1971; and letter to Kathy Goldman from Allen Hodge, President of Upper West Side Independent Youth Council, September 3, 1971, both KGC.
- 68 "Chapter 4. United Bronx Parents," no author, n.d., Box 2, Folder 14, 319, UBPP.
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- 70 Interview with Laly Woodards, October 22, 2013, Bronx, New York.
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“Sex-Ins, College Style”: Black Feminism and Sexual Politics in the Student YWCA, 1968–80

April Haynes

In 1970, the Young Women’s Christian Association of the United States, one of the largest and most influential women’s organizations of the twentieth century, committed itself to “One Imperative: to thrust our collective power toward the elimination of racism, wherever it exists and by any means necessary.”¹ Often perceived as a “Jesus in gym shoes” organization rooted in white Protestant women’s missionary efforts around the world, few twenty-first-century readers associate the YWCA with militant antiracism.² Yet between 1968 and 1970, young women organized within historically black colleges and universities across the South to make the elimination of racism the single most important goal of this powerful institution. Several hundred of these student leaders convened on the campus of Emory University in 1968, declaring that “no longer would they stand for middle class white values to be forced upon them” within the YWCA. They drew inspiration from students at Howard University, who had launched a widespread movement for self-determination in historically black colleges and universities.³ Women aligned with the Black University Movement worked within and through the Student YWCA, which had become the vanguard to transform the National Association. Having contributed their “fair share” to the national fund year after year, African American women expected to act in leadership roles, channel YWCA resources toward social justice campaigns of their choosing, and cultivate black feminist consciousness.

The Emory meeting and its eventual impact on the National YWCA reflected a larger trend. Rather than abandoning existing institutions—such as the university or the YWCA—many activists in black communities sought to take them over, redistribute their resources, and make them “of worth to the movement.”⁴ One Howard student, Vivian Lewis McCain, saw the campus YWCA as a resource for cultivating black *women’s* self-determination in particular. Soon after completing her master’s degree in Religious Studies, she joined like-minded members of black YWCAs across the American South in planning an intervention at the scheduled convention of the National Student Council at Emory.⁵

Black college women like McCain infused the YWCA of the United States with a political approach that Kimberlé Crenshaw has termed *intersectionality*. They defined the elimination of racism as a feminist issue: the same student leaders who wrote "Women's Liberation" into the "national priorities" of the YWCA also agitated for the adoption of the One Imperative. They repeatedly pointed out that hierarchies of race, gender, class, age, region, and sexuality structured the material conditions of young black women's lives and shaped the subjective constitution of their very identities. Students directly challenged these "interlocking structures of oppression," targeting events and discourses that clearly expressed mutually constitutive relations of racism, sexism, poverty, and US imperialism.⁶ After the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention adopted the One Imperative in 1970, members also voted to implement an "Action Audit" that required every chapter in the United States to report regularly on the steps they were taking toward the elimination of racism. "If the Association has been working on feminist concerns," asked the Action Audit, "how have members been helped to understand the relationship of sexism to racism?" Moreover, auditors urged local YWCA chapters to act against "the international dimensions of racism" and to interpret the struggles of women of color in the United States in relation to those living in South Africa and Vietnam. Doing so inspired some Student YWCA members to identify themselves as "Third World Women" living in a context of internal colonialism. They also organized transnational solidarity actions in support of decolonization and against apartheid.⁷

When black college women brought transnational and intersectional feminist analyses to their campus YWCA, they drew on a long but largely forgotten history—one in which their forbears had focused on sexuality as an important locus of intersectional oppression and resistance. The YWCA had provided sex education for college women across lines of color and nation since the turn of the twentieth century; now black college women used its vast resources to conceptualize sexual empowerment in their own terms. Vivian Lewis McCain led this effort during the late 1960s. After completing her degree, she took a job in the Student YWCA and designed a "Sex-In"—a workshop that she facilitated on at least twenty-one predominantly black college campuses between 1968 and 1970.

Hundreds of young people attended the Sex-Ins, and after each one McCain met with smaller groups of women to "rap about the black student and human sexuality."⁸ The rap groups developed into consciousness-raising sessions in which women exchanged sexual information, recounted their experiences, and analyzed the politics of everyday life. Young black women spread the word about McCain's Sex-Ins because they saw problems in the sexual culture of their campuses and communities produced by and perpetuating institutional racism and sexism. Within the safe, well-resourced, and reputedly placid space of the campus YWCA meeting, they theorized sex while organizing to capture and revolutionize extant institutions.

This chapter interprets YWCA meetings in historically black colleges and universities, including the Sex-Ins, as formative spaces in the construction of black feminism in the southern United States. While presenting a case study of the YWCA of the USA, it also posits the confluence of sex education, feminism, and black women's activism as part of a longer transnational history. The YWCA became a major advocate for women's sex education during the early twentieth century in response to transatlantic cultural

currents and geopolitical developments. Soon after the First World War, students in black colleges across the American South asserted a “New Negro” politics: they sought autonomy from white administrators’ paternalism, improved educational resources, and a curriculum reflecting black histories and cultures.⁹ This trend both coincided with the creation of new YWCA groups on several black campuses and directly predicted the demands of later student movements. African American YWCA activists of the early twentieth century are usually understood as respectable clubwomen, who had little in common with the sexually assertive blues women more often identified with New Negro cultural politics.¹⁰ Yet on black campuses of the early twentieth century, YWCA leaders also built an institution that later students used to theorize, organize, and channel resources toward black women’s sexual liberation. Their intellectual heirs, the proponents of the One Imperative, capitalized on the YWCA’s investment in sex education to create spaces on campus in which female students could visualize social transformation.

This history calls into question a common narrative which holds that radical feminism emerged in the late twentieth-century United States when white women left the civil rights movement and the secular New Left. That origin story depends on and perpetuates a definition of feminism—a singular vision that foregrounds the liberal pursuit of gender equality over intersectional movements for structural transformation—which Chela Sandoval has characterized as “hegemonic feminism.”¹¹ Early critics of hegemonic feminism, such as Frances Beal, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa, denounced racism within “the” women’s movement even as they confronted sexism from men in nationalist and Third World Liberation movements.¹² Because these arguments circulated widely during the late 1970s and reached full voice in the early 1980s, a mistaken perception lingers that women of color feminisms postdated the white women’s movement and emerged in response to it. More recently, Benita Roth, Kimberly Springer, Jennifer Nelson, Anne Valk, and Maylei Blackwell have documented the much earlier emergence of multiple and intersecting feminisms. Community studies yield fruitful evidence of consciousness-raising and self-help strategies within organizations formed by and for women of color at the same time that white women developed these tools.¹³ Close analysis of the National Student YWCA records adds new dimensions to this important historiography. Against the hegemonic narrative that correlates the rise of Black Power with a decline in women’s status, I contend that the turn toward Black Power on southern campuses facilitated rather than slowed students’ pursuit of sexual and gender politics. To recent scholarship on women of color feminisms I add an exploration of the unique and significant sexual politics that student activists developed in historically black colleges and the YWCA. Their conceptualization of Black Power rejected the pronatalism and homophobia endorsed by leaders such as Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver.¹⁴ By weaving calls for sexual liberation together with their own version of evangelical Protestantism, black YWCA feminists also departed from the secular orientation of the white- and male-dominated New Left. Hampton students, for example, argued that they could “participate in the revolution” and also “keep their Christian uniqueness.”¹⁵ Long before the advent of the phrase *sex-positive feminism*, black YWCA members confronted the real sexual dangers faced by women of color

while affirming pleasure as an integral component of total liberation. Even in the context of a revolution, when life and death were very much on the line, they did not consider sex a trivial issue.¹⁶

The World YWCA

The centrality of the YWCA in a story of sexual radicalism and woman of color feminism may surprise some readers, since the YWCA originated in a social purity movement led by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant women during the late nineteenth century. But almost immediately thereafter, African American women began struggling to transform the YWCA. After decades of activism, they succeeded in integrating the National YWCA, while struggling to maintain autonomy and authority in historic black branches.¹⁷ The college students who used their campus YWCAs as movement bases during the 1960s drew upon this tradition, often simultaneously asserting Black Power and striving to build interracial alliances.¹⁸

The Student YWCA—which, by the mid-twentieth century, had cultivated a more activist culture than the *National* YWCA—supported and even sparked women's movements. Radical feminists such as Charlotte Bunch had their consciousness raised in student YWCA meetings and learned to apply feminist analysis to transnational social movements.¹⁹ As one activist wrote, the "innocuous name has advantages ... Who would suspect the YWCA is full of commie, radical heathens?"²⁰ Such camouflage worked especially well on private, church-affiliated black campuses where time-honored Protestant traditions combined with "the politics of respectability" to make the YWCA a uniquely welcome women's space.²¹

While the association's vanilla reputation had tactical advantages during the 1960s, its perpetuation ignores more than a century of organizing by women of color *outside* the United States to make the World YWCA relevant to their lives. Diverse campaigns for reproductive justice and against sexual violence grew in tandem with sex education programs that rejected conformity to (white, American) Protestant understandings of sin.²² The African American students who participated in Sex-Ins at their campus YWCA during the late 1960s joined a global movement that linked sexual pleasure to women's liberation *and* spiritual fulfillment.

In order to contextualize sex education in the Student YWCA, it is first necessary to briefly sketch the Association's transnational history more generally. The World YWCA emerged at the height of British and American imperialism during the late nineteenth century. White women affiliated with rival groups of Protestant missionaries organized YWCA chapters in North Africa, South and East Asia, the South Pacific, South America, and the Caribbean. Some claimed a maternalist responsibility to "rescue" women and girls from customs they associated with "primitive" patriarchy; others presented themselves as professional educators offering technical skills that would draw colonized women into Western industrial relations. Both groups claimed to represent the interests of indigenous women while elevating their own standing in imperial politics. At the same time, they found themselves beholden to male colonial authorities and worried that the YWCA might do little beyond supporting the spheres

of influence then being established through war, statecraft, and economic exploitation. They organized the World YWCA in 1898 in hopes of replacing the masculine model of imperial competition with one of Protestant women's cooperation. In the process, they created a new field in which Anglo-American women would exercise global authority. As European and white American women agitated to raise their own status in the colonies, the World YWCA provided a base from which to develop local women's movements along maternalist and imperial lines.²³

Indigenous women in India, China, Jamaica, and South Africa struggled from the outset to define the goals and priorities of organizations claiming to speak for them. Across disparate locales and colonial conditions, World YWCA conventions yielded opportunities to network, organize, and appropriate resources. Women of color gained offices in local YWCAs by holding European and white American women accountable to their own Protestant mission. Their collective activism produced a revised constitution in 1952 that prevented any policy from being "imposed from above."²⁴ While the demands of local women flowed through the World YWCA network, it became a major international organization by the mid-twentieth century. Members and leaders increasingly championed the causes of working women, religious pluralism, decolonization, and antiracism. The YWCA eventually became so politicized—and its missionary origins so remote—that some women of color rechristened it a global movement of "Young Women Committed to Action." In the United States, where an earlier generation of African American women had forced the desegregation of the National YWCA, black college students embraced the new label as an expression of pan-African solidarity and a sign of their own radicalization.²⁵

Transnational origins of YWCA sex education

Activists within the World YWCA and the YWCA of the USA consistently ranked sexual safety and health among their top priorities. Their advocacy changed, along with changes in the composition and goals of the global leadership, from imperial and maternalist frameworks during the early twentieth century to antiracist and feminist goals by the 1970s. Women of color harnessed and transformed the organization in both local and global contexts over these decades. This section traces the early history of sex education in the YWCA of the USA, which began amid transnational migration, became a temporary arm of the American nation-state, and then developed a consciously international feminist program. It was within this dynamic context that African American women began using YWCA sex education programs to challenge the racial and gender status quo.

During the period of British and Anglo-American dominance, YWCA officers strove to protect European immigrants and US-born factory operatives from "the traffic in women." It was within the context of a panic over transnational prostitution that the YWCA of the USA developed its public sex education program. The Social Morality Commission, founded in 1913, worked to "awaken among women and girls an appreciation for their responsibility for sex irregularities." Under its auspices the YWCA sent social morality lecturers into colleges, high schools, factories, and

women's clubs. They believed that only informed young women could avoid the traps of seduction, trafficking, premarital pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections.²⁶

Early twentieth-century YWCA lecturers generally racialized the women they hoped to reach as potential victims of "the white slave trade."²⁷ Until 1918, the Commission employed an all-white bureau of lecturers and almost exclusively addressed young white women, whom they presumed to be the most sheltered from sexual information and therefore most at risk of exploitation. Yet these "preventive" lectures did more than simply dissuade listeners from vice: they also represented heteronormative pleasure as a positive good—a bulwark of social stability if restrained during adolescence and channeled toward marriage. For example, the YWCA employed Mabel Ulrich to instruct girls in what she called "the normal side of sex," that is, the physiology of heterosexual intercourse. She feared that merely warning white girls against seduction and disease could create a "sex antagonism" between women and men, and thereby encourage lesbianism in those who should have been shown "a straight path."²⁸ Ulrich promoted an ideal of "normal" white womanhood that spurned purity for its own sake and instead trained girls to anticipate—and hold out for—mutual satisfaction in companionate marriages. She assumed that adolescents needed practice to achieve this goal and insisted that the YWCA had as much a duty "to provide a girl with beaux as to provide her with a gymnasium." Supervised dating would strengthen girls' "moral backbone" and steel them against the blandishments of white slavers. Other social morality lecturers, such as Rachele Yarros, addressed Mexican-American women. But rather than striving to protect them from sexual trafficking or inciting heteronormative pleasure, Yarros aimed to prepare them for enlightened motherhood. The contrast illuminates the ethnic stereotypes that framed early YWCA sex education.²⁹

The outbreak of the First World War created new opportunities for women of color to take an active role in sex education. The Social Morality Commission expanded its purview beyond the prevention of "white slavery" when the War Work Council of the YWCA absorbed the sex education program. Military officials blamed young women for spreading syphilis and gonorrhea among the troops. Although critical of this one-sided directive, the YWCA seized the wartime opportunity to expand its sex education program both in the United States and overseas. Social morality lecturers became responsible for teaching women to abstain from casual sex with American soldiers. Now authorized and funded by the US government, the War Work Commission recruited several new educators, including African American doctors such as Ionia Rollin Whipper and Sarah Winifred Brown. They were charged with delivering lectures on "Patriotic Womanhood," a phrase intended to obscure the sexual content associated with the old social morality framework.³⁰

Under the auspices of keeping soldiers "fit to fight," YWCA lecturers actually offered a wide-ranging and transnational sex education program to women and girls.³¹ The records of the International Conference for Women Physicians, which met in New York City in 1919, reveal the diverse issues and perspectives of sex educators affiliated with the YWCA who had been working during the war years in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Uruguay, Japan, China, India, and several European nations. The YWCA organized this conference after the war in order to justify and coordinate their

continued investment in women's sex education now that the US Public Health Service would take charge of education for disease prevention. Freed from military oversight, the postwar YWCA could pursue "methods for cooperation in dealing with social problems affecting women of the world." But what, exactly, were those "social problems"? Participants revealed that they far exceeded the content demanded by US military leaders during the war. They addressed topics such as birth control, abortion, divorce, single motherhood, female orgasms, masturbation, same-sex "crushes," and transsexuality. By no means did all participants agree about any one of these subjects, but they shared a common conviction that young women had the right to discuss such issues so that each individual could develop her own ethical code.³² They also collectively protested military policies that perpetuated a sexual double standard in the name of patriotism. For example, several women openly challenged an army colonel who addressed them about "moral education in the army." They argued that "trying to get women to accept the status quo of sex morality is not the significance entirely of sex education for women."³³ On the contrary, young women demanded "a new sexual morality"—an ethos of respect, affection, and pleasure.³⁴ Sex education classes, the majority agreed, should be made into spaces in which women could imagine how to achieve that goal.

Ionia Whipper, for one, keenly felt the need to change the sexual status quo. Descended from elite black activists, she had been raised to understand the critical ways in which historic and continuing sexual discourses had shaped the Jim Crow conditions of the American South. Her great-uncle, William Whipper, was both a prominent black abolitionist and founder of the American Moral Reform Society, an organization that challenged stereotypes of black licentiousness as early as 1836. And her mother, Frances Rollin Whipper, studied under Sarah Mapps Douglass—the first African American sex educator—before becoming an activist for woman suffrage and black civil rights.³⁵ Ionia Whipper continued the family tradition when she lectured to black women and girls across the American South under the auspices of the YWCA Social Morality Commission in 1918 and 1919.

With a medical degree from Howard University and a post at Tuskegee University, Whipper in many ways embodied the politics of respectability. She expected perfect decorum from black women in her own family and condemned those who chose a Bohemian lifestyle over the responsibilities of motherhood.³⁶ She also shouldered the significant burden of traveling through the segregated South in order to make the social morality lectures that the YWCA had formerly reserved for white girls available to African American women. She knew that their exclusion resulted from the racist assumptions that black female sexuality was inherently deviant, could never be made "normal," and did not merit protection.³⁷ Whipper's war work afforded a highly visible opportunity to insist that "the same standards of conduct" applied to all women and that "colored girls must be protected."³⁸ Her listeners apparently agreed. Thousands of women of all economic classes flocked to Whipper's lectures in forty-five southern cities and towns. In Louisville, a group of thirty-five women organized their own lectures after her departure, going into "factories, churches, and other centers to educate the girls."³⁹ Whipper's cross-class appeal and insistence on black women's sexual dignity as a sign of race pride placed her squarely within a tradition of respectable African American activist women.

Yet in important ways, Whipper can also be seen as a foremother to Vivian Lewis McCain and the sex radicals of the 1960s. More than any other group, *students* gathered to hear Whipper's sex education lectures. Her visits to Fisk, Wilberforce, Lane, and Mississippi Industrial each drew more than one thousand listeners, while between three and five hundred attended her lectures at Storer College and the Lincoln Institute.⁴⁰ And these students were part of a radicalizing generation. As African American soldiers returning from Europe faced race riots, lynching, and enduring poverty, it seemed increasingly clear that upright behavior in itself did little to change white supremacy. The politics of respectability became vulnerable to critique, and students defied the paternalist policies of black colleges by combining race pride and sexual experimentation. Whipper shared her students' determination to confront white supremacy rather than accommodate it.⁴¹

In sexual as well as racial terms, Whipper defied convention. One of the earliest lecturers paid by the US government to provide sex education by and for black women, she was also unusual for daring to speak publicly about sex as an unmarried woman. During a period when the YWCA questioned sending *any* single women into the field, the risk was undoubtedly greatest for African American women. Nevertheless, her presence at the International Conference of Women Physicians suggests that she may have been among the YWCA staff who flouted military policy by giving students a more capacious sex education than the government intended. Finally, Whipper appears to have primarily engaged in "romantic relationships with other women."⁴² Combining an image of respectability with layers of radicalism, Ionia Whipper's story perfectly captures the YWCA legacy for women in black colleges.

African American Student YWCAs in the 1960s

Like the YWCA, historically black colleges and universities have a reputation for sexual and gender conservatism. During the 1960s, many private black colleges remained beholden to all-white boards of trustees and strictly adhered to the religious traditions of their founders. Students and administrators clashed throughout the decade over dress codes, curfews, and *in loco parentis* policies. Yet Methodist, Episcopal, and Baptist institutions overwhelmingly supported the student YWCA, even when they knew that members engaged in frank sexual conversation.

Administrators of historically black universities, especially private campuses that relied on denominational rather than state funds, supported the YWCA mainly in recognition of its racial liberalism. After integrating the National YWCA, African American women began pushing the organization to confront racism as a fundamental barrier to black women's health and well-being. Female luminaries of the civil rights movement, from Dorothy Height to Barbara Jordan, also worked with the student YWCA on voter registration and fair housing campaigns. In 1961, Ella Baker and Casey Hayden visited the Duke University YWCA together, modeling the national organization's commitment to integration in what was then an all-white university. They were only among the first of many interracial pairs of organizers hired by the National Student YWCA to traverse the South delivering workshops on racial justice.⁴³

As the student movement radicalized, the YWCA's Protestant image and social service pedigree endeared it further to administrators of private black colleges. When an interracial YWCA team spontaneously arrived at Tougaloo College, the Dean of Women publicized their presence and invited students to meet with them in her own office. Thirty young women did just that, engaging a YWCA representative and Dean Lillie Outlaw in an open discussion of black identity, the disciplinary process on campus, and the formation at Tougaloo of one of the first student groups to use the name "Young, Gifted and Black." Dean Outlaw built an excellent relationship with students by supporting their activism—and their "idea of sexual freedom." Above all, she encouraged students to become increasingly active in the National Student YWCA movement.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, *public* colleges across the South became increasingly hostile to the student YWCA. Dependent upon state funding, most predominantly white and several historically black universities distanced themselves from civil rights activists. On segregated, predominantly white campuses, students expected the YWCA to function as a white social club that organized mixers, evangelical missions, and charity drives. But in 1965, the council of the National Student YWCA voted to require local chapters to integrate and to foster social justice in their communities. They created an Office of Racial Justice and asked every college YWCA chapter in the nation to write this commitment into its constitution. A wave of student associations chose to disaffiliate instead. Some public institutions, such as the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State College for Women, doggedly preserved the all-white YWCA until the parent association formally disowned them.⁴⁵

Racial integration could be equally undesirable—and even more difficult to achieve—on some black campuses. South Carolina's Shaw University disaffiliated from the YWCA in 1965, citing an inability to comply with the new diversity criteria. Although Shaw was a private Baptist college, such resistance more frequently came from administrators of historically black campuses who relied on state monies. Of twenty-three predominantly black colleges and universities surveyed here, ten private colleges granted official permission for YWCA visits or offered other forms of institutional support to organizers, compared with only three public universities. Of the ten schools that actively opposed or passively resisted YWCA leaders, eight were public and only two private. Resistant administrators identified the Student YWCA as a civil rights organization and rejected visits from regional staff on those grounds before they ever learned that such visits might include sex education or feminist consciousness raising.⁴⁶

While conservative southern chapters fled the YWCA's National Student Movement, many northern and western students simply lost interest in the organization. Immersed in a counterculture against hegemonic Protestant values, students on multiracial urban campuses considered the YWCA "finky" and characterized its activism as "dabbling in important campus movements."⁴⁷ While these students could join a panoply of secular Left organizations, private black colleges usually supported only a handful of faith-based organizations, fraternities, and sororities. Administrative paternalism, white community control, the religious origins of a given institution, and church

acceptance of male dominance combined to make the YWCA the only viable space on many campuses in which black women could develop a distinctive agenda. As a result of these overlapping trends, students in historically black colleges and universities organized through the new YWCA chapters they formed after visitors from the national organization had departed. In the process, they pressured the National Student YWCA to build new chapters and foster extant associations on black campuses.

The Black University Movement

Many black colleges lacked stable funding, and students availed themselves of the resources that YWCA participation could offer without sacrificing one iota of their radicalism. By 1968, black students across the South were involved in a campaign to "save black schools." In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, "many Whites rushed to the view that there'd be no need for black colleges."⁴⁸ African Americans in the South frequently remarked that interracialism for its own sake risked obscuring the value of black institutions, which in turn enabled white southern politicians to devalue the work of black educators. Radical students sought to transform the historically black college from an institution that had trained African Americans to survive Jim Crow racism into a revolutionary "Black University." The Black University Movement began in 1968, when police shot and killed three black students of South Carolina State College who had gathered to protest violations of the Civil Rights Act in Orangeburg. An all-white jury acquitted the officers, igniting protests at multiple historically black universities. Students demanded a role in university judiciary systems, an overhauled curriculum, improvement of physical buildings, and community-based hiring of faculty and staff. The movement reached its most idealistic phase with the creation of Malcolm X Liberation University, an experiment in community-based, student-run education. Advocates of Black Power sought to use the resources of the institution for long-term social change and to incorporate African Americans beyond the gates of a given campus in that process.⁴⁹

It was in this context that young black women transformed the YWCA. The mass flight of conservative students from integrated associations allowed the organization to broaden its horizons in multiple areas. Now organizers promoted the campus YWCA as a meeting space in which students could formulate "the sense of blackness in the U.S. today,"⁵⁰ a tool to confront administrative paternalism, and a woman-centered organization prepared to fight sexism on campus. Driven by student demand, the Sex-In served as a vehicle for recruiting new members to an association that organizers intended to serve female students of the ideal Black University.

Vivian Lewis McCain conceived of the Sex-In in 1968, when at age twenty-five she accepted a position as southern regional director for the National Student Association of the YWCA and began traveling throughout rural Mississippi paired with white colleagues such as Sarah Jane Stewart and Marcia Perry. McCain, Stewart, and Perry organized students to confront racism in their communities and on their campuses. They also stressed that the YWCA could offer female students leadership training and a dedicated space in which to articulate their unique challenges and priorities.

McCain understood that while interracialism looked radical to many white southerners, it sometimes struck students in black colleges as quite conservative. At Bennett College in North Carolina, YWCA members were active in the Black University Movement. McCain described Bennett women as “together” and remarked of campus culture: “Black identity is hot.” Representatives of Black Students United for Liberation and the Student Organization for Black Unity invited McCain to campus but dismissed her partner Sarah Jane Stewart as a “honkey do-gooder.” In Mississippi, black administrators at Alcorn State University similarly rejected Marcia Perry, telling McCain that “no trash would be welcome on campus.”⁵¹ This resistance had a practical as well as an ideological basis. The presence of an unknown, single white woman invited scrutiny and increased the danger of racist violence—the brunt of which usually fell on black students.⁵² In addition, many students saw white women’s interest in black education as part of a long tradition of social control. Often the only other white women on campus were deans, philanthropists, or presidents’ wives—all of whom expected deference from students. The white member of an interracial YWCA team was sometimes perceived as a “typical authoritative white chick,” whether because of her own behavior or as a personification of this systemic problem. Though eager to fuse women’s liberation with the Black University Movement, students might refuse to attend a program that included any white YWCA representative and request “Black staff only” at future visits.⁵³

In 1969 McCain responded to this feedback by working separately from white women. She occasionally traveled with black male leaders of the YMCA, such as Charles Whitaker. Meanwhile, Sarah Jane Stewart and Marcia Perry concentrated on antiracism trainings at predominantly white women’s colleges in the South; they also presented on women’s liberation and abortion law reform. For her part, McCain made consciousness-raising an integral part of her all-black work. She sometimes found women “afraid and lonely, brainwashed by a rotten society and helpless.” But at other times, she found them to be informed, sophisticated, and radical—prepared to challenge moderate black faculty and conservative white benefactors alike. At several colleges, she met students who had already begun to organize Black Power groups for confronting administrators.⁵⁴

These confrontations ranged from cultural debates to militant actions. Students at Jackson State College complained that their “Negro” librarian did not make gospel music and spirituals accessible because she considered such music “low-class.” Mrs. Lipcomb, the librarian, believed that only European classical music held instructive value. Although McCain looked and acted the part of a mild-mannered YWCA visitor, she joined several students in promoting the Black Arts Movement on campus. “You are part of the brainwashing job done to us by whites,” she told Mrs. Lipcomb, “and this is what makes you feel the way you do.”⁵⁵ Students expected YWCA staffers to understand and reinforce the cultural politics of Black Power on campus.

In her reports to the National Student YWCA, McCain commented on the progress of students’ political consciousness. Especially on rural campuses, she studied their clothing and hairstyles for indicators of their isolation from—or involvement in—Black Power. The sight of “revolutionary clothes” such as army jackets indicated students’ ability to express themselves without a punitive dress code. It also raised

issues of gender politics. At Lane, a private Tennessee college, McCain discovered that the president had "granted permission for the boys to wear Afros but did not make this allowance for the girls." The policy followed on the heels of a "student revolt," led in part by YWCA members. The president suppressed future activism by expelling more than thirty students, including a YWCA leader whose Afro expressed her defiance. Her comrades, including a "young radical" named Joyce Wright, invited McCain to give a Sex-In at Lane in February 1969. The program lasted from 10 a.m. until 4 a.m. the following morning, breaking into groups as small as fourteen and as large as two hundred. Women discussed sex throughout the evening. But they also criticized the male-run Student Christian Association, which dominated campus life with the blessing of the administration. At the end of this consciousness-raising marathon, two more young women "tried the Afro move again."⁵⁶

Similarly, activists at Southern University invited McCain to give Sex-Ins in 1968 and 1970. They continued to use consciousness-raising in campus meetings long after she left. In 1972, students boycotted the campus in a protest of dilapidated buildings, white paternalism, and the Eurocentric curriculum. They met violent state repression, and the campus YWCA organized in defense of arrested students. Meanwhile, the Baton Rouge YWCA remonstrated against the involvement of any organization that shared their name. Radical black women led the student YWCA in a different direction from the moderate community organization.⁵⁷

Interpreting the Sex-In

McCain organized the Sex-In as a fundamental component of the Black University Movement during an especially contentious period in the history of sexuality. In 1965, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan had described black families as matriarchal and responsible for a "culture of poverty." This myth of black matriarchy maintained a fiction that "the Black woman is already liberated," especially in terms of sexual behavior.⁵⁸ In addition to shaping policies that disadvantaged black women, the Moynihan report ignited a backlash within some black communities against women who asserted sexual independence from men. A particularly vocal strain of Black Nationalist discourse prescribed supportive heterosexuality and motherhood as women's primary duties within black communities; departures from these roles were deemed counterrevolutionary. This discourse responded to the very real crisis of forced sterilization among women of color in the United States and Puerto Rico, yet many women of color protested that patriarchy in the name of nationalism did not empower them. Toni Cade Bambara described feeling constant pressure to fend off "the Black Matriarch stick."⁵⁹ Frances Beal insisted that coerced domesticity and unlimited reproduction were not appropriate solutions to forced sterilization. These processes robbed black women of the chance to form "utopian visions" and reduced those active in revolutionary struggle by half.⁶⁰ In this context, creating space for young black women to define liberation on their own terms necessarily included the terrain of sexuality.

At the same time, white feminists linked sexual pleasure to social liberation. Anne Koedt critiqued sexologists such as Sigmund Freud and his popularizers, who argued

that normal women outgrew the clitoral orgasms of adolescent masturbation and became sexually responsive exclusively in vaginally penetrative sex. Koedt famously described the vaginal orgasm as a myth manufactured by psychoanalysts to keep women sexually dependent upon men.⁶¹ Ti-Grace Atkinson and Betty Dodson also argued that true liberation required sexual individuation. Atkinson's "The Institution of Sexual Intercourse" suggested that heteropatriarchy had so profoundly shaped American sexual culture that celibacy might be a necessary step in a woman's personal development.⁶² Dodson proposed that women should begin by "Liberating Masturbation." She convened a consciousness-raising session on masturbation in 1970 and became convinced that, without being taught *how* to masturbate, women could never discover their own sexual power or achieve social liberation. So Dodson organized Bodysex Workshops, in which she distributed images of female genitalia, sold vibrators, and provided live demonstrations.⁶³

White feminists increasingly narrated sexual liberation as a journey from a state of sexual passivity, dependence, and ignorance and toward one of self-actualization. This narrative revolved around their own experiences and mirrored the historical construction of white femininity in opposition to myths of black voraciousness and matriarchy.⁶⁴ Toni Cade Bambara questioned the new crop of white feminist "experts" on sex and challenged the implication that sexual experimentation was, by itself, inherently revolutionary. She urged black women to work together toward a politics of "sensuality" that addressed the conditions of their lives and prompted them to envision their own fulfillment.⁶⁵

By the time Bambara published this critique, Vivian Lewis McCain had been active for two years in precisely the same project. She later reflected that she had begun these workshops to meet the demands of students at Hampton, Rust, and Mississippi Industrial. Black college women in the South pressured the YWCA to send "someone who can communicate to us in our way; in language we are used to" about sexuality prior to the publication of the feminist texts that have since come to be considered foundational.⁶⁶ The feminist politics of the Sex-In should be seen as organic and unique—not derivative of those espoused by white-majority organizations such as the Boston Women's Health Collective. Although some scholars have credited the Collective with originating the Women's Health Movement, *Sex-In's*, *College Style* preceded the publication of *Our Bodies, Our Selves*.⁶⁷

Students continued to demand Sex-Ins on their campuses for the next three years. On several occasions, campus leaders spontaneously organized meetings with an attendance of several hundred, forcing McCain to repeat the workshop with little or no advance notice. At Jackson State, organizing a Sex-In proved to be the top priority of students, even though administrators opposed it. The Dean of Women explained that she and the president feared that "the community would associate a Sex-In with a Love-In" and "requested that it shouldn't take place due to the fact that Jackson State was a State school and *not* a private school."⁶⁸ McCain sometimes led two or three workshops during a single visit, then met individuals afterward to discuss their particular needs and goals until well after midnight. At the end of her visit to Southern University, she concluded her report to the regional YWCA: "Tired! Tired! Tired!"⁶⁹

Demand for the Sex-In grew as students advertised it by word of mouth. Though designed for members of collegiate YWCAs, those who attended campuses in predominantly black towns occasionally invited friends, neighbors, and community members. In some instances, young men joined them or requested a separate workshop for male students. McCain overcame her initial discomfort and occasionally addressed young men. Doing so afforded a precious opportunity to raise *their* consciousness about the politics of sex, as well. After facilitating a workshop for eighty-five young men until 2:00 a.m., she noted "I tried to instill in them (the guys) a sense of responsibility" about their sexual behavior with women.⁷⁰ These forays into young men's sex education in no way diluted the feminist implications of her work, particularly on campuses where YWCA members would go on to lead the particular actions inspired by the Sex-In after McCain left town. Although repeating workshops for multiple groups beyond the campus YWCA could be exhausting and unpredictable, it fulfilled the Black University ideal of making the knowledge produced in academic settings relevant and accessible to surrounding communities.⁷¹

Within the Sex-In, McCain shared a wide range of graphic sexual information. At Rust College, a Methodist black campus in Holly Springs, Mississippi, she asked Dean Annie M. Hall "how free" she could be with women students. Dean Hall gave her "the go ahead to be as frank as frank can be." McCain did not hold back. "Unmarried love can be as just as married unlove," she told YWCA members. Next, she described a variety of contraceptive methods, diagrammed the clitoris, explained several methods for pleasurable lesbian sex, and even described more varied activities "of interest" such as "sixty-nine," "sadism," and "anilingus." Many of her topics overlapped with those that were being simultaneously explored in many white feminist spaces. Sex-In participants discussed contraception, abortion, clitoral sensation, and female masturbation again and again, but they often treated these issues differently from white-majority consciousness-raising sessions. On one occasion, McCain openly disagreed with Koedt about vaginal and clitoral orgasms.⁷² More often, however, she presented both sides of a debate and withheld her own opinion unless students asked for it. Above all, she strove to present YWCA members with a smorgasbord of sexual information to use in making their own ethical decisions. McCain reported the content of these conversations to the National Student YWCA and produced her own program materials tailored "to special requests made by college students in the Southern region." Her pamphlet, *Sex-Ins: College Style*, became an organizing tool beyond her own region.⁷³

The Sex-In also departed from contemporary sex education programs the YWCA offered at predominantly white universities. The YWCA had continued to offer sex education programs on college campuses since the Social Morality lectures of the 1910s, but their mid-century curriculum emphasized "Love and Marriage." By 1969, many white students who remained affiliated with the national association had turned these sex education sessions into activist meetings dedicated to the decriminalization of abortion. They pressured the YWCA of the United States to advocate abortion law repeal and support the Equal Rights Amendment. But few white student YWCA leaders addressed the race and class dimensions of reproductive politics. Some organizations, such as the University of Nebraska YWCA, came into conflict with

the national leadership because they “isolated women’s liberation from the masses of women, namely Third World Women.” This tension became most clear in 1970 when the executive director advertised her support for population control programs that many women of color considered genocidal on a global scale. YWCA programs in other predominantly white institutions also linked the issues of contraceptive access and abortion law repeal to the idea of a “population explosion.”⁷⁴

McCain consciously rejected the discourse of population control because the student activists with whom she worked considered the YWCA useful to the extent that it served them as part of a broader movement for “Third World Women’s Liberation.”⁷⁵ For example, the YWCA’s Black Affairs Committee resolved in 1970 to fight for Angela Davis, then a political prisoner held in solitary confinement on trumped-up charges. The resolution was adopted first by the national student association, then by the YWCA of the United States as a campaign to fulfill the One Imperative. Student chapters organized rallies and teach-ins in support of Davis.⁷⁶ At the local level, women in historically black colleges helped to organize the Southwest Georgia Project, a nationalist movement to reclaim control over a designated territory of twelve black-majority counties that they intended to redeem from internal colonialism in the form of economic, political, intellectual, religious, and cultural domination by state and national governments. Student YWCA members also aligned themselves with the Red Power movement “in their fight to reclaim freedom” and expressed solidarity with women active in the Young Lords and the Angolan revolution. Black YWCA leaders consistently expressed a Third World feminist consciousness that transcended the imagined borders of colonized communities as well as the political borders of the United States.⁷⁷

Thus, when McCain facilitated discussions of contraception and abortion, she did so in direct relation to Black Power and Third World Women’s movements. At South Carolina State College, she played a recording in which educator Barbara Sizemore argued that a black man could “be killed with birth control pills or be killed after he is born—it doesn’t matter with the whites.” The students laughed bitterly at this statement, but when pressed to verbalize their opinions they expressed only partial agreement. Several black women described the pill as “a form of racial genocide” but clarified that they were “not completely opposed to all forms of birth control.” They were mainly concerned about the health risks then being publicized by news coverage of the controversy surrounding Barbara Seaman’s *The Doctors’ Case against the Pill*. Those risks struck them as especially likely to affect southern black women, who often lacked access to high-quality health care and accurate medical information. Suspicious that the pill was being tested on women of color without their consent, the students feared that black and Puerto Rican women were being “forced into something of which they have little knowledge of the dangers and implications involved.”⁷⁸ *Sex-Ins, College-Style* endorsed the pill as a safe and effective choice but also promoted reliable alternatives such as condoms and diaphragms. When students at another college asked McCain about the IUD, she called it a controversial and potentially dangerous method.⁷⁹ In general, black YWCA members wanted safe contraceptive methods and protested their lack of access to trusted contraception as a symptom of institutional racism and sexism.

YWCA workshops at historically black colleges encouraged members to think in systemic, rather than individual, terms about sex and reproduction. They discussed the pill amid debates concerning the draft, capitalism, and African decolonization movements. The institutional context raised a different problem of access during a Sex-In at Rust College. When McCain asked students, "What do you think of abortions?" one woman answered, "What the hell [do] I care about abortions? I want to know how you prevent getting pregnant. If this is done you won't have abortions to worry about." She pointed out that Mississippi made abortion a crime, but it also censored contraceptive information. Vivian McCain was rare in her willingness to risk jail and fines in order to bring sex education to young black women in the Deep South. She encountered students who considered the embargo against sexual information symptomatic of internal colonialism—a measure adopted by a remote, white-supremacist state legislature that did not reflect the will of disenfranchised black communities.⁸⁰

Still other YWCA members, including some who met McCain at Virginia's Hampton Institute, expressed concerns that restricted access to abortion constituted a major threat to black women's health. Their university president, Jerome Holland, directed the local Planned Parenthood chapter and supported Hampton students who joined the nascent southern campaign for abortion law repeal.⁸¹ Black students used sex education workshops as spaces in which to debate and organize around the issues of contraception and abortion, which they interpreted in light of the intersections of race, class, and gender.

In addition to agitating for reproductive justice, Sex-In participants resisted *in loco parentis* policies that codified the sexual double standard, perpetuated white cultural dominance, and suppressed participation in the Black Freedom Struggle. YWCA members at Lane fought the rule requiring women "to be in their dorms every night at 10:00 p.m., including weekends," while young men received greater leeway.⁸² At Bennett, the politicized student body demanded the resignation of administrators who "wanted to take a brush and straightening comb to get rid of the kinks in their students' lives so they could be good little polished grinning Aunt Mabels for whitey." Determined to take charge of their own sexual lives, several Bennett women demanded a "coaching period" in which McCain taught them how to facilitate Sex-Ins after she left. They further requested "a display of contraceptives and sex articles" to use in student-run sessions, believing themselves capable of presenting such information in a way that was perfectly compatible with Black Power.⁸³

Sex-In participants also addressed the racial politics of rape, mobilizing both to defend black men from false accusations and challenging white women to combat sexual violence against women of color. On one occasion, McCain publicly confronted a white YWCA member in Greensboro whose "old man" was known in the community for sexually harassing black women. Bennett students encouraged McCain by telling her that they had approached the same woman more than once about her husband. They considered such confrontations a step toward honest reconciliation. The "truth hurts like hell," one Bennett student remarked, but it "opened up the way" for white women to address their own racism and face the sexual politics of white supremacy in the South. Students of historically black colleges participated widely in the antirape

activism that Danielle McGuire has described as central to the mid-twentieth-century Black Freedom Struggle; many of these same students were campus YWCA members.⁸⁴

At the same time, YWCA women held black men accountable when they promoted or engaged in disrespectful sexual behavior. One group debated Eldridge Cleaver's discussions of rape, lynching, and interracial sex in *Soul on Ice*, questioning whether Cleaver "really" spoke for "a majority of Blacks."⁸⁵ In the pages of the *Black Dispatch*, black student YWCA members registered anger at "The Black Man-White Woman Thing." Assured that "Black is Beautiful," women had "discarded our straightening combs, bleaching creams, wigs and peroxides," only to find that black men increasingly pursued sexual relationships with white women in order to assert their liberated manhood. "The same speed with which they ran from lynch mobs, they use now running to white women," wrote Georgia Mary Darby. White women also seemed to have little appreciation for "the suffering and the degradation Black women have gone through" when they organized Women's Liberation meetings.⁸⁶ Darby's anger stemmed from a source deeper than simple jealousy: scholars of the Civil Rights movement have shown that white southerners used the specter of interracial sex to discredit the movement and, at times, incite the murder of activists.⁸⁷ While black men and white women enjoyed breaking a long-standing taboo, black women faced violent recriminations as well. In the protected space of the black YWCA, they could collectively voice feelings of betrayal and contemplate the kind of sexual revolution they wanted to create instead.

Southern black college women prioritized *both* black self-determination and the egalitarian possibilities of sexual revolution. Well aware of sexual danger, they nevertheless embraced pleasure. Tougaloo students practiced "shacking," in which women spent the weekends in the men's dormitory. In doing so, they used the sexual double standard against itself: administrators who sporadically searched female students' rooms seemed more reluctant to invade male students' privacy.⁸⁸ Bennett students invited McCain to give a Sex-In, during which they informed her that "the 'in thing' on the college campus" at the time of her visit was "'The French' (Fellatio, Anilingus, Cunnilingus)." These activities were not mere substitutes for heterosexual intercourse intended to avoid pregnancy. Bennett was a women's college; three YWCA members revealed to McCain that they had sex with female partners.⁸⁹ In any case, students across the South repeatedly sought education about nonheteronormative activities. In response to "special requests made by college students in the Southern region," McCain described oral sex and genital contact between women, bisexuality, "troilism" (multiple partner encounters), and mutual masturbation. She also recalled having once accidentally surprised "two girls" in the midst of sexual contact and called it "a liberating scene." While attending to issues of sexual power and reproductive injustice, Sex-In participants also carved out a space on campus in which to explore desire and reframe their sexuality as "something profound and beautiful."⁹⁰

McCain stopped submitting visitor reports in 1970, when she moved to Washington, DC, to become associate director of the National Student YWCA. The promotion reduced her interactions with students. Her withdrawal did not spell the end of feminist sexual discourse on predominantly black campuses, for her work had

bespoke a broader trend all along. Many of the same young black feminists who had used YWCA meetings for consciousness-raising during the late 1960s rose to positions of leadership during the 1970s and carried on the work at a national level. In 1969, the Black Affairs Committee of the National Student Movement urged the YWCA "to hire more black staff and directors" and asked in particular "that they be held responsible to the black constituency." Women appointed to these offices defined the elimination of racism—not integration for its own sake—as a core component of women's liberation.⁹¹

The end of an era

Throughout the 1970s, the national student YWCA continued to depend on the involvement of women at historically black colleges and universities. A form letter sent to inactive YWCAs in 1980 remarked on a "current resurgence of the YWCA activity at predominantly Black Institutions of Higher Learning" and urged them to participate in this exciting "National Student Movement."⁹² But despite these efforts, the student YWCA declined during the early 1980s. The emphasis on black schools tied the organization's fate to institutions which were themselves increasingly endangered as economic recession combined with conservative resistance to Civil Rights organizations. For example, the YWCA at Mississippi Industrial College, organized in 1919, had thrived through the 1970s but foundered in 1982 when the entire college folded due to financial strain.⁹³

In the wake of Title IX in 1972, some black campuses disaffiliated their YWCAs for fear that any gender-specific programming would endanger their tenuous claim on federal funds. Male students on any campus without a Student YMCA could object that the very existence of a YWCA discriminated against them on the basis of sex. When a campus responded to this possibility by closing its YWCA, members were expected to merge into a coed Student Christian Association instead. Men tended to hold leadership positions in such groups, and the politics of respectability prevailed over participation in the sexual revolution. Virginia State College in Petersburg, "the only state supported school that is Black" in 1978, typifies the pattern. There, Rev. Harold Braxton, the student activities advisor, phased out the campus YWCA in favor of a coed group led by himself and several male students. Students Denise Jones and Maxine Brown—both of whom "had concerns with sexism on campus"—objected, but to no avail. Braxton already felt pressured to recruit "other races" to the faculty, and he feared further reprisal on Title IX grounds if the campus sponsored a women's student organization.⁹⁴ Given the context of antifeminist backlash during the Reagan years, the decline of the student YWCA after Title IX may be compared to southern states' cynical disinvestment in historically black colleges and universities after *Brown*.

During its heyday, radical black women used the student YWCA to network with each other, develop feminist politics, and debate sexual ethics. Vivian Lewis McCain's *Sex-In* bridged the sexual revolution to student power, women's liberation, and the Black University Movement. Because she responded to the demands of students, her reports represented a larger and more persistent trend. To this day, the National YWCA remains committed to the twin goals of "empowering women

and eliminating racism.” Although in many areas, the YW has merged with the YM and become valued primarily as a gym, in Southern and Midwestern cities, local YWs continue to provide crucial social services primarily by and for women of color. Moreover, on college campuses where it continues to thrive, young activists have found it uniquely supportive of feminist, queer, and gender-nonconforming students. Nevertheless, the deeper challenges once envisioned by young women ensconced in historically black colleges and universities have largely fallen victim to economic sanctions. From Texas to Nebraska, student YWCAs were red-baited and removed from the funding rolls of community chests during the Reagan years.⁹⁵ As the organization has declined in prominence and potential, its legacy has been misunderstood.

Notes

- 1 Dorothy I. Height, *The YWCA's One Imperative, Eliminate Racism: The Story of How a Long-established Voluntary Organization in American Life, the Young Women's Christian Association, Is Coming to Grips with Institutionalized racism in Itself and the Communities It Serves* (New York: YWCA National Board, 1971).
- 2 Scholars have acknowledged a long history of African American women's efforts to harness the resources of the YWCA against racism; however, these works generally address an earlier period, when those efforts focused primarily on integration and seldom took a militant approach. See Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906–46* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).
- 3 On the Howard demonstrations and the Black University Movement, see Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
- 4 McCain, Visitor's Report, Rust, November 13–14, 1969, YWCA University programs, Sophia Smith Collection (hereafter SSC).
- 5 Vivian Lewis married Robert McCain, a man who evidently supported her activism, in 1969. For the sake of clarity, I have referred to her as Vivian Lewis McCain throughout this chapter. McCain's account of the Emory meeting is drawn from her Visitor's Report dated November 13–14, 1969 at the Rust College YWCA, YWCA SSC. She also documented her work in *Sex-Ins: College Style* (Atlanta: YWCA, 1970).
- 6 Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140 (1989): 139–67; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Jackson State College Visitor's Report, November 17, 1969; Height, *The YWCA's One Imperative*.
- 7 YWCA, “Student Action Audit for Change, 1970–1980,” Box 788, Folder 10 YWCA SCC; Student Association Review, n.d., ca. 1970–75, Bennett College YWCA SSC; Dorothy Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates: A Memoir* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003).
- 8 McCain, Visitor's Report, Bennett, March 21, 1971, YWCA SSC.

- 9 Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Joy Ann Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008); for a primary source critiquing eurocentrism and paternalism in black colleges in the early twentieth century, see Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (New York: Norton, 2007 [1928]).
- 10 Angela Y. Davis, *"Blues Legacies and Black Feminism" Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 2011); Erin D. Chapman, *Prove It on Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 11 Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Knopf, 1979); Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000); Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: A History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- 12 Frances Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade Bambara (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 109–22; Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage, 1981); Audre Lorde, *Sister/Outsider* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984); Combahee River Collective, *The Combahee River Collective Statement* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1986 [1982]); Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Boston: Kitchen Table Press, 1984).
- 13 Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968–1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas, 2011).
- 14 Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Books, 1968); Amiri Baraka, "Black Woman," in *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays since 1965* (New York: Random House, 1971). For an important exception by a male Black Power author, see Huey Newton, "To the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements," in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2009), 252–4.
- 15 Vivian Lewis McCain, Visitor's Report, February 4–5, 1969, Hampton Institute YWCA SSC.
- 16 Michele Mitchell has described a similar situation during the height of Jim Crow racism in *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
- 17 Paula J. Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2009); Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*; Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*; Weisenfeld, *African American Women*.
- 18 Christina Greene argues that this ideological balance characterized black women's activism more generally. She also documents the resistance of white community YWCA members to sharing power with African American women in Durham,

- North Carolina. See Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Such tension likely tarnished the YWCA name in Durham and may account for the relative inactivity of the Student Y at North Carolina Central University during the period of this study. “YWCA of NCCU, Historical Background,” 1981, YWCA of the USA records, Box 798, Folder 10, SSC.
- 19 Ethel Brooks and Dorothy L. Hodgson, “An Activist Temperament: An Interview with Charlotte Bunch,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 35, 3/4 (2007): 60–74.
 - 20 Duke University YWCA Annual Report, Box 797, Folder 18, YWCA SSC.
 - 21 Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined the phrase “Politics of Respectability” in reference to historically black colleges. See Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). On the racial politics of women’s space in United States Second Wave Feminism more generally, see A. Finn Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
 - 22 Carole Seymour, *Journey of Faith: The History of the World YWCA, 1945–1994* (London: Allison & Busby, 1994).
 - 23 Seymour, *Journey of Faith*, 10. On maternalist and imperial feminism, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
 - 24 Seymour, *Journey of Faith*, 79–80.
 - 25 Winston-Salem State University YWCA records, Box 799, folder 5, SSC; Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 37.
 - 26 *Association Monthly* Vol. XII (New York: YWCA, September 1919). Emma Goldman was the first to describe “The Traffic in Women” as a moral panic rather than an objective reality. See her “The Traffic in Women” in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911), 183–200.
 - 27 White slavery discourse included European immigrants to the United States; see Kathy Peiss, “Charity Girls and City Pleasures: Historical Notes on Working Class Sexuality,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Anne Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 74–87.
 - 28 Mabel Ulrich, “Constructive Preventive Work,” Fourth Lecture. Monday, March 1, 1915; and “Social Morality,” July 12, 1917, YWCA of the USA, Box 625, Folder 12, SSC.
 - 29 Rachele Yarros described her lectures to “Mexican mothers” in a group of YWCA-affiliated sex educators on October 22, 1919. See *Proceedings of the International Conference of Women Physicians*, Vol. V (New York: The Woman’s Press, 1920), 171–4. For more on Yarros, see Robin E. Jensen, *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education, 1870–1924* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010). For more on the intersection of whiteness, heterosexuality, and normalcy, see Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880–1940* (Durham: Duke

- University Press, 2007); and Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 30 Social Morality Committee of the War Work Council, *Suggestions to Local Committees on Social Morality* (New York: National Board of the YWCA, March 1918), 6–7; Social Morality Committee, War Work Council, *Report: June, 1917 to July, 1919, Government Lecture Program Included* (New York: National Board, YWCA, 1919); YWCA of the USA, International Conference of Women Physicians, Attendees, Box 594, Folder 13.
 - 31 Social Morality Committee, *Report*, 3.
 - 32 *The Proceedings of the International Conference of Women Physicians*, Vols. I–VI (New York: The Woman's Press, 1920).
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Contemporary Feminisms and the Secularism Controversies: A Model of Emancipation

Natacha Chetcuti-Osorovitz (translated by Sandrine Sanos)

[T]heories [of ideology, of subject formations] cannot afford to overlook the category of representation in its two senses. They must note how the staging of the world in representation—its scene of writing, its Darstellung—dissimulates the choice of and need for “heroes,” paternal proxies, agents of power—Vertretung . . . [R]adical practice should attend to this double session of representation rather than reintroduce the individual subject through totalizing concepts of power and desire.¹

The question of the relation between religion, secularism, and gender equality has been a consistent feature of French political debates since the 1989 controversy, or the Headscarf Affair, when three Muslim girls were expelled from their middle-school in northern France because they refused to take off their headscarf.² These debates reveal the ways contemporary French feminism has been the subject of reconfigurations and divisions. As historian Joan W. Scott has shown, although many have argued there is an alliance between gender equality and the separation of Church and State, this was never a central concern during the secularization process undertaken during the Third Republic. However, the “headscarf,” which is now taken as a sign of the absence of gender equality, women’s emancipation, and secularity, has now become an “iconic sign of difference.”³ Debates and discussions have therefore insistently focused on the headscarf’s visibility, turning it into a recurring topic of discussion. As such, it is an especially pertinent site of analysis of the remapping of contemporary French feminist thought and activism.

The 2004 ban on “conspicuous religious symbols” in public schools and the recent debates regarding same-sex marriage illuminate these feminist reconfigurations. Prior to these legislative efforts, European states such as Germany, France, and Belgium had begun to more actively oversee the institutional and religious place of Islam in society in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Controversies over the question of Islam have often opposed feminists against anticolonialists, antisexist against antiracists, and anticapitalists against social liberals. Such tensions and oppositions (especially prevalent during struggles against heteronormativity

and homonationalism) bring to light new theoretical and political developments that have shaped French feminism. Scholars have identified these as "classical republicanism" and "critical republicanism."⁴ They have opposed one another over how they understand the secular contract (defined by political scientist Jean Bauberot as the demise of religion's role as an overarching institution in the wake of the 1905 legislation on separation of church and state). This interpretive conflict has contributed to the emergence of racialized minorities' speech and actions within both feminism and the public sphere, which have taken place within the larger context of changing modes of feminist activism. Until then, feminist activism had defined itself through a universalist vision of gender equality. At the same time, divergent discourses that contested the hegemonic representation of feminist and LGBTQI struggles have denounced the normative Western national framework that feminist activism appeared trapped in.⁵

This new stage in the critique of relationships of domination was further shaped by a loss of feelings of national belonging and the increase of feminist claims for equality. In these debates, controversies, and developments, secularism stands as a prism of sociological analysis and a question at stake in equality claims. Within the context of the reshaping of religious pluralism claimed by minorities, the question of secularism has therefore played a central role in the reconfiguration of feminist politics and alliances.

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which the "secular contract" has been redefined by a range of actors and explore contemporary feminist articulations of the relationship between citizenship and the secular contract. To do so, I will focus on an analysis of the feminist controversies that erupted around the ban on conspicuous religious symbols in schools, domestic violence, and marriage reform. Building upon the analysis of texts authored by experts, activists, and engaged intellectuals over the last ten years, I will show how a variety of feminist "counter-publics" have recast their emancipatory project. Analyzing the tensions between feminism, secularism, and citizenship allows us to grasp how academics and activists both contributed to the emergence of new public discursive norms: how have the power relations denounced by individuals, who were marked because they are women, racialized minorities, or religious followers, reshaped politics?⁶ Within a context of gendered and racialized discrimination and marginalization, how might we accommodate different forms of equality, be they political or experiential? It is important to note that, as political scientist Valérie Amiraux has argued, the racialization imposed upon European Muslims has taken place within a specific European racial context. Scholars have demonstrated how the very idea of "European identity" (or Europeanness) is an enduring political project relying on a cultural coding that obscures discourses of race while ensuring race's constitutive and disciplinary social role.⁷ Analyzing these contemporary political configurations is an especially urgent task since it goes beyond the issue of religion or feminism and reveals how, within the larger context of a destabilization of the principle of secularism, discrimination based on gender, race, and sexuality shape power relations at the heart of European societies.

On equality of rights and secularism: The secular contract at the heart of feminism

French feminism emerged as a collective political and activist movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. Already various feminist organizations and groups diverged over the issue of secularization and gender equality. One of the main points of discussion focused on the Catholic vision of the “virtuous woman,” which was at complete odds with feminism’s support of secularization in the name of equality between men and women. Two trends could already be distinguished: while a critical, anticlerical, and more left-inclined feminist movement began organizing, other feminists mobilized around a version of secularism that they understood to be a guarantee of neutrality and pluralism. Their difference was evident in their responses to events such as the Dreyfus Affair, one of the important trials of late nineteenth-century France. Those who believed secularism to be a neutral concept often sat on the opposite side of anticlerical and leftist feminists who supported Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus, who had been accused of treason. Feminists’ involvement on either side of the issue depended in large part on their relationship to Catholicism and republican secularism. Anti-Semitism shaped feminists’ positions as much as did their understanding of republicanism’s nature and legitimacy.⁸ However, despite these differences, the prevailing feminist thought throughout the century remained committed to universalist equality.

More recently, what has been termed “second wave feminism” or, in France, “MLF feminism,” which emerged in the wake of the May 1968 student uprisings and took its cue from Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, focused mostly on the body and reproductive rights.⁹ Feminists claimed the right of women to control their own bodies and campaigned for the legalization of contraception and abortion as well as equality within the family and the labor force. Those concerns shaped most of 1970s and 1980s activism. Secularism was never a central concern but still functioned as an implicit structuring principle.

Second wave feminist activists protested against the patriarchal and heterosexual underpinnings of the family, the (Catholic) Church, and the French (or Western) State.¹⁰ They aimed to undo the main philosophical, scientific, theoretical, and religious structures at the heart of society in order to escape the educational and familial demands that shaped individuals and upon which, they argued, institutions were built. Feminist critique focused especially upon the coercive nature of heterosexuality and the manner in which sexual difference was given meaning through the principle of complementarity rather than equality. At stake was the dismantling of the cultural “figure of veneration” between virtue and purity embodied in the related figures of the Virgin Mary and the housewife.¹¹ Ultimately, twentieth-century feminist struggles expressed women’s desire to escape the subjection to a power system that claimed neutrality and universalism, yet kept them both invisible and marked as different.

The model of secularism forged within the French republican universalist tradition and inherited from the struggles for civil and political rights profoundly shaped French second wave feminism, irrespective of its different incarnations. This influence, in

turn, determined the bounds of legitimate public speech and a model of emancipation that was taken for granted. The particular French version of secularism was enshrined through late nineteenth-century laws regarding secular and free public school as well as the 1905 law instituting the separation of church and state that aimed to eradicate and overcome regional and religious specificities.¹² This vision of secularism presumes a homogeneous public sphere that does not necessarily reject religion. Secularism was therefore a paradoxical enterprise: on the one hand, it eroded the role of the Church; on the other, it inaugurated an increasing rationalization of life that sociologist Max Weber has termed the "disenchantment of the world" and a secularization of the state and labor. This process that culminated in the "secular contract" posed anew the question of how to mobilize social links within a collective identity.¹³

It is this unique conception of secularism that has pervaded the kinds of feminist activism that came about in the 1970s. Discussion did not focus on the role of religion in the social sphere; instead feminists criticized, and even rejected, all religions, since they were argued to be the means of women's oppression because of their reliance on a hierarchical vision of sexual difference whereby "woman" was conceived as inferior. Second wave feminists centered their work on the struggle for greater equality and universality, focusing on legislative gains and the achievements of rights for men and women. If secularism remained an implicit and invisible foundation to feminists' arguments in the 1970s, what then precipitated this dramatic shift to an explicit engagement with the question of religion and secularity?

Feminisms and postcolonialism: Claiming full citizenship

Beginning in the 1980s, feminists renewed their modes of activism and redefined the stakes of their political involvement mostly around the question of secularism, which they now understood to be a site of resistance. This shift can be explained by the institutionalization of feminism and the demographic transformation of foreign and immigrant populations living in France. It was at that time that differences emerged between those focusing on diversity and secularization models and those critical of cultural relativism. The simultaneous emergence of a subaltern discourse from minority groups reveals how concrete resistance practices were shaped by a political context focused on social movements and a critical reflection on "modern forms of colonialism." Sociologist Didier Lapeyronnie has shown that this relationship was at work in political discourses interpolating immigrants, and especially their children. Second-generation immigrants were called upon to integrate when, in fact, they had already done so.¹⁴ Examining the place of religions in this instance is especially important as it highlights how religion shaped social relationships, in part because of the plurality of religious expressions that now occupied the public sphere.¹⁵ Sociologists Daniele Hervieu-Léger and François Champoin have explored how the loss of authority of traditional institutions coupled with a greater visibility and increase of claims made by marginalized social groups created tensions. In light of multiple forms of sociability that have influenced religious transformations—especially within Islam and Judaism—"secular virtue" is no longer seen as the foundation of national

and social consensus. Rather, it has become evident that we face a different sort of modernity.¹⁶ It is not “less religious” but produces a different kind of relationship to the religious. Beset by what might be termed a “secularization crisis,” France especially seemed less well equipped to deal with the recognition of multiple religious “identities” than other European countries.¹⁷

Such a “crisis” was shaped by the ways in which in the last thirty years Islam had become a site of otherness and an especially visible minority within European nations, even more so in France. The representation of Islam as both visible and “other” has been the cause of transnational expressions of panic and fear in the face of what has become the symptom of national collapse.¹⁸ We should note that the use of religion or religiosity in order to affirm minority collective identities is a process that Emile Durkheim first alerted us to. It is not so much religion (as faith) that is at stake, but a form of sociocultural infrastructure allowing individuals to come together in a collective identity, irrespective of religious practice or attachment, through the establishment of rituals and dogmas. Religion, or the rejection of religion, can even become the site of political identity, as late twentieth-century feminism has shown.

The coming to power of the left in 1981 and the subsequent creation of a Ministry for the Rights of Women, headed by Yvette Roudy, contributed to the institutionalization of French feminism.¹⁹ Such state investment in the fight against discrimination and inequality shaped the emergence of what has been termed “state feminism.”²⁰ That process facilitated the assimilation and appropriation of gender equality rhetoric into state discourse. Such institutionalization unwittingly created a gap between principled declarations on the question of (gender) inequality, proposed legislative solutions, and most women’s actual lives, whether they were activists or not. Consequently, secularism inhabited a different place in activist and state feminist rhetoric throughout the 1980s and 1990s and played a role in transforming some of the political stakes of discussions.

The explicit focus on secularization took place at the same time that second- and third-generation North African immigrants (whose presence in France is the result of a history of colonialism) were increasingly singled out as figures of otherness. These groups’ alleged religious attachment was identified as the origin and symbol of immigrant women’s inequality and oppression. According to this perception, Islam is nothing more than an irreducible site of difference and otherness. The equation of immigrants and Islam to otherness, in turn, obscured and fragmented such racialized groups’ political claims: what claims they made were subsumed under the question of secularism, which was now the issue dominating public discourse.

The feminization of immigration in the 1980s, thanks to the principle of “familial reunification,” has had a profound influence upon the ways secularism was understood, especially in light of the religious, political, and sociological dimensions of this new phenomenon. Those changes have been the subject of controversy. According to Jean Bauberot, this periodization is misleading because it focuses more on secularism rather than the analysis of institutional forms of religious coexistence within the French republican state. Instead, for him, a “new secular contract” is warranted. Echoing this diagnosis, philosopher Etienne Balibar asked in 1991 whether “secularism should be closed or open.” For Balibar, scientism operated as the religious limit of a “closed secularism” while ecumenism functioned as the limit of an “open secularism.”²¹

Following the feminization of immigration, immigrant Algerian women began participating in a variety of organizations through the course of the next two decades, becoming especially visible in the 1990s. As Françoise Gaspard has argued, it was only then that French society (including French feminist movements) appeared to have recognized the enduring consequences of "family reunification" and familial immigration, the new place of Islam in French society, at the same time that both the far-right and Islamic fundamentalism began gaining importance.²²

From the 1980s, two trends surfaced within French feminism and the public sphere: on the one hand, groups such as the Movement of Black Women leveled a powerful critique of the anthropological and sociological foundations that structured power relations between men and women.²³ They also pointed to the ways religion acted as a mechanism for the reproduction and justification of power relations. Another group, the Coordination of Black Women, created in 1978—as well as other organizations of African women—was especially critical of "cultural relativism" which, according to its members, legitimated gendered violence such as polygamy, genital mutilation, and other forms of gendered oppression, rather than condemning them as human rights violations. At the same time, they publicly denounced the racialization of "black bodies" and the naturalization of colonial policies. Those topics were the focus of a March 8, 1980 demonstration.

At the same time, second-generation North African immigrants started organizing politically. Their arrival on the political scene was characterized by a central claim: the demand for equality of rights as a foundation for their membership in French society and in the French nation. One of the earlier expressions of this politicization, signaling at once greater visibility and a different form of political activism, was the 1984 "Marche des Beurs."²⁴ Embedded in claims for equality of rights was a pointed critique of the manner in which religion had become a "natural" and overdetermining site of difference assigned to North African immigrants. Against the argument that an Algerian (whether French citizen or not) was necessarily only Muslim, young French men and women of North African origin instead publicly called for their recognition as "naturally" or fully French.²⁵

Demanding recognition as full French citizens worked against the racialization that had, until then, characterized minority groups. It proved to be one of the central issues for the last two decades of the twentieth century. Two concerns shaped these groups' political demands: the racialization of gender relations and the oppression of foreign or migrant women (especially women of Algerian origin) by men as well as by cultural and religious communities to which they belonged. The 1989 Headscarf Affair erupted within this larger context, which also shaped the debates in its wake (on polygamy, genital mutilation, forced marriage, coed sports, or the wearing of religious signs in schools) that most commentators and scholars deemed related to the question of the headscarf. The year 1989 therefore proved a decisive turning point: from that moment, women belonging to minority groups began participating more widely in feminist organizations. Unlike second wave feminism, which had implicitly relied on a secularization model as a foundation for rights, contemporary feminism rearticulated its goals around a variety of issues such as antisexism, antiracism, anti-imperialism, and the struggle against heterosexism. These feminists pointed to the many experiences of

oppression and focused especially on a critique of “classical” secular republicanism. Their emphasis on plurality and diversity of experiences contested the assumption of homogeneity of the category “women” that feminists too often presumed.

While the Headscarf Affair has been the subject of many discussions, what seems especially important is the ways in which this controversy helped crystallize political affiliations and solidified a variety of feminist positions on this question.²⁶ The headscarf gave a new face to immigration, which became especially visible in the realm of education, the quintessential republican institution and embodiment of secularism, thereby signifying the emergence of “an unexpected Islam” in French politics.²⁷

From that moment on, and in response to the Headscarf Affair, two positions faced off within the ranks of feminist organizations and left-wing political parties. Proponents of a “tolerant feminism” disagreed with the exclusion of the three veiled young schoolgirls from school. Antiracist NGOs such as SOS Racisme and the Movement against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples (Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l’Amitié entre les Peuples, or MRAP) explained that these students’ exclusion was symptomatic of a desire to “sequester Islam within a ghetto” and pointed to the racist underpinnings of such a decision. Most critics, including leftist parties and feminists, called for persuasion rather than exclusion. They sided with the November 27, 1989 State Council decision that the ban on the headscarf could and should be imposed in the face of instances of propaganda or disruption to teaching. (For instance, when young girls refused to attend biology lessons because of their religious faith or because their practice of sports was seen to be impossible if they were to keep to their religious customs. Playing soccer while wearing a headscarf was seen as impossible. There are also cases of young girls asking to be excused from swimming because it was a mixed-sex activity.) Secularism alone, they argued, was still best able to protect all differences and avoid religious proselytism. Furthermore, they explained that focusing on the headscarf would exoticize women’s oppression and would produce a set of racist assumptions under the guise of ending discrimination against women.²⁸

As a result, feminist discussions centered on offering a new analytical prism for sexist discrimination when, as historian Florence Rochefort has explained, “the veiled young girl is perceived to be the expression of the Iranian revolution and the rise of fundamentalism in Arabo-Muslim countries.”²⁹ That issue (of how to rethink their analytical framework) was especially vexing since, at the time, most feminist groups proclaimed their commitment to a universalist model of women’s rights and allied themselves with North African and Middle-Eastern secular feminist organizations involved in denouncing the headscarf’s reactionary and abusively compulsory nature. The figure of the “veiled woman” was incompatible with feminist emancipation ideals founded on republicanism, secularism, and the right to one’s body. Prominent feminist activists such as the lawyer Gisèle Halimi and philosopher Elisabeth Badinter, as well as feminist organizations like Planned Parenthood (Planning Familial), the League of the Rights of Women and the Ruptures collective, especially defended this position. According to Rochefort again, the headscarf became, in effect, the lightning rod for the reactivation of a secular imaginary, opposing the figure of “the religious woman” allegedly subjected to some archaic obscurantism to the national (republican and secular) figure of Marianne, the allegoric figure of the French Republic.³⁰ Feminists

and political parties pondered the same questions: What version of secularism should be embraced and what legislative efforts might be used, and to what effect? Should one ban or tolerate the veil? What was the best position in order to avoid the exclusion of young Muslim women?

State institutions similarly took an active interest in these issues, turning the question of discrimination against women into a national affair and bringing about a reconfiguration of feminist strategies. The years following the Headscarf Controversy witnessed a flurry of legislative efforts around the question of gendered discrimination. An entire apparatus was devised, which included: the repression of polygamy (1993); labor equality between men and women (2001); the ban of conspicuous symbols in school (2004); the creation of an advisory commission for the monitoring of discrimination called the HALDE (Haute Autorité de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l'Égalité, 2004); the reinforcement of prevention and repression of domestic violence, especially genital mutilation and forced marriage (2006); and a law forbidding that a woman or a girl "hide her face" (in cases of burkas) in public spaces (2010).³¹

Meanwhile, feminists remained divided over the presence of veiled women among their ranks. The lens of religion, culture, postcolonialism, and secularism (which no longer seemed self-evident) shaped analyses and posed the question of categorizing women. In effect, whether it was around the headscarf, polygamy, genital mutilation, or the refusal of same-sex educational institutions, these issues brought about a reconfiguration of secularism as feminist politics' organizing principle.

Emancipation strategies and the reconfiguration of contemporary feminist politics

Unlike other European countries, the French "secular contract" is structured through a unifying discourse that emerged in response to the disappearance of Catholicism's public role in the regulation of gender roles and sexuality. Religion has not completely vanished, however. While mainstream discourse understands gender and sexual emancipation derived from secularism, religion is still at work in actual social and political debates over sexuality and family. This became evident, for instance, during the discussions over the proposed legalization of same-sex marriage and adoption. Such interventions of the religious in the political should not be seen as outside of contemporary feminist political reconfigurations. Instead, they require that we analyze what kinds of discourses were mobilized in support of the recognition of "multiple identities"—ethnic, religious, social, and sexual. How do we think about the link between "multiple identities" and the singular republican conception of *the French* identity? How did republicanism insert itself in the articulation of feminist claims?

From "classical republicanism" to a critique of "cultural conformism"

A number of feminist groups have relied on the principle of secularism as it was enshrined in the 1905 law separating Church and State and in the 1948 (United Nations) Universal Declaration of Human Rights which included gender equality as

a human right.³² Since the 1980s, these feminist groups have included the Association for Solidarity with Democratic Algerian Women (Association de solidarité avec les femmes algériennes démocrates, or ASFAD), Neither Whores Nor Doormats (NWND) (Ni Putes ni Soumises), and the network of Women in Solidarity (Femmes Solidaires).³³ They have embraced this political vision, foregrounding the principle that every individual possesses rights.³⁴ Activists and intellectuals in this camp proclaimed their commitment to universalism, which they understood as the refusal of cultural relativism that, according to them, gave different value to women's oppression depending on one's culture or religion. They accused proponents of "critical republicanism"³⁵ of promoting a dangerous particularism that would empty women's rights of its universal content. They argued, for instance, that condoning certain practices restricting women's bodies in the name of religious laws (such as the *Sharia*) would allow each and every society to define women's rights as it saw fit. Consequently, they explained only strict observance of universalism would do. Because they understood republican schools to be the site of molding students as citizens and of individual freedom, the headscarf should not be allowed within their walls as it remained a political symbol of women's oppression.³⁶ Other groups were more concerned with drawing attention to internal community violence, such as NWND and the network of Secular Iranian and Algerian Feminists (Féministes Laïques Algériennes et Iraniennes). These groups also supported the 2004 ban on the headscarf in schools.³⁷ These groups, however, founded their claims upon their experience of racism and racialization. They explained that they aimed to fight "the sexism of Muslim families" and the silence that surrounded gendered violence which, they argued, was the consequence of "indigenous cultures." To them, silence fostered enduring gendered discrimination and unequal power relations between men and women. Like other feminist republicans, they called for a harmonious and secular society opposed to radical Islam.

Condoning the stoning of women in the name of cultural relativism (and in the name of respect for religious laws such as the *Sharia*) amounted, according to them, to ignoring the degradation of women's status in the name of culture or religion. That, in turn, they argued, would lead to civilization's downfall. Republican feminists' critique extended to all practices perceived to oppress or subjugate women, including the wearing of the veil and the regulation of sexuality (such as the demand for sexual purity before marriage, genital mutilation, or polygamy).³⁸

Against the critique that they were upholding a hegemonic version of female emancipation, these feminists contended that cultural relativism must be fought because human rights are not a Western invention but a principle shared across other differences. At the same time, they were also critical of proponents of radical secularity. In this vein, journalist Caroline Fourest has explained that "Multiculturalism tends to view every religious claim as a cultural claim. On the other hand, too narrow a conception of secularism tends to view every religious expression as a political one."³⁹

Furthermore, republican feminists have been especially critical of postcolonial racism. They point to state policies that, they argue, demand an excessive assimilation at the expense of any collective project or the forging of solidarity among different cultural and ethnic groups, which should stand as the symbol of a society to which

every citizen feels committed. Such a normative vision of assimilation, they explain, would only solidify identity categories and force a turn inward. Novelist Wassyla Tamzali notes, "Let's not forget that immigration was already a 'problem' a century ago: Italians and Spaniards suffered violence in the South of France. It is even more so today since we are looking at immigration from non-European populations ... Still, discrimination and racism shapes the relationship between these immigrants and host populations."⁴⁰

Republican feminists remain skeptical of any (state) invocation of "diversity," especially since it appears that the state only appeals to women in terms of the specific, historical, community capital derived from their supposed "race" or "culture." Culture is invoked insofar as it relates to "diversity." According to this framework, "Muslim women" are called upon as the embodiment/symbol of the relationship between the Western and Muslim worlds.⁴¹ This rigid identity category provides the illusion that diversity is indeed being assimilated into a modern world by adding "color" to politics. By making Muslim women hyper-visible in the public sphere and staging their symbolic presence, the state can both anchor and justify its legislative efforts in the field of gendered discrimination by passing laws protecting women against violence and promoting equality in political representation. Activists and scholars have been especially critical of what they have deemed instrumentalization by right-wing parties, on the one hand, which insist upon denying familial origin, and, on the other hand, left-wing policies that overemphasize the issue of the headscarf under the guise of a postcolonial recognition of cultural diversity.

Authors such as noted Algerian writer Assia Djébar have tackled the problem of staging and visibility of the female body in writings about the silence and the forbidden gaze imposed upon Algerian women in the 1980s. Indeed, minority activists who support secular universalism have adopted controversial positions in regard to the burqa and, more recently, the decision by the French Court of Cassation—France's highest appeals court—to annul the 2008 layoff of a day care center teacher because she refused to take off her headscarf at work.⁴² NWND activists have, for instance, publicly decried the simultaneously disabling and disabled gaze imposed upon women. Building upon analyses regarding the invisibility of minority women and their resistance strategies—first articulated by Colette Guillaumin on the intersection of gender and race and Christine Bard on the symbolic politics of women's fashion—these activists have explained that, paradoxically, "veiling" women only makes them more visible in the public sphere while they remain invisible as persons once unveiled. They are women but a representation of Woman, not a sex, but *the sex*.⁴³

Following this logic, some NWND activists have chosen to join the feminist group Femen, which is especially committed to a struggle against religion since they believe religious institutions and doctrines are instrumental in the subjection of women's bodies. The Femen movement, which first emerged in Ukraine in 2008, has quickly become a transnational network and a media and social network sensation. Their media presence can be explained not so much by the political questions they raise but by the very strategies they have adopted: to desexualize female bodies precisely, and ironically, by publicly exposing their breasts while demonstrating.

“Classical republican” feminists have therefore favored struggle against sexism as their prime focus. Their alliance with other international feminist groups is symptomatic of their commitment to identifying and eradicating gendered violence.⁴⁴ According to them, all men share a tendency toward sexist violence that some second-generation French men display. They must focus on a “culture of gendered violence” above all. In response to “critical republican” feminists, they ask whether failing to name gendered violence in the case of racialized minorities does not, in and of itself, also constitute a form of racism. Doesn’t upholding the idea of a “native culture” also allow, they ask, the legitimation of women’s oppression?

Critical republicanism and “deracializing” feminism

Critical republicans have focused instead on a critique of the ways imperialism and racism lay at the heart of secularism. They have pointed to the illusory neutrality of republican secularism and to the underlying colonial and ethnocentric underpinnings of feminist politics. Since, according to them, it is racism and discrimination that first and foremost shape identity, they side with victims of racism, irrespective of gender.

Activist groups such as *The Rebellious* (*Les Insoumises*) have argued that support for secularism can exist alongside respect for other religions and cultures. They reject (religious) extremism while fighting against the specific forms of oppression that women who are racialized endure. However, they also reject any form of state paternalism and bemoan the lack of inclusion of women from the “suburbs” (French minority populations are often concentrated in the suburban areas around large cities) into what they call mainstream feminism. Their overarching critique is especially directed at “classical republican” feminism that, they argue, presumes a superiority inherited from a bourgeois identity. As a consequence, their political activism has been especially noticeable as it repeatedly calls for the unity of feminism around the struggle against sexism and class inequalities while calling for transgenerational alliances.⁴⁵

Organizations such as *The Natives of the Republic* (*Les Indigènes de la République*) have called for the end of what they consider to be their marginalization and subaltern position as minorities and allies within French feminism. They have publicly refused to situate themselves solely in reference to female or Muslim oppression, instead bringing to the fore their struggle against imperialism and postcolonialism. Their prism of analysis has resulted in a different interpretation of secularism unmoored from its universalist assumptions and underpinnings. Sociologist Christine Delphy has, for instance, argued that legislative efforts such as the ban on conspicuous religious symbols in schools and the debates that have taken place among universalist feminists (or “classical republican”) are nothing more than a racialization of the kinds of social issues created by enduring discrimination. In short, Delphy adds, most participants in the debate instrumentalize egalitarian feminist rhetoric, which amounts to a form of “respectable racism.”⁴⁶ Others, such as essayists Felix Ewanjé-Épée and Stella Magliani-Belkacem, have echoed Delphy, furthering her critique of “white” or “hegemonic feminism” of racism and colonialism.⁴⁷ They explain the issue is not so much pointing to the imperialist instrumentalization of feminism or the LGBTQI movement as racist, but grasping the “convergence of interests” between imperialism and the dominant

impulses within these movements—a convergence, they suggest, might be best understood as “collusion.”⁴⁸

Consequently, these activists criticize the manner in which the prevailing belief that the headscarf can only be a symbol of women’s oppression or inferiority has become hegemonic within French feminism and helped justify its ban. They stress instead that wearing the headscarf is a political statement that must be understood as a distinctly political form of visibility and solidarity that women exhibit toward their own culture and social group. The (feminist) debate over the headscarf has therefore framed the issue in terms of rights and gender equality, when it merely reinforced an “ethnocentric universalism.”⁴⁹ State policies and “classical republican” feminists, alongside those “accidental feminists” (who have instrumentalized feminist rhetoric), have designated the headscarf and burqa as the sole visible signs of oppression, thereby implying that gendered violence only affects foreign or migrant women. A similar fear runs through these activists’ texts, warning that both minority and racialized men and women purportedly defended by universalist feminists are actually further stigmatized by them. “Critical republican” activists therefore refuse to part from those they see as belonging to the same social group as themselves, for instance, showing solidarity by wearing the headscarf. At the same time, they ask “classical republican” feminists to consider the following: does refusing to stand apart from men who belong to the same social group as themselves, or choosing to wear the veil, necessarily mean embracing one’s original community’s prevailing hierarchies and norms? Does that also mean an inability to understand criticism of social inequities? Does it mean breaking off with the secular republican context?

Just like the former generation of second wave feminists, “critical republican” feminists emphasize women’s right to control and regulate their own bodies as a founding principle of their own emancipation. However, because they reject the idea that there may be only one model of bodily freedom, their activism has taken a different form. For instance, in response to the Femen action which, in April 2013, involved its members publicly revealing their naked breasts in support of an arrested Tunisian Femen member and in protest of the limitation of women’s rights among Arabo-Muslims, a group named Muslim Women against Femen publicly claimed their right to live out their faith as they wished. To further emphasize that they were not oppressed, they included the slogan “Muslimah Pride” (proud to be a Muslim) on their group’s website.⁵⁰

According to scholar Smaïn Laacher, explicitly aligning with men or with a specific religious practice (be it visible or not) should be understood as a sign of these women’s agency. Forging these alliances allows these women to stake out their agency, redefine their ability to maneuver in the political and social area, and map out the affiliations that determine their identity to one’s original social group, to feminism, or against sexism and racism. It also allows them to widen their range of possible affiliations while offering a critique of the limits of “classical republican” secularism that refuses any particular form of affiliation in favor of a universalist model. What appears is a will to determine for oneself the very modes in which one understands emancipation. In a similar, though slightly different, fashion, the organization Lesbians of Color (Lesbiennes Of Color) has chosen what might be seen as a “middle-ground.” They reject

both imperialism and the extremes of feminist movements' debates on secularity.⁵¹ At the same time, they argue against both heterosociality and the overdetermining paradigm of religion, especially radical Islam.

Overall, these feminists' denunciation of the colonial continuum is, in part, a result of the legacy of migration and postcolonialism. It allows them to highlight the relation between the recognition of religious, especially Muslim, minorities' rights and citizenship and the discrimination they face in the public sphere. This legacy similarly frames their analysis of the imbrication of feminist emancipatory strategies and the visibility and "deprivatization" of religion, in opposition to the homogeneity of emancipatory strategies promoted by French feminists who remain committed to a "secular morality."⁵² Undeniably, these analyses have shaped the emergence of a feminist practice seeking to escape a colonial paradigm that orders the world according to the binary opposition of "us" (France and Europe) and "them" (the Others). As is evident, while contemporary French feminists still share a commitment to undoing women's oppression and fighting against gendered discrimination, they part ways in their relation to secularism and the political strategies they favor. Analyzing the tensions that have emerged around feminist reinterpretations of the meaning of French republicanism highlights the manner in which the very foundations of citizenship have been challenged. Strikingly, these challenges derive from a social model that departs from the principle of national solidarity and the expression of "multiple identities." These controversies have, in turn, transformed public opinion, public policy, and opened up ways of envisaging social compromise differently.⁵³

Notes

- 1 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988).
- 2 Collège Gabriel-Havez in Creil (Oise department).
- 3 Valerie Amiraux, "Le port de la 'burqa' en Europe : Comment la religion des uns est devenue l'affaire publique des autres," in *Quand la burqa passe à l'ouest, Enjeux éthiques, politiques et juridiques*, ed. David Koussens and Olivier Roy (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014), 15–37.
- 4 Cécile Laborde, *Français, encore un effort pour être républicains* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2010).
- 5 Jasbir K. Puar, *Homonationalisme. Politiques queer après le 11 septembre* (Paris: Ed. Amsterdam, 2012); Félix Boggio Ewanjé-Epée and Stella Magliani-Belkacem, eds., *Les féministes blanches et l'empire* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2012).
- 6 Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).
- 7 Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Par Sherene Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008).
- 8 Florence Rochefort, "Foulard, genre et laïcité en 1989," *Vingtième Siècle* 75 (2002): 145–56.

- 9 Christine Bard, Annie Metz, and Valérie Neveu., eds., *Guide des sources de l'histoire du féminisme* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006). "MLF" is the commonly used acronym for the political movement Mouvement de Libération des Femmes (or Women's Liberation Front), bringing together various radical, Marxist, and other feminist collectives, organizations, and committees that had mobilized from 1967 to 1970 amid the student movement of May 1968. It is said to have officially emerged in 1970. (The acronym was later infamously copyrighted by psychoanalyst and editor Antoinette Fouque in 1979, unbeknownst to many feminist activists and scholars who protested this but, ultimately, could do nothing.) The three main political movements within second wave feminism are identified as materialist, egalitarian, and essentialist feminism. Alternately, scholars have talked about the opposition between feminist "universalists" and "particularists." See Bibia Pavard, *Si je veux, quand je veux* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 358; and Claude Zaidman, "Le Féminisme," *Les cahiers du CEDREF* 15 (2007): 45–71. On essentialism, see Naomi Schor, "Cet essentialisme qui n'en est pas un: Irigaray à bras-le-corps," in *Féminismes au présent, Futur Antérieur* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993).
- 10 Françoise Picq, *Libération des femmes. Les années mouvements* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1993); Cathy Bernheim, *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes. Textes premiers* (Paris: Stock, 2009); Liliane Kandel, "Génération MLF," *Travail, genre et sociétés* 24 (2010): 4–24.
- 11 Kandel, "Génération MLF"
- 12 Liliane Maury, *Les Origines de l'école laïque en France* (Paris: PUF, 1996). Laws were passed in 1882 (Loi Ferry), 1886 (Loi Goblet), and 1905.
- 13 Jean Baubérot, *La morale laïque contre l'ordre moral* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).
- 14 Didier Lapeyronnie, "L'ordre de l'informe," *Hommes et Migrations* 1211 (1998): 68–82.
- 15 Jean-Claude Monod, *La Querelle de la sécularisation, de Hegel à Blumenberg* (Paris: Vrin, 2002).
- 16 Jean Baubérot, *L'intégrisme républicain contre la laïcité* (La Tour d'aigües: L'Aube, 2006).
- 17 Françoise Champion, "Les Nouveaux mouvements religieux," *Ethnologie Française* XXX, 4 (2000): 533.
- 18 Amiraux, "Le port de la 'burqa' en Europe"; George Morgan and Scott Poynting, eds., *Global Islamophobia: Muslims and Moral Panic in the West* (Surrey, England; and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012); Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism. Racism in a Neo-liberal Age* (Dublin, Ireland: Zed Books, 2011). These fears and anxieties are connected to and were intensified, especially after January 2014, in France. An example of this is the campaign launched to convince students' parents that the latest state efforts to promote gender equality in school manuals and lessons entitled the "Alphabet of Equality" ("*ABCD de l'Égalité*") were, in fact, efforts to "promote gay and lesbian identity" and dissolve sexual difference. These groups' actions (which aimed to mobilize parents through leafleting and social media) pointedly accused these state policies of encouraging "homosexual proselytism" and "gender undifferentiation." These rumors, presented as facts, were expressed through the prism of anti-Semitism. On anti-Semitic rumors, see Edgar Morin, *La Rumeur d'Orléans* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1969); and Natacha Chetcuti, "Quand les question de genre et d'homosexualités deviennent un enjeu républicain," *Les Temps Modernes* 2, 648 (2014): 241–53.
- 19 Yvette Roudy was member of the Socialist Party, politician, and European parliamentary deputy from 1979 to 1981 as well as Minister for the Rights of Women from 1981 to 1986.

- 20 Marie Malavoy, "De l'état de féminisme au féminisme d'État," in *Pluralité et convergences. La recherche féministe dans la francophonie*, ed. Huguette Dagenais (Montréal: Éditions du Remue-ménage, 1999); Francine Descarries, "Partenariat féministe. Pouvons-nous encore rêver de changer le monde?" in *Pluralité et Convergence*, ed. Hugette Dagenais (Montréal: Les Editions du Remue-Ménage, 1999).
- 21 Etienne Balibar, "Faut-il qu'une laïcité soit ouverte ou fermée?," *Mots* 27 (1991): 73–80.
- 22 Françoise Gaspard, "Pensons aux musulmanes qui se battent !," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 26 (1989).
- 23 The Movement of Black Women (MBW) was founded in May 1976. It brought together Antillean and African women, most of whom were students, exiles, and intellectuals. Its first public meeting took place in Paris on October 29, 1977. They argued that fighting for women's rights should come second to fighting against imperialism or class oppression, a position that created much resistance and debate among African activist groups. The MBW has mobilized against genital mutilation, polygamy, as well as racism, neocolonialism, and exoticizing and "miserabilist" stereotypes of African women which would explain their supposed "submission." They have also demonstrated against Apartheid, political repression in Africa, and forced expulsion of African immigrants. While the group disbanded in 1980, other similar organizations have since emerged.
- 24 "Beur" is the colloquial form predominantly used by French youth beginning in the early 1980s. It reverses syllables so that the French term "Arabe" becomes "rebeu" that was subsequently shortened to "beur." This was a political self-identifier as well as a generational marker.
- 25 Smaïn Laacher, *Femmes invisibles, leurs mots contre les violences* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2008).
- 26 Françoise Gaspard and Farad Khosrokhavar, *Le Foulard et la République* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995); Smaïn Laacher, *Femmes invisibles, leurs mots contre les violences* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2008); Florence Rochefort, "Foulard, genre et laïcité en 1989," *Vingtième Siècle* 75 (2002): 145–56.
- 27 Laacher, *Femmes invisibles*, 37.
- 28 Joëlle Brunerie-Kauffmann, Harlem Désir, René Dumont, Gilles Perrault, and Alain Touraine, "Pour une laïcité ouverte?" *Politix* (November 1989).
- 29 Rochefort, "Foulard, genre et laïcité en 1989," 147.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 While designed to address the statistically insignificant numbers of women wearing "burkas" or "niquabs," the law never directly refers to these forms of coverings but speaks to the general violation that "hiding one's face" entails in French secular public space.
- 32 Françoise Gaspard, "Féminisation de la politique? Un regard international," *Travail, genre et sociétés* 2 (2007): 135–8.
- 33 The organization Association for Solidarity with Algerian Women was created on July 5, 1995 in France. It descended from the International Network of Solidarity with Algerian Women (RISFA), created in March 1994, when violence against women in Algeria greatly increased. The French organization included both French and Algerian feminists (who had recently moved to France). Their aim was to help immigrant women win their administrative demands and to "create a solidarity network with Algerian women in order to help them fight discrimination, obscurantism, and fundamentalism, and to support them in their claim to ban the familial code." See: <http://www.asfad.org> (accessed November

- 5, 2013). The most well-known organization is Neither Whores nor Doormats (NWND), created in 2003 in the wake of the murder of Sohane Benziane on October 4, 2002 in the Balzac housing project of Vitry-sur-Seine (Val de Marne department). The organization is designed to fight discrimination and violence against women in (working-class and immigrant) suburbs. Women in Solidarity was created in 1945 and has an advisory status with the United Nations. It is an educational organization designed to help women, both immigrants and others, and it is committed to secularism, equality, and antiracism. It is overseen by Sabine Salmon and belongs to the European network of organizations of men and women for a "secular and feminist Europe." See: <http://femmes-solidaires.org/spip.php?rubrique16> (accessed November 5, 2013).
- 34 Caroline Fourest, *La Dernière Utopie: menaces sur l'universalisme* (Paris: Grasset, 2009); Wassyla Tamzali, *Une femme en colère. Lettre d'Alger aux Européens désabusés* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009).
- 35 Critical republicanism defends the idea of a community founded in the law and common good Voir Maurizio Viroli, "Républicanisme, Lormont," *Editions Le Bord de l'Eau* (2011): 20–21.
- 36 Caroline Fourest, "Ne pas se tromper de combat," *Prochoix* 41 (2007).
- 37 This activist group first became known with a "Letter to our Feminist Friends," published on the website of the feminist magazine *Prochoix* on May 22, 2009. It is secular and "universalist." While calling for equality in politics, labor, and family, it is critical of those in the "Critical Republican" camp that it accuses of "colonial guilt." See: <http://www.prochoix.org/cgi/blog/index.php/2009/05/22/2179-des-feministes-laiques-algeriennes-et-iraniennes-parlent-aux-feministes-de-l-exotisme> (accessed November 5, 2013).
- 38 Caroline Fourest and Taslima Nasreen, *Libres de le dire* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010).
- 39 Fourest, *La Dernière Utopie*, 215.
- 40 Tamzali, *Une femme en colère*, 19.
- 41 Tamzali, *Une femme en colère*.
- 42 See <http://www.npns.fr/actualite-npns/cp-npns-rappelle-le-principe-de-laicite-comme-fondement-de-la-republique-a-propos-de-laffaire-babyloup/> (accessed September 10, 2014).
- 43 Colette Guillaumin, *Sexe, race et pratique du pouvoir. L'idée de Nature* (Paris: Côté-femmes, 1992); Christine Bard, *Ce que soulève la jupe: identités, transgressions, résistances* (Paris: Autrement, 2010).
- 44 Josette Trat, "'Les féministes blanches et l'empire,' ou le récit d'un complot féministe fantasmé," *Contretemps* (2012).
- 45 See their website: <http://lesinsoumises.org/>
- 46 Christine Delphy, *Classer, dominer. Qui sont les autres?* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2008).
- 47 Ewanjé-Épée and Magliani-Belkacem, *Les féministes blanches et l'empire*.
- 48 See especially Josette Trat's critique regarding this issue and analysis of the causes of this "alliance."
- 49 Chandra Tapalde Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- 50 <http://www.lesobservateurs.ch/2013/04/10/femen-et-islam-merci-mais-non-merci/>
- 51 This group was created in 2009, bringing together lesbian feminists originating from Africa, the Americas, the Antilles, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Asia.
- 52 Saïd Boumama, *Dictionnaire des dominations* (Paris: Syllepse, 2012).
- 53 David Koussens and Roy Olivier, eds., *Quand la burqa passe à l'ouest, Enjeux éthiques, politiques et juridiques* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014).

SEWA's Feminism

Eileen Boris

The Gujarati custom of addressing all women as ben, meaning sister . . . seems to instill a latent sense of sisterhood in relationships. SEWA . . . owes much to this common sense of sisterhood in bringing together women of all castes, classes, trades, tribes, and faiths.

—Ela R. Bhatt¹

In late March 1995, Hillary Clinton traveled to Ahmedabad, the Gujarat home of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), where she talked with some 200 informal sector workers, who “were no longer afraid to organize for better treatment in India’s marketplace and society.” Learning about the struggles of this union of embroiders, *beedi* (cigarette) rollers, rag pickers, produce vendors, and other poor women, she came away impressed by “how this kind of solidarity and effort can change lives.” Since 1972, SEWA had marched in the streets, created cooperatives, developed health insurance and pension policies, lobbied for inclusion under labor law, bargained with contractors and other middlemen, and raised the consciousness of thousands of women through leadership classes and training. However, Clinton’s praise for its “efforts to give women ‘a better life without fear’” focused on another venture: the SEWA bank, a pioneering entry into microfinance—just the kind of program that was most legible to the global feminism that the First Lady exemplified, one that stressed equal rights with men through capitalist development.²

In a neoliberal world that promoted the market and individualism, which the policies of her husband, President Bill Clinton, did so much to foster, SEWA appealed to a wide range of NGOs, international agencies, donor nations, and Western feminists for its practice of self-employment and self-organizing.³ Its empowerment of poor women was radical in the context of Indian politics, economy, and gender systems, but what the *New York Times* in 2009 called its “quest for economic freedom” offered a model for betterment assimilable to other agendas that vied with its own.⁴ While SEWA’s creation of a social protection scheme for own-account workers excluded from state welfare might be considered feeding into neoliberalism by substituting private efforts for public ones, seen from another standpoint, such efforts actually adapted



FIGURE 4.1. Ela Bhatt, c. 2000.

Source: Accessed via Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MJ-Ela-Bhatt-October-2013.jpg>.

what trade unions often do: develop benefits for members as a step toward raising the overall social wage. In a nation dominated by the informal sector, with caste-based inequalities and village patriarchy coexisting with strong women's movements, self-employment enmeshed women into relations of dependency and debt rather than profitable entrepreneurship. But, under the right circumstances, self-employment could liberate women from economic and social restraints.⁵ SEWA educated its members as workers and as women activists through a multipronged approach that deployed services, social welfare, education, training, negotiation, and cooperatives to generate dignity and daily bread for the nominally self-employed.⁶

Clinton was hardly the first to sing SEWA's praises. This union of poor women gained global recognition during the International Decade for Women.⁷ In 1974 Indian feminist Devaki Jain, "the Gandhian in the midst of ... mostly Marxist economists," visited Ahmedabad, where she met SEWA leader and founder Ela R. Bhatt. Jain soon introduced Bhatt to various New Delhi networks; a year later, she may have had something to do with Bhatt joining India's nongovernmental delegation to the first UN Conference on Women in Mexico City.⁸ Political scientist Irene Tinker from the United States, one of an emerging feminist group of women and development specialists pressuring the US

State Department for gender parity in foreign aid and international decision-making, tapped Bhatt to present on the SEWA bank at a seminar days before the official UN conference in June 1975. Two years later, the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation awarded Bhatt its annual cash prize honoring “greatest of spirit and transformative leadership in Asia.” She used the money to capitalize the Mahila SEWA Trust for member services.⁹

The UN Conference exposed Bhatt to the social justice struggles of women throughout the world: she recalled how it sparked “a new feminist consciousness”—not one based on the sexual politics and legal equality dominating mainstream feminism in the United States and Great Britain, but one located in the resistance of Bolivian mine and Malaysian plantation workers, that is, in the fight for economic redistribution within and among nations that was rocking the UN system with the membership of independent “Third World” nations.¹⁰ In Mexico City, Bhatt came into contact with Ghanaian businesswoman Esther Ocloo, who was seeking to improve the prospects of market women, and US investment banker Michaela Walsh, who, “blown away by the role of women in their local economies,” spearheaded the organization of Women’s World Banking (WWB) to expand access to credit to women globally, much as SEWA was doing locally. Bhatt became one of WWB’s trustees.¹¹

At subsequent UN conferences, Bhatt and other SEWA leaders met feminist staff from the International Labor Organization (ILO). During the 1980s, the ILO would channel monies to the association not only to document working conditions under the new putting-out system, as researchers referred to industrial homework, but also to facilitate SEWA organizing, which the ILO promoted as an example to other grassroots groups in the Global South.¹² SEWA then joined with national and local groups as part of the transnational feminist push for what became ILO convention #177, “Home-Based Labor,” the first international instrument to recognize homeworkers as workers, rather than housewives just earning income on the side, and thus worthy of the labor standards covering all other wage earners.¹³

This is where I came in. In April 1989, funded by the Ford Foundation and the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), SEWA and the Gandhi Labour Institute organized an “International Workshop on Homebased Workers.”¹⁴ The ILO Office often supported such efforts to facilitate its own gathering of information used to spur the making of global conventions. As a historian of industrial homework in the United States, I was among some thirty “experts” who traveled to Ahmedabad to discuss what we knew about home-based labor and to develop a research agenda. We considered definitions and types of home work, organizing strategies, occupational health, legal contexts, and macro and micro economic trends. During the meeting, SEWA actively shaped our perceptions of the situation. We visited the SEWA Reception Centre, toured the slums of Ahmedabad to observe garment sewers and incense makers in their working and living spaces, and met with grassroots leaders, including women trained as paralegals to defend other members in court against municipal regulations, police harassment, and employer nonpayment. During the final discussion on future research, the meeting minutes recorded:

Since funding is not a problem for her research, and USA is not a developing country, Ms. Boris does not contemplate submitting a proposal [to the ILO for studying

home work]. However, Ms. Boris would be able to facilitate participation (though not travel funding) in the Fourth International Conference on Women's Studies to be held at Hunting [Hunter] College, N.Y., in June 1990, especially for papers linked to household, kinship or gender issues.

This would provide a respectable international forum for dissemination of findings and could lead to an edited volume, for which Ms. Boris is willing to share responsibility.¹⁵

I indeed did organize a session for that conference and with political scientist Elisabeth Prügl—then a PhD student—coedited *Homeworkers in Global Perspective: Invisible No More* (1996) with essays from many participants in the 1989 and subsequent meetings of researchers leading up to the ILO convention. Reflecting the transnational network on home work, essays highlighted conditions in Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia, Finland, Philippines, Iran, Pakistan, India, Canada, the United States, and Great Britain.¹⁶

It was uncanny to find this report in the archive nearly twenty-five years later when I returned to the issue of home-based labor and the ILO as a historian rather than as a practitioner constructing knowledge to bolster the argument for an international convention. I thus write this analysis of SEWA and its achievements from the feminist standpoint of engaged scholarship that probes the past to assess the making of transnational feminism across difference. As history, it grounds memory in the archive, fully understanding how partial both memory and archives are.¹⁷

SEWA's achievement and feminism do not fit neatly into Western liberal classifications. Rooted in Gandhian philosophy, its grassroots activism among poor women challenged conventional understandings of trade unionism and provided an alternative to rights-based women's movements that neglect household economic security. In directing collective action and cooperative efforts to enhancing the lives and livelihood of home-based and mobile workers (such as peddlers and vendors), who fall outside of standard employment contracts, the SEWA women's movement contested both male-dominated trade unions and men's power within the household. Development would come through the empowerment of poor women.¹⁸

The birth of SEWA

Ahmedabad was home to Mahatma Gandhi after his return from South Africa in 1915 until 1930; from there he began the Dandi Salt March against British taxation. Once a handloom weaving area, the city had become "the Manchester of India," the center of the textile industry. In the 1920s, with Anasuya Sarabhai, the radicalized daughter from a mill owner family, Gandhi founded the Textile Labour Association (TLA), a union that operated on the principle of cooperation. For Gandhi, "there is no employee or employer . . . both are co-trustees of society and the community as a whole."¹⁹ Sarabhai agreed with Gandhi that a union had to address the larger needs of people, building their capacities. By the 1950s, factors impacting manufacturing throughout the nation—night work and other restrictive women-only labor laws,

active campaigning by union men to block women's employment, and employer preference for male over "more expensive" women—also had pushed women out of factories in Ahmedabad.²⁰ Despite the rationales of protecting maternal health and maintaining household domesticity, the elimination of women from the formal sector never meant that women would cease generating income. They formed a pool of pieceworkers that transformed homes into places of income production.²¹ Women became breadwinners. Most self-employed women generated over half of family income. More than 20 percent were household heads, compared to less than 7 percent in the general population.²²

Ela Bhatt came from a respected Brahmin family with roots in the independence movement. Her maternal grandfather, a physician, went on the Salt March, was arrested during the independence struggle, and practiced Gandhian simplicity. Less politically progressive, her Anglophile lawyer father nonetheless supported women's higher education. As a child, she has explained, teachers "taught us the importance of decentralizing the economy, at the village, local and district level." By the time she graduated with a law degree in 1954, Bhatt "saw our task as rebuilding the nation, and Gandhism taught us to look at things from the perspective of the masses," she recalled in a 2010 interview with South African scholar Edward Webster. "Poverty is wrong because it is violent; it does not respect human labor, strips a person of his or her humanity, and takes away their freedom": these lessons she took away from Gandhi's teachings. She would explain, "With SEWA we put into practice the Gandhian principles of self-reliance and collective action. And Gandhi saw the importance of developing rural India." She argued:

The values he advocated and represented are universal and of all times. Truth, peace, non-violence, self-reliance and simplicity. And we all carry these values in us. Think holistically and simultaneously. In your personal life, but also in your public, economic and political life. Whatever activity you do, think how it relates to you, to the community, to society and ultimately to the universe.²³

In 1955 she started working for the legal department of the TLA.²⁴

After time away for childbirth and a stint working at the state Ministry of Labour, Bhatt returned to the TLA in 1968 to head its Women's Wing.²⁵ In the 1950s and 1960s, the Women's Wing provided the wives of unionists with training in household skills and arts; it also offered social welfare to member families. Bhatt had other ideas. She understood that the women needed not home economics but organization as workers. Thus, she proposed to the TLA a separate women's union rather than a ladies' auxiliary. "I wanted . . . to organize the women workers in a union so that they could enjoy the same benefits that organized labour received." Indeed, she recognized, "Women do not need to come together against anyone; they just need to come together for themselves. By forming a union—a bond—they affirmed their status as workers, and as a result of coming together, they had a voice."²⁶

As SEWA recounts its history, informal sector workers—cart-pullers, head-loaders, and used-garment sellers, a good proportion of whom were migrants to the city from surrounding villages—went to Bhatt for aid. She began investigating and

publicizing their living and working conditions. At an outdoor meeting in 1971, the women decided to form their own association that would be a trade union. At first the Registrar of Trade Unions rejected their application because he did not consider them workers. After all, they lacked employers in a traditional sense. Bhatt remembers how her members "were invisible to the policy makers, the census writers and the trade union leaders."²⁷ It took months before the Registrar accepted SEWA's concept of a union as being "for the workers" rather than "against the employer." SEWA was registered as a union in 1972.²⁸

A decade later, SEWA broke from the TLA over strategy and focus. It chafed at being told to organize women into traditional trade unions when its membership of "own account" and piece-rate employees needed credit, housing, social welfare, and marketing channels. The break came during the caste-based riots in 1981 that hit SEWA members hard. Their households were starving as all business except government-protected industry shut down; it was unsafe to be on the streets even before curfews, making it impossible for market vendors and peddlers to function. While SEWA sought reconciliation between various ethnic and status factions, the TLA remained neutral. Conflict between its leadership and Bhatt, who defended the "Scheduled and Backward" castes in public, finally led the TLA to expel SEWA from its umbrella. Male-dominated, despite its early leadership, the union viewed these women "as enterprising housewives stepping in to work at a time of crisis."²⁹ It never fully accepted an organization of self-employed women, who appeared as competitors driving down the wages of mill workers, but who actually were attempting to fill the void left by deindustrialization and economic change.³⁰ Like other national trade unions, the TLA still concentrated its organizing on India's rapidly disappearing formal sector, about 11 percent of the national labor force at the time of SEWA's birth.³¹

Expulsion was devastating to a trade unionist like Bhatt, but it actually opened new directions. SEWA would not only organize workers into a union but also into alternative forms of production that could improve upon the going rate of employers by offering competition. Union members created cooperatives "to become owners of their labour." They marketed products, provided services, and bargained with middlemen. There were dairy, livestock, land-based, craft, trading, and service cooperatives (like the bank, child care, and health).³² There were distribution and production cooperatives of vegetable vendors, cleaners, paper pickers, patchwork sewers, block printers, and cane and bamboo weavers. Renana Jhabvala, SEWA's secretary and chief trade union organizer, has observed: "coming together in a cooperative marks the first time in their lives that they [the members] have ever actually owned something of their own and had decision making power over it." Consciousness shifted "from a piece-rate worker to a worker-owner," with a ripple effect of enhancing "women's personal and economic empowerment."³³ These cooperatives generated solidarity as well as efficiencies.

SEWA further deployed membership strength to engage in advocacy, but reinforced lobbying with direct protest. One example was when Gujarati *chindi* (embroidery) outworkers struggled for inclusion in the state's minimum wage. The government ignored their demand, so they marched. "So many women in *burqas* with little children," Jhabvala recalled. "As we shouted, 'We all are one.' 'Give us minimum wages.'

We went past the traders' shops and then we went to the Labour Commissioner's office and demonstrated there. Within the week the government took out the first notice [for legislation]." But industrialists and the officials whom they had bribed delayed inclusion. When the Labour minister suspended the minimum wage rather than extend it, SEWA fought back through publicity; it went to the newspapers, which were more than happy to expose government corruption and collusion. Winning legislative passage was only the first step, however. SEWA then had to strike to get the ministry to enforce the law. At the end, SEWA negotiated with the embroidery merchants independently from the government. It increased wages, but the traders refused to reimburse the price of thread, a cost that kept women from making any profit. Unable to win protection from the rising price of materials, SEWA formed a thread cooperative to wrestle from the market what it could not win outright.³⁴

Social services further developed to meet the daily needs of workers. SEWA pushed for coverage under state social security and welfare provisions, such as health maintenance and housing, but set up its own when government failed. These efforts demonstrated the link between reproductive and productive labor.³⁵ Childbirth had emerged as one of the greatest health challenges faced by the women; to mitigate some of this risk SEWA early on offered maternity benefits in 1978. A decade later, it won inclusion of landless agricultural laborers under the state program.³⁶ As Mirai Chatterjee, who ran the organization's social security branch, explained, "First was childcare, then health care, followed by water, sanitation and housing, then social insurance and finally pensions. Work and social security are two sides of the same coin."³⁷ Social security was a benefit of membership, not a philanthropic undertaking. It represented the self-help component of self-organizing.

The bank, chartered in 1974, alleviated the real need for credit among headloaders, vendors, peddlers, garment makers, and embroiderers who were taking loans from moneylenders. Terms of repayment by the moneylenders, sometimes at interest rates of 30 percent, kept workers destitute. SEWA challenged banking as usual. The women had nothing for collateral, could not sign their names, and could not go to a bank during the usual business hours. While banking regulators were skeptical that such a bank could succeed, SEWA gave credit on the basis of knowing the women and assessing their uses for the money: approving loans for buying raw materials or improving marketing outlets, for example, but not for a more lavish family wedding. It brought women with similar business needs together to undertake bulk buying and obtain government subsidies. It circumvented logistical problems through substituting photographs for written identification and going to where the women worked rather than having the women journey to the bank. Despite some initial problems with repayment, the bank flourished. Women were able to own tools, pay off old usurious debts, and recover pawned jewelry. A quarter century after its founding, the bank established "five-year fixed loans worth Rs.5,000 each for educating girl children and a saving scheme of Rs.34,000 for the purpose of providing financing for marriages"—accepting the importance of the wedding for its members.³⁸

SEWA became an independent women's organization in the early 1980s. Beginning with nearly two thousand members, on the eve of ILO deliberations in 1995 over the home-based labor convention, its membership had grown to about 145,000 women

from various informal sector occupations, with about 23,000 of them home-based. By 2008, about half of its "All India Membership" of nearly a million resided in Gujarat, its home state. Overall there were ten autonomous SEWA "sister" groups in seven Indian states. By then, some 14.45 percent were home-based workers; the majority of members were manual laborers and providers of services—a section that included domestic and agricultural workers. Also included in the membership were hawkers and vendors. Many members were technically self-employed even if dependent on distributors or suppliers. Though beginning as an urban organization, SEWA expanded in such a manner that its rural branch now dominates, consisting of some 60 percent of the association.³⁹ In 2014, it had grown to 1.8 million members.⁴⁰

Leaders were a mix of college graduates and local women without education. As Bhatt explained, "We needed educated professionals who could speak on behalf of the women when they themselves could not." For example, Jhabvala, who joined the effort in 1977, graduated from Harvard and attended Yale; Chatterjee arrived in 1984 with a public health degree from Johns Hopkins University. Middle-class organizers and researchers, Bhatt insisted, "managed to make the workers' issues their own." The educated learned from the members; knowledge came from the grassroots in what we might name a form of feminist participatory action. As one observer explained, "Lawyers, doctors and managers who believe in the work come to learn from the self-employed the context of their problems. They provide their services while they *pass* on their skills. The idea is holding hands in mutual respect while they shift control."⁴¹ We might argue that they practiced what Chicana feminist theorist Cherríe Moraga calls "theory in the flesh."⁴² At every expansion, women emerged as leaders from the group of workers to rally the others and strengthen the organization.

Recognition and assistance from international organizations, both NGOs like OXFAM and global labor federations like the IUF (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, and Allied Workers' Association) and ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), offered the material basis for independence from the TLA. The progressive IUF, dedicated to improving conditions for low-waged workers, first recognized SEWA as a labor organization and thus provided access to global union deliberations; it remained a staunch supporter. Funding further came from the governments of the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden and from the ILO, which asked it to run the "Participatory Action Research Project on the Development of Effective Monitoring Systems and the Application of Legislation for Home-based Producers" in 1986. Such monies paid for the land and building of the SEWA Reception Centre in the heart of Ahmedabad, the location of the SEWA bank, cooperative store, offices, and meeting rooms. Donors facilitated the purchase of transport vehicles, materials for income generation projects and embroidery, spinning, weaving, and dairying cooperatives, the construction of a center and classroom for the rural wing, and the holding of training sessions and clinics.⁴³ Their aid allowed SEWA to stand on its own and forge "a Third World Model" of a union devoted to the informal sector where the workspace as well as the work is fluid, the employer obscured or nonexistent, and the worker under the radar of official notice.⁴⁴

This model challenged the conventional form of unionization in which employees in a shop or an entire industry band together to wrest better conditions and higher wages

from a distinct, single employer. Jhabvala explained that the cooperatives softened the image of the trade union as antagonistic, “hard,” or conflictual; the cooperative attracted allies.⁴⁵ Likewise, since the women participated in makeshift economies, combining various income-generating activities that include self-employment, contract work, and temporary hiring from multiple employers, SEWA located collective action not in the workplace but in the occupational sector. Rather than traditional collective bargaining, SEWA won tripartite boards of government, labor, and employer representatives that set the rules to “govern” various entities, like the Ahmedabad cloth market. It demanded macroeconomic and environmental changes, including resource distribution, housing, and clean water, as well as “political empowerment”—to better the health and welfare of individuals while promoting social transformation. Women learned that government “is not a super power and the workers should not passively wait for government assistance to come. They can go to the rural and urban administrators and their MPs and discuss their problems and grievances and seek help.” SEWA engaged in these issues strategically from the perspective of long-term change.⁴⁶

Empowering women

SEWA saw itself as part of the women’s movement, but not all Indian feminists agreed with this classification. According to scholar Elisabeth Armstrong, Asian feminism has been divided into three types. Shaped by former colonial relations, “social reform feminists” sought to improve women’s position through uplift, including “better access to education, health care, social welfare, and modernized cultural and religious practices.” They did not challenge existing power hierarchies, but rather sought to alleviate the suffering generated by inequalities. Nationalist or state feminists “sought equal rights for women in independent nations and women’s full participation in public life.” These feminists focused on political inclusion, especially equal rights before the law. Finally, left feminists, connected to mass party formations, sought fundamental political, social, cultural, and economic restructuring.⁴⁷ SEWA represented another way, empowering poor women to seize control over their lives that incorporated elements of all three types.

However, for historian Radha Kumar, SEWA stood apart from the new feminism of the late 1970s and 1980s, which protested rape, dowry murder, and other forms of violence against women. Like left women’s organizations, SEWA targeted the working class but also appealed to rural and village, that is, peasant, women. While some of the left groups had roots in the Second World War-era antifascist resistance and remained connected to anti-imperialist organizing, SEWA came to its transnational work for a much more pragmatic reason; it moved into the global arena to win ILO standards to pressure the Indian state, which had refused to take up legal changes that Bhatt introduced to Parliament as a private member’s measure in 1988.⁴⁸ Given its attempt to impact public policy, feminists influenced by the Communist or Maoist Left judged SEWA, rooted in nonviolence and cooperation over class conflict, reformist. SEWA, in turn, rejected such groups as disconnected from the daily struggles of poor women.⁴⁹

While noting nineteenth-century philanthropic and religious reform that saw Indian women as objects of their largesse, SEWA traced its genealogy to the early years of the independence movement, "when, under Mahatma Gandhi," according to Jhabvala, "women actively participated in the freedom struggle and became active in their own liberation."⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Bhatt noted, independence from colonial rule needed a "second freedom":

The right to vote was not enough ... As poor people, they wanted to come out of an existence defined by day-to-day survival. As women, they wanted equal and ample opportunities to learn and to act ... They wanted a voice and visibility. This was not possible without access to and ownership of economic resources by the poor women, and their overcoming exploitation by men, society and state policies.⁵¹

SEWA has presented a feminist twist to Gandhian self-sufficiency updated for an era of structural adjustment and neoliberalism. In the Gandhian mode, SEWA believed that if field organizers became "one" with village people, "all the barriers that prevent women from active participation in development are gradually broken down and it becomes possible to introduce new ideas and programmes for better living conditions."⁵² Jhabvala often has quoted the nationalistic exhortation of Gandhi: "women have to take *leadership* to solve the problems of the country. Women should widen their family to the whole country." As she insisted during a 1989 study tour for grassroots organizers, one form of leadership development undertaken by the association, "If women organize there are many ways to solve the problems of rural women." Because the participants were "women working and being from the rural areas," they knew "the problems of rural women," even those who dressed differently, spoke another language, and ate other kinds of food. A common purpose could emerge from common problems: "drought, floods ... non-payment of minimum wages, domestic problems, health problems due to work, child birth." Asked what to do, attendees replied, "The only way to solve the problem of rural women is through organizing," which required "education, work and food." Reflecting the participatory democracy and autonomy at the center of the SEWA approach, the women insisted, "rural women have to come together and organize themselves." From meeting village women elsewhere, one attendee learned "the power of love and unity," a lesson taught as a prerequisite for expanding into a national movement.⁵³

Leadership development and skill building was a precondition to empowerment and essential to creating what some global feminists at the time called "concientization."⁵⁴ SEWA recognized that "unless women acquire the ability and confidence to participate equally with men, the situation will not change."⁵⁵ So it created "awareness classes" that addressed the entire woman, her spiritual, physical, and social conditions, as a prerequisite to raising labor standards.⁵⁶ The transformation of work required the transformation of people. As Bhatt announced the impact of unionization, "For the first time, the women realized that they were workers, even though society perceived them as mere housewives and mothers."⁵⁷

As ILO feminists in the Programme on Rural Women and the ILO's Indian regional office recognized, "for SEWA organizing does not simply mean joining SEWA."⁵⁸

Organizing meant "Generating Awareness,"⁵⁹ that is, empowering often illiterate and always "spread out" or isolated workers through gatherings, called camps, that allowed such women "to move out of their home, visit SEWA, meet other workers and learn about their rights."⁶⁰ These were the women that Jhabvala portrayed for ILO consumption as confined to the home from "social taboos" and the preferences of male kin, women who were "the bearer and rearer of children and the servicer of the family," who could be seen "breast-feeding her child and rolling the hand-made Indian cigarettes" or conveying, in potter families, "water from the well both for the family and for the clay." They kept their daughters close by, rather than sending them to school, to help with the housework and the home work. The majority labored longer than factory counterparts for lower wages when they received work, which was intermittent throughout the year. Combined with their family labors, they worked nearly continuously and suffered from myriad health problems, including back pain, eyestrain, and anemia.⁶¹

SEWA constructed its leadership camps to enable women responsible for earning enough for family survival to "draw a clear picture of their lives and their problems as working women" and provide "a better awareness of their roles in society, their rights to earn a respectable livelihood." To target the whole person, the camps began with prayer, song, and yoga; covered self-care, sanitation, nutrition, and health; fostered self-confidence, leadership, cohesion, and group decision-making through games and role-playing; taught about legal rights, occupational safety, unionization, and cooperatives; and visited factories, shrines, and medical clinics.⁶² Participants heard that "employers can fire one woman but they cannot do it to a thousand!" Learning the power of collective action, they had opportunities to practice such lessons in arguing for state protection.⁶³

Eager to support projects that combined standard-setting with technical cooperation (giving of advice on enforcing labor standards and related issues), the ILO financed such camps for generating a bridge between legal training and organizing. At one such camp for *beedi* workers, for example, the women listened to experts speak on social protection currently available. But the women were skeptical that they would ever receive benefits from the Provident fund established for their trade, a joint employer-employee enterprise that until 1985 had not covered unorganized home-based piece-rate workers. Even after the courts ruled that the law included the home workers, employers resorted to all kinds of illegalities to avoid paying benefits (like creating false names for workers and switching names on payment records every couple of weeks). They also withheld the ID cards that were necessary for state-funded health care and school scholarships.⁶⁴

All the camps allowed participants an opportunity to speak out, discover commonalities, and develop demands for better living and working conditions. Some women testified to personal change. Said one attendee in 1989, "When she started work with SEWA she was not bold enough to come out of the home. Now she works and travels from village to village." She learned that "even illiterate people can work and help themselves to fight against exploitation."⁶⁵ Presentations relied on visual and oral communication; these included posters with graphs on women's wages in relation to men's, charts on benefits and working conditions, and films depicting demonstrations

and other SEWA activities.⁶⁶ In encouraging the women to speak, organizers pushed against religious blinders and socialization that "inhibits them to mix freely with one another."⁶⁷

At a May 1986 camp that drew forty garment workers from Ahmedabad, the women shared stories of wrongs in a process of being informed about their rights. These women lived in the contained space of their neighborhood and subject to male power within the family. Responsible for the cost of electricity, sewing machine, thread, and transport to pick up and deliver goods, at daily earnings of Rs.6–7, the women obtained only a pittance of what merchants and middlemen kept as profit. They complained about those merchants who demeaned "the quality of their stitching and harassed them about the rates and invariably held back part of the money due to them." The "more aware" shared experiences of being retaliated against for protest activities, such as marching against low piece-rates or airing grievances on a television program.⁶⁸

Facilitated by the SEWA discussion leader, the women offered suggestions for improving their lives that drew upon the understandings produced by those previously dismissed as exploited victims. The organizer may have guided discussion, but the resulting list reflected the women's hardships and aspirations:

- Removal of prevalent, hindering social customs.
- Equality of women—on par with men and between themselves—Hindu or Muslim.
- Creating and demanding respect for women.
- Right to education for women.
- Demanding proper housing and sanitation facilities.
- Fighting for minimum daily wages.
- Importance of nutritious food for their children.
- Education for their children.
- Dedication from teachers and people involved in their issues.
- Demanding better health facilities— proper and timely medical attention particularly in case of emergencies.
- The importance of hygiene cleanliness in the home surrounding and child rearing.

Most significantly, organizer Bina Sharma recalled, "while putting forth these suggestions it gradually dawned on them that they, themselves, individually and collectively, should make efforts toward achieving their ideals." She proudly noted, "Some of the more forthcoming women were even proud of themselves (and rightfully so) that they could be the instruments through which new socio-economic conditions could come into being." From feeling "lethargic," fatalistic, and "helpless," they "felt they could achieve a lot if they united and set their minds to fight for better privileges."⁶⁹

SEWA gathered data on working conditions, compensating for neglect of this population in official statistics—a lacuna that India shared with nations worldwide. When it came to occupational health and safety, the women themselves provided the basis for establishing ergonomic standards. They were able to redesign tools, like a



FIGURE 4.2. Ela Bhatt with *beedi* makers in Rakhial, c. 1985.

Source: Credit: SEWA.

collecting stick for paper pickers. Moreover, as staff health expert Mirai Chatterjee explained to Anita Kelles-Viitanen, a Finnish staff person from the ILO's India office, they relied “on the participatory approach.” Chatterjee was skeptical of the “objectivist epistemology of epidemiological studies, pointing out that this would not be appropriate for a participatory organization like SEWA.” In contrast to such outsider evaluations, her “study reflects workers’ reality.” Kelles-Viitanen lamented “that no thorough clinical examinations of women workers were taken at this stage nor control groups studied.” She later sent Chatterjee to an occupational health workshop in Helsinki, but SEWA never abandoned its participatory method. Knowing what to improve depended on the experiences and perceptions of the workers themselves.⁷⁰

From such knowledge came action. *Beedi* legal camp workers prioritized an agenda: gaining a holiday bonus, ID cards, and the necessary raw materials to roll their cigarettes. SEWA would send letters to employers and government officials, and the women planned a follow-up mass meeting.⁷¹ The garment worker camp concluded that flooding the authorities with complaints, unionizing, or creating a cooperative offered viable counteractions to employer withholding of benefits and minimum wage. Attendees presented demands for increased wage rates and more extensive inclusion in minimum wage legislation to the Labour Commissioner, “who promised to look into the matter” but by himself could not do much. Part of “awareness,” then, was gaining the courage and know-how to transform embodied knowledge into public actions. While still at the camps, SEWA instructed the women in techniques for lobbying.⁷²

But it wasn't only the state or the male-dominated unions that SEWA challenged. Organizers discovered “that when men attended meetings, women either became silent

observers or left altogether." Women especially withdrew when their own male family members were around. Village men resisted seeing women "as organisers, trainers and group leaders," the new roles SEWA cultivated that were disrupting traditional gender dynamics. "In the poorest families, any extra income was welcome to the males and to that extent they supported the union's activities," the ILO noted. "But at the community level, the men found it very difficult to accept equal status for women." Indeed, "when women persisted, the men might even become unbalanced and assault them."⁷³

Empowering women meant enhancing their power within households. SEWA's aims included: "To make all possible efforts to advance their morals, to remove the evil effects of old customs, to prevent their exploitation in any form, to promote women's self-respect..." Not only did women from rural areas lack literacy, which could restrict information, but they also had inordinately heavy workloads, combining farm labor with family and domestic labor. Those in urban areas similarly undertook both family labor and income-generating work. Exacerbating the situation, inadequate dowries could lead to desertion by husbands, expulsion from the household, or even death. As one ILO researcher asserted, "Women do not hope to be treated as equals by the men and expect male domination to continue..." Religion, custom, and family values promoted male power.⁷⁴

Two important decisions reflected the organization's commitment to building the capabilities of its members, even if they were poor and not literate: SEWA restricted membership to women and the bank protected earnings from husbands. Self-reliance, gained from governing SEWA and controlling her own resources, increased a women's power within her household. After involvement in SEWA, by the 1990s, Bhatt reported members having a higher status within families. A third had a say in obtaining household assets or arranging the marriages of their male as well as female children. They "all have dealt directly with either the police, the municipality, the government and panchayat [village council] officials, while only 4% of their men have done so."⁷⁵

Restricting membership to women enhanced individual and collective growth. At the first meeting after being kicked out of the TLA, the assembled women resolved to be an all-women's organization: Previously the President of TLA had served as the President of SEWA, with Bhatt as General Secretary. Now "there was such a sense of liberation that there was no man heading the meeting and telling us what to do or think. There was no one we had to be careful not to hurt if we did not pay him enough respect," one observer reported. "It felt like a daughter's righteous struggle. We had left the nest."⁷⁶ SEWA members persisted in using kinship and domestic metaphors like this one in discussing the organization and their involvement. They were not only sisters, but also confronted "mother-in-law/daughter-in-law problems" between elected leaders and organizers.⁷⁷ Women said, "SEWA is my mother"; "The bank is like my mother;" and "When we have a difficulty, we go home to SEWA."⁷⁸

Given "the chauvinistic attitudes of men who think that women in general are inferior, unintelligent, illiterate and cannot understand the proceedings of a meeting and the traditional roles of women which take up most of their time that they cannot attend meetings or are too tired to attend," organizers sought spaces where women could flourish, "where women find common problems and set up machinery to tackle

as a group.” SEWA thus turned to the house meeting to engage in conversation with each family and encourage women’s participation.⁷⁹ In addressing women’s health, it could gather women together for such meetings without threatening community norms.

The SEWA bank also was “a woman’s space ... ‘the village well,’ a place to come together and talk with other women about their work,” Jhabvala has recalled. To maintain control over their earnings, the women learned to put their saving account in their own names as well as to own their tools and “to have their land or home registered in their own name (or at least jointly with their husbands).”⁸⁰ They kept passbooks in a bank safe to keep knowledge of their funds from husbands, some of whom would demand the cash for their own use. According to Bhatt, “a pressing need for a safe place to save money” was also a reason for the bank. The women “no longer wanted to hide their earned money under the mattress or in their clothing.”⁸¹

Consciousness transformed

Over the years, Ela Bhatt, Renana Jhabvala, and other leaders have taught through anecdote. Telling stories about brave women who stepped up to protest allowed them to convey both the conditions faced by India’s informal sector workers and also to suggest that embodied knowledge offered the basis for analysis and action. One story Bhatt told a *New York Times* reporter in 2009 illuminated the shift in consciousness that SEWA cultivated. Questioning the women “what ‘freedom’ meant to them,” she shared:

Some said it was the ability to step out of the house. Others said it was having a door to the bathroom. Some said it meant having their own money, a cellphone, or “fresh” clothes every day.

Then she told of her favorite. Freedom, one woman said, was “looking a policeman in the eye.”⁸²

A Bhopal *bedi* worker off to attend a union meeting “dropped her burkha forever”; a leader of the embroiderers from Dariapur “openly confronted her own brother who represented the employers while negotiating a wage rise in the Labour Commissioner’s office.”⁸³ Such gestures manifested SEWA’s feminism.

Though SEWA shared much with other Indian grassroots economic development formations and with women who protested high prices and marched for environmental sustainability, in the competition for Western NGO funding, it was among the best in publicizing its enterprises and gaining attention. With Dutch and British activists, it built HomeNet as a transnational network among home-based workers and organizers that led the final campaign for the ILO convention. It later would help form WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment, Globalizing and Organizing), a Harvard University think tank that has maintained SEWA’s presence before the larger NGO, academic, and donor communities.⁸⁴ But it also joined with others in the Global South through DAWN (Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era), founded in 1984 at the end of the UN Decade for Women. It aided organizing elsewhere, as in South Africa.⁸⁵ It has continued to fight for ILO action

on the informal sector as well as to document persistent exploitation of home-based workers worldwide.

SEWA has captured attention because of its achievements, not just because its videos, writings, and tours appeal to Western feminists. It offered an authentic example of women working collectively for development. Its method—surveying the women involved to transform into makers and subjects those who too often stand as objects of development—was in keeping with the new women's studies epistemologies of self-reflectivity that questioned top-down meanings. Its success has come from bridging the local and the global.

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Feminist Dissidents in the “Motherland of Women’s Liberation”: Shattering Soviet Myths and Memory¹

Rochelle Ruthchild

And we can now proudly say without the slightest exaggeration that except for Soviet Russia there is not a single country in which there is complete equality between men and women and in which women are not placed in a degraded position, which is particularly felt in everyday family life.

—Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, September 23, 1919²

She holds a child in her right hand, a shopping bag in her left, her drunken husband staggers behind her, and ahead is a new Five Year Plan. This is the typical Soviet woman.

—Soviet Brezhnev era (1965–82) joke

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, become a feminist . . .

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, chase Putin out!

—Pussy Riot, *Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Moscow, February 12, 2012*³

In the Russian Federation, to be a feminist is not a violation of the law or a crime.

A number of religions, such as Russian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and

Islam, are based on principles which are incompatible with the ideas of feminism.

Tolokonnikova, Alekhina and Samutsevich and their unidentified accomplices . . . on February 21, 2012 carried out an act motivated by religious hatred and hostility . . .

—Excerpt from the judge’s verdict against Pussy Riot⁴

Mainstream discourse on feminism still privileges Western and Western colonial narratives in discussions of women’s history. As Estonian scholar Redi Koobak has noted, the “so-called former Eastern Europe continues to be something of a gap in feminist studies, if not entirely a non-place or non-region.”⁵ Such a focus distorts the actual history of women’s movements and feminism, creating what Koobak terms

a "lag" discourse, and obscuring the ways in which so-called backward areas were actually pioneering.⁶

Russians were among the first to raise the question of women's place in society. From the 1860s, consciousness about the role of women was a significant element of proposals to restructure Russian society; Nicholas Chernyshevsky's 1863 novel, *What is to Be Done*, the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the Russian intelligentsia, had as a central theme the liberation of women from low-wage work and domestic slavery. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Russian women pioneered in winning access to higher education, founding battered women's shelters, and gaining the right to practice medicine. In 1917, feminist demonstrators forced the Provisional Government to grant women the vote and the right to run for office. Russia was the first major power to do so.

When Lenin and the Bolsheviks took power, they viewed themselves as extending the tradition of radical commitment to women's liberation, which they defined as complete transformation of women's role in society. They also explicitly distanced themselves from feminism, which they portrayed, inaccurately, as being solely concerned with political rights. Alexandra Kollontai, the foremost Bolshevik advocate for women's liberation, and an antifeminist polemicist, claimed that "The woman question—say the feminists—is a question of 'rights and justice.' The woman question—say the proletarian women—is a question of a piece of bread."⁷

Under Bolshevik rule, prerevolutionary feminist activists fled the country or went underground. Those who stayed, supportive of the Soviet commitment to women's liberation, worked in literacy campaigns, served as physicians in clinics for the poor, and were often decorated by the state for their service. But mention of previous feminist activity was dangerous, and these women were silenced.

New generations of feminist activists, when they did appear, found inspiration from the West, or from Bolshevik women activists like Kollontai. Their own history had been erased. The newest wave, ranging from Pussy Riot to the "Feministki," while proudly proclaiming themselves feminists, claim inspiration from Western thinkers or groups, such as Shulamith Firestone, Julia Kristeva, bell hooks, and Redstockings. This enables opponents to label feminism as an alien, Western import. Yet Soviet Russia has a history of feminist activism. Sadly, it is little known in Russia today, and ignored in the West.⁸

Sixty years after Lenin's 1919 boast, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the first Soviet "free journal for women" appeared in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), the cradle of the Bolshevik Revolution. The first issue, entitled *Woman and Russia: An Almanac for Women about Women*, consisted of ten copies, carefully hand lettered and typed. Printed clandestinely (the only way it could be printed given Soviet censorship), the journal proclaimed "support for the forgotten cause of women's liberation." It included poetry, art, and essays covering a range of subjects, from patriarchy to prisons, from matriarchy to marriage, from theology to abortion. Seeking to appeal to a wider audience, the editors solicited contributions from their readers, stating their intention to "examine the position of women in the family, at work, in hospitals and maternity homes, the lives our children lead, and the question of women's moral rights."⁹ Although *Woman and Russia* managed to circulate *samizdat* (underground) fashion, from hand to hand, Soviet authorities quickly seized most of the copies (some had



FIGURE 5.1. The cover for the self-published (*samizdat*) *Al'manakh: Woman and Russia*, appearing in 1979, the first independent feminist journal published since shortly after the October 1917 Bolshevik revolution.

Source: With permission: Tatyana Mamonova.

already been smuggled to the West) and warned Tatyana Mamonova, initiator of the *samizdat* project, against any further activity. But the authorities refrained from more drastic action, perhaps unsure about what to do.

The women did not cease their activity. By the spring of 1980, they had divided into two groups, Women and Russia, led by Mamonova, and the Club Maria (after the Virgin Mary). The official formation of the Club Maria was scheduled for March 8, International Women’s Day. The international socialist women’s holiday, an official holiday, with its ritual speeches, flowers, and meals prepared by husbands or children, had become the Soviet equivalent of Mothers’ Day. Like the originally pacifist Mothers’ Day, International Women’s Day’s militance was forgotten.

The Soviet secret police (KGB) got wind of the feminists’ plans and on the night of February 29, 1980 searched several apartments and seized a camera-ready copy of the first issue of *Maria*, the journal of the soon-to-be launched Club Maria. The women responded by immediately announcing the creation of the Club Maria and issuing an “Appeal to Mothers” against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The

appeal urged "Women of Russia" to join protest actions, burn draft papers, and by any means possible persuade their husbands and sons against joining the war effort in Afghanistan.¹⁰ Thus the Maria group expanded its focus on the Virgin Mother to encompass contemporary wartime mothers and in the process underline their resistance to the Soviet state.

The KGB did not act decisively until the summer of 1980. Then, on the eve of the Moscow Olympics, three feminist activists, Mamonova, Natalya Malakhovskaya, and Tatyana Goricheva, were bundled onto a special Aeroflot flight and formally expelled from the Soviet Union. Following this, other feminist activists were harassed, searched, jailed, exiled to Siberian gulags, or died suspiciously. This did not stop the flow of material to the West, or the publication of subsequent editions of *Woman and Russia* and *Maria*, the two Soviet feminist journals.

What explains the emergence of an independent Soviet women's movement in 1979–80, sixty years after Lenin proclaimed the complete emancipation of women after the Bolshevik Revolution? Who were the feminist dissidents? How did their ideas and concerns compare with those of Western feminists? Why have they been largely forgotten in the post-Soviet period?

To put the feminist protests into perspective, it is necessary to know the arc of Soviet policies in relation to women. Immediately after seizing power in October 1917, Lenin and the Bolsheviks made marked changes in the legal status of Russian women. Soviet laws guaranteeing equal rights, equal pay for equal work, legalized abortion, universal child care and health care, and simplified marriage and divorce procedures were in theory far more comprehensive than those in the industrialized, capitalist West.¹¹

Official Soviet policy for the emancipation of women had two interrelated objectives: bringing the majority of women into the paid labor force, and freeing women from their traditional domestic responsibilities to allow them to participate equally in work outside the home. The first objective was far more successful than the second, resulting in women's exhausting double burden of full-time work outside the home as well as most responsibilities (child care, cooking, and cleaning) within the home.

Ideology dovetailed with necessity for Soviet rulers. The need for female labor was a factor throughout the country's history. Ringed by hostile powers, determined to industrialize without massive infusions of foreign capital, devastated by purges during the 1930s and then by the Second World War (in which an estimated 27 million Soviet citizens died, by far the highest casualty rate for any combatant nation), the Soviet state had to utilize its workforce to the fullest. In this, Marxist ideology concerning women's emancipation fit the material conditions of the nation.

Relying primarily on legislation and education, the Soviets achieved impressive results. Instituting the equivalent of a massive affirmative action program for women, they virtually eliminated illiteracy, equalized education levels between women and men, hiked the female workforce participation rate to almost 100 percent, and encouraged the training of impressive numbers of women professionals.¹²

Women's emancipation often served specific economic policy goals. Peasant women in the 1930s were four-fifths of the female population. To sell rural

collectivization, party leaders argued that women would gain economic rights in the new system, notably that they could keep their wages "rather than having to turn them over to the family patriarch."¹³ In Central Asia's Islamic republics in the 1920s, the Soviets, lacking a classic industrial proletariat, sought to create a "surrogate proletariat" among women by vigorously promoting female emancipation. Resistance, especially from male family members, was strong; women were murdered for unveiling or for the "crime" of being schoolteachers. Nevertheless, by the end of the Soviet period the status of Central Asian females compared favorably with those in Muslim countries outside the USSR.¹⁴

As this brief survey shows, feminism in the USSR started from a different place from that in the West. Many basic feminist demands had been law for years, and the state, at least in theory, stood for equality between the sexes. Further, in the late Soviet period, the "woman question" was one of the few areas in which a gap between theory and practice was openly acknowledged. After Stalin's death, his regime's assertion that the woman question was resolved gave way to acknowledgement of that gap. Signaling this recognition in his de-Stalinization speech at the 20th Communist Party Congress in 1956, Nikita Khrushchev observed: "Very few women hold leading posts in the party and soviets."¹⁵ In the Brezhnev years (1964–82), before Mikhail Gorbachev initiated his policy of *glasnost* (openness), the press regularly documented and discussed discontent with state support structures (inadequate or nonexistent child care, shortages of consumer goods, poor consumer services) and women's double burden of work in the family and in the workplace.

What differentiated the Soviet feminists' critiques from official acknowledgements of problems with the reality of policies related to women? Although both recognized persistent inequalities, official explanations variously blamed men (the stubborn persistence of patriarchal custom), women (their continued "backwardness"), or the bureaucracy. That overall policy, made by an aging, largely ethnically Russian, and all-male leadership, might be responsible was not mentioned. In contrast, the feminists, like other Soviet dissidents, placed the blame squarely on the political leadership and the system, although their exact analyses varied. For Tatyana Mamonova of the Women and Russia group, the Soviet system, despite its great promise, had become simply the same old sexist wolf in socialist clothing. For the Club Maria, the "tragedy of women" exemplified the moral crisis of Soviet communism, its hypocrisy and abandonment of spiritual values.¹⁶

The original editors of *Woman and Russia* were disillusioned not only with the political system. Like Western women activists of the 1960s angered by the hypocrisy of the New Left in their own countries, the Soviet women were also motivated by the sexism of their male comrades in the dissident community. The Soviet dissident movement schooled the feminists in the politics of protest, but it also fueled their grievances.

The women who published the first feminist *samizdat* were all part of the Second Culture, a loosely organized group of nonconformist, dissident Leningrad writers, poets, and artists, which emerged during the "Khrushchev thaw" of the early 1960s. Nonconformist in their art, the Second Culture men were, as Mamonova wrote in 1984, "with the possible exception of Andrei Sakharov, whom we consider to be truly

democratic,"¹⁷ quite conformist in their treatment of women. They expected women to nurture and serve them, turned a blind eye to wife beating, and ridiculed as second-rate the creative work of their female comrades. Such attitudes could lead to tragedy. The case of one young artist, Tatiana (Tania) Kerner, exemplified the worst outcome of such dismissive treatment. Kerner, pregnant by the editor of a well-known *samizdat* journal, was persuaded by another male dissident leader to keep her baby because "children are the flowers of life." Once the baby was born, neither man showed any interest in helping to nurture the "flower," and Kerner, torn between her love for her child and her love for her art, committed suicide in 1973. After her death, the Second Culture dissidents all acclaimed her art.¹⁸

Tania Kerner's tragic life and death as well as other examples of Second Culture sexism motivated Tatyana Mamonova, the initiator of the Soviet feminist publication, *Woman and Russia*, to work with several other female dissidents on this journal. Mamonova was no stranger to feminist ideas. She had written essays on the woman question in the early 1960s, during the Khrushchev "thaw" of rigid ideas about society and culture. At that time, she sought the support of official state-supported organizations and publications. Primary among these were the Soviet Women's Committee, headed by the first woman in space, the cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, and the magazine *Women of the World* (*Zhenshchiny mira*). But Mamonova's letter to the magazine's editors discussing sexuality and sex roles, with positive remarks about homosexuality and masturbation, brought an invitation to a chat with the KGB. Mamonova had no more success with her friends in the nonconformist art movement. When she tried to talk about women, they dismissed her concerns as frivolous and unimportant, a standard response given to feminists: "We have so many problems already we don't want any more!"¹⁹

In the mid-1970s, seeking to escape the insular Leningrad dissident community, Mamonova traveled the vast expanse of her country. But everywhere she turned, she found new evidence of the oppression of Soviet women. From Central Asia to Kamchatka on the Pacific coast, she heard "the most vile curses, insulting the virtue of women" (the Russian verb meaning to curse is derived from the word for mother). As a single woman travelling alone, she experienced constant harassment. Returning home, marrying and bearing a son, she found childbirth "a tragic experience" in which women suffer needlessly at the hands of callous doctors and nurses. This was in the late 1970s, in the country that had pioneered natural childbirth techniques.²⁰

News about the "significance and seriousness of the women's democratic movement" in the West finally impelled Mamonova to action. Through her connections in the dissident and diplomatic communities, she obtained some feminist books and read Western press accounts of women's demonstrations in Western countries. Especially influenced by Robin Morgan's anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will*, and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, she resolved to start a Soviet women's journal and publish it abroad, "joining with international feminism." At that critical juncture, other dissident women were willing to join her.

As urban dissident intellectuals, Mamonova and her comrades Malakhovskaya, Goricheva, and Julia Voznesenskaya, all permanently expelled in the 1980 pre-Olympic

"cleanup," were hardly typical of the average Soviet woman. Nevertheless, their upbringing was not unusual in the society that eventually expelled them.

All came from loyal Soviet families; none had parents who were dissidents or purge victims. Indeed, Voznesenskaya called her father "a real Communist, dedicated to the Party. The name Lenin for him was sacred." And Malakhovskaya described her parents as part of the "first generation," who believed totally in the Revolution.²¹ At the time they were expelled, the women ranged in age from their mid-thirties to their mid-forties. All had been married; three were divorced. Voznesenskaya and her husband, a party official, had had political differences; Malakhovskaya left her violence-prone husband; the reasons for Goricheva's divorce are unclear. Mamonova is still married; her husband shares her views and took her surname. Goricheva is childless; the others have male children. Malakhovskaya and Mamonova each have one son; Voznesenskaya has two.²²

All but Mamonova were dissidents first and then feminists. Voznesenskaya, protégé of the acclaimed Leningrad poet Tatyana Gnedich, first fought the stifling official culture of socialist realism, organizing unofficial poetry readings and art exhibitions. She claims that at that time she did not make a distinction between "male or female problems." Indeed, in 1975, she rejected Mamonova's proposal to start a feminist journal, asserting that there was no need to create a specifically feminist opposition within the democratic movement as a whole.²³ But when she was sentenced to a Siberian labor camp for her dissident activities, Voznesenskaya heard her sister prisoners' tales of brutal treatment and sexual harassment and experienced some of this herself. Suddenly aware of the "special fate of women," she returned to Leningrad determined to publicize, and hoping to change, the treatment of women in the camps.²⁴

Upon Voznesenskaya's return in 1979, Malakhovskaya asked her to join the feminist project. Although concerned about women's issues, Voznesenskaya still did not consider herself a feminist, but several factors were drawing her in that direction. The ridicule of her Second Culture friends, who claimed that in writing about women she had "gone too far," helped to strengthen her feminist resolve. She finally embraced feminism when KGB agents, literary critics of impeccable taste, during a visit chastised her for publishing writing of such "low artistic standards." Voznesenskaya claimed that this incident inspired her to redouble her efforts to produce excellent feminist work; she joked that she now had an official mandate to improve the quality of feminists' work. In claiming her feminism Voznesenskaya did not abandon her dissident ties; she continued to maintain strong connections with her Second Culture friends.²⁵

As we have seen, Julia Voznesenskaya had learned about sexism from her sister prisoners. Natasha Malakhovskaya came to feminism by a different route, experiencing it daily in her married life. A writer, Malakhovskaya thought she had met a kindred spirit in a young man who "cried when he said how he loved me." She married this sensitive soul. But her husband, while cultivating a public image of gallantry and concern about Christian love, in private drank and beat his wife. His split personality manifested itself in private as well. When Malakhovskaya's work "was not keeping me from preparing dinner," her husband encouraged her writing and showed her first novel to some of his Second Culture friends. As a result, Malakhovskaya was drawn into dissident activity.

She helped edit the *samizdat* religious journal 37, wrote some articles, and finished her second novel. When Tatyana Goricheva told Malakhovskaya about Mamonova's feminist project, Malakhovskaya experienced a flash of consciousness: "It was like an intuition. I felt as if I were standing on a mountain and could see it all in perspective, because suddenly I saw that in the Women's Movement you can say exactly what I wanted to say—everything."²⁶

For Natasha Malakhovskaya, feminism was a vehicle for personal liberation; for Tatyana Goricheva, it opened vistas for spiritual liberation. The oldest of the exiled women, Goricheva claimed to have been a "subconscious feminist" all her life. She initially shared the view of many Soviet intellectuals that feminism was "frivolous." But as a philosophy major at Leningrad State University in the early 1970s, she was drawn to "the question of woman, the question of sex, of love . . . of eternal femaleness." This led her to Russian Orthodoxy and "the concept of Sophia, who is compared to cosmic wisdom and creativity, to the God Mother and to the ideal of feminism." Sophia, Greek for wisdom, has from ancient times been a key concept in Eastern Orthodox theology, sometimes associated with God's role in the Trinity.²⁷

Goricheva formed a women's study group at this time, but then was drawn to *samizdat* publishing. Fired from two jobs for her nonconformist views, she and her husband began publishing the journal 37 (named for their apartment number and the year of one of the most infamous Stalinist purge trials—1937). Active in Second Culture, she learned about Mamonova's feminist journal project and joined it because "the situation of woman is the most evident expression of the tragedy of our society." For Goricheva, the tragedy of life in a repressive secular state manifested itself among women in "false emancipation." She advocated a return to the Russian Orthodox Church, which, because it was the strongest force representing values different from that of the Soviet state, represented "the most progressive movement or force in Russia now."²⁸

The emphasis on Orthodox Christianity as a force for feminism differentiated Goricheva and to a lesser extent Malakhovskaya and Voznesenskaya from Mamonova. Following the Western feminist tradition, Mamonova's feminist views were largely secular. Although religious feminism is not unique to Russia, it has been mostly peripheral to the mainstream Western feminist discourse which critiques patriarchy and women's oppression. Shortly after the *samizdat* *Woman and Russia* appeared, Goricheva, Malakhovskaya, and Voznesenskaya broke with Mamonova, forming the Club Maria, which they called "the first free woman's club in our country," and issuing their own journal, also named *Maria*. The women chose the Madonna, or Maria, the Christian symbol of maternal selflessness, and not Sophia, the Orthodox symbol of feminine wisdom.²⁹

They rejected the secular rationalism symbolized by the Marxist state and also by what they understood as Western feminism. Instead they posited a higher truth as embodied in Orthodox Christian spirituality as reflected in women's traditional roles. Spurning Soviet "compulsory equality," they sought to develop a uniquely Russian approach to feminism, stressing community and a spiritual-religious transformation. Western feminism also was not the answer for them. They asserted that Mamonova, the chief proponent of Western feminism in their group, "was throwing out the baby

with the bathwater" by emphasizing equality and failing to appreciate the differences between the sexes.³⁰

The Club Maria's rejection of Marxism or any other Western rationalist ideology—its anti-individualism, its insistence on a uniquely Russian path to social change, and its focus on the Orthodox Church as the center of opposition to the materialist state—was not new. These attitudes echoed nineteenth-century debates between the Slavophiles and Westernizers, and the dialogue of the dissident movement in the Brezhnev era (1960s and 1970s) between the advocates of Western-style democratization (advocated by nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov) and those favoring a Russian spiritual-moral revival (promoted by novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn).

What was new was the attention paid to the role of women in the church and to the question of female spirituality. In Soviet Russia the churches were filled with old women; the *Maria* feminists argued that Orthodoxy could appeal to younger women as well. For Goricheva, the church had become a consciousness-raising haven, "the only place where women can talk about all their problems. No men come."³¹ Further, the church was not only a sanctuary for women; the shortage of priests enabled women to take over many of the traditional sacramental functions, especially in isolated rural parishes. In no way did this mean equality. The *Maria* feminists did not advocate for opening up the priesthood to women. Their concern was neither equality nor, in their view, making women more like men, but the discovery of the feminine, or more precisely, the Russian feminine essence. That essence, they argued, was the soul of Russia, and in the godless Soviet state it had found refuge in the Church.³²

In exile, the three leaders of the *Maria* group largely went their separate ways. Goricheva enrolled in a Russian Orthodox seminary in Paris and contributed articles to major émigré publications. Voznesenskaya moved to Frankfurt in what was then West Germany where she became heavily involved in émigré politics and also contributed to émigré publications. Although Goricheva wrote frequently for *Maria*, and Voznesenskaya served as the Western representative of the Club *Maria*, the pattern of their feminism remained tied to male dissident concerns and émigré politics, not infrequently becoming subordinated to them. Only Malakhovskaya, in poor health, eking out a meager living for herself and her son in Austria, stayed largely aloof from émigré politics. She was most concerned about expanding the Club *Maria*'s appeal beyond Russian Orthodox members, noting that its members included other Christians, "different nationalities and different religions: Orthodox, Catholic, and Baptists." Where this left Jews and Muslims was not clear. As the chief editor of *Maria*, Malakhovskaya established contact with members of the feminist spirituality movement in the West, publishing an article on women and writing for the feminist journal *Trivvia*. And she also engaged in polemics with Western leftist groups, publishing an open letter in the Trotskyist sectarian Spartacist group's journal *Women and Revolution*, in which she condemned their attacks on the feminists as "petty-bourgeois," and critiqued their "strange, fusty and moth-eaten terminology."³³

As might be expected, Tatyana Mamonova moved most vigorously to "join with international feminism." While *Maria* was published in Russian and French, *Woman and Russia*, edited by Mamonova, was translated into twelve languages, including most



FIGURE 5.2. Feminist dissidents expelled from the Soviet Union make the cover of *Ms. Magazine* in November 1980.

Source: Permission: *Ms. Magazine*.

Western European languages and Japanese. Four volumes of the journal appeared in France, and Beacon Press in the United States published an anthology of the first five volumes. Restricted as an ordinary Soviet citizen from foreign travel while she lived in Russia, Mamonova in exile lost no time in seeing the world, lecturing widely in Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada, and the United States. Shortly after her arrival in the West, Mamonova and Robin Morgan embarked on a whirlwind speaking tour of the United States sponsored by *Ms. Magazine*. To publicize further the plight of her Soviet sisters, Mamonova opened an office and archive in Paris. When she moved to the

United States to accept a Radcliffe Institute fellowship, she eventually transferred her organization’s office and archive to New York.³⁴

To Mamonova, women’s oppression was central. Regardless of class and nationality, women were the “new proletariat,” the “most oppressed class.” Patriarchy held sway everywhere, in socialist and capitalist countries alike. She employed the term *phallocracy* to describe the complex web of patriarchal institutions that hold women in thrall, and argued that women must act as the new revolutionary vanguard and uproot this oppression. Men failed to build socialism; it was women’s turn. Largely eschewing émigré politics, Mamonova agreed with the Sakharov faction in accepting the achievements of the Revolution in abolishing blatant social inequities, but arguing for urgent additional democratic and economic reforms. In a 1981 Edmonton, Alberta speech commemorating International Women’s Day, she asserted: “We do stand for social transformation and we do not think the socialist revolution was in vain. The revolution did contribute to the transformation of the world, even though Russia itself, weakened by hunger, by intervention, by war, was unable to realize its ideals.”³⁵

Mamonova connected with a different Russian tradition from that of the Maria group. She identified strongly with the prerevolutionary democratic intelligentsia and with the feminists and cultural radicals (*nigilistki*) who challenged social mores and fought for equal education. Attempts to integrate socialism and feminism, as in the social experiments of the 1920s advocated by the “Bolshevik feminist” Alexandra Kollontai, interested her greatly. She agreed with radical feminists that these experiments failed because ultimately women were forced to sacrifice feminism to the revolution. Aligning with the democratic rebellions of the late 1960s, she proudly “count[s] myself in the generation of 1968—the generation of the occupation of Czechoslovakia and the rebellion in France.”³⁶

The exiled feminists, like the revolutionaries of past generations, split and traded charges and countercharges. To Mamonova, the Maria group members were not real feminists: “By emphasizing Orthodoxy, Maria takes the teeth out of feminist objectives.” In a prescient observation, given the post-socialist patriarchal renaissance and Putin’s alliance with the Church, Mamonova observed: “Reactionary circles both inside and outside Russia are already beginning to use Orthodox-political feminism as an ideological battering ram in the fight for chauvinistic hegemony.”³⁷ Feminists who remained in the Soviet Union also had conflicting visions and perspectives, but their isolation and vulnerability encouraged cooperation and the need to use all means to increase their visibility. Thus, for example, Galina Grigorieva and Alla Sariban, both feminists who stayed in the Soviet Union, contributed essays to later issues of both *Woman and Russia* and *Maria*.

The exiling of the leading feminists did not at first succeed in suppressing their activity within the USSR. New issues of *Maria* and *Woman and Russia* regularly appeared in *samizdat* format; the flow of articles to the West continued. The Club Maria grew to four chapters, in Leningrad, Moscow, Odessa, and Riga. Contributions to *Woman and Russia* began to reflect the national and ethnic diversity of the Soviet Union, featuring writing from the Baltic republics, Armenia, Central Asia, and Kamchatka.

Articles in *Woman and Russia* by unskilled laborers and about conditions in the then ubiquitous workers' dormitories indicated that feminism was finding sympathizers beyond dissident and intelligentsia circles and even in the Communist Party. Mamonova cited the case of the secretary to a regional committee of the Komsomol (Young Communist League). While the secretary was preparing to receive a delegation from a Leningrad grammar school, a longtime male coworker turned to her and commanded, "Some old bags are going to be here. Get some coffee on the table for them." The woman, outraged, commented to Mamonova, "He spoke to me as if I were a robot without any feelings. And his words carried the scorn of a grandee, scorn for both the delegation and for me as a woman."³⁸

The successes of the feminists in reaching out to larger numbers of Soviet women occurred despite continued official harassment. This harassment included physical abuse, apartment searches, the seizure of manuscripts, books, and typewriters (the printing presses of *samizdat*), job loss, and, for single mothers, threats that their children would be taken from them or drafted into the army. Some of the feminists buckled under this pressure. Natalia Lazareva, illustrator of the original *Woman and Russia* and member of its editorial collective, served a ten-month prison term in 1981 for "anti-Soviet agitation." Arrested again in 1982, she gave detailed information about friends and acquaintances in exchange for a promise that she would be allowed to emigrate. At her trial, however, the authorities sent her East instead of West, sentencing her to four years in the gulag and two years of internal exile rather than to a new life outside the Soviet Union. Galina Grigorieva, mentioned earlier, was a prolific contributor to both *Woman and Russia* and *Maria*. A single mother with four children, she was pressured to appear in a documentary produced by state-run television about the Leningrad feminists and the Club Maria in which she condemned her own activity and that of Julia Voznesenskaya.³⁹

What was the content of the feminist publications and how did they compare with other Soviet dissident and feminist writing in the West? In form, the feminist journals were similar to other Soviet dissident journals. Theoretical essays, discussions, and exposés of everyday life mingled with short stories, poetry, and literary criticism. The contributions were for the most part short (between three and ten pages), and they touched universal themes, such as family and work (inside and outside the home), as well as such familiar Western feminist concerns as women's hidden history, health care, and violence against women.

Reflecting the particular characteristics of Soviet society, some contemporary Western feminist issues—pornography, prostitution, sexist advertising, the empty-nest syndrome, the psychology of women, and feminist therapy—were simply not mentioned. In the USSR, pornography was banned; advertising was limited to political exhortations and the equivalent of public service announcements. Soviet women were expected to hold full-time paid jobs all their adult lives. They generally married and had children young, and did not wait to enter the world of paid work until after their children were grown. Freud was virtually unknown in the USSR; the language and jargon of psychology did not pervade everyday speech; counseling happened in the work collective or, more commonly, informally in the

family. Therapy services were rudimentary at best; individual treatment was viewed as violating collective norms.

In the Soviet feminists' writing, sexuality, sexual relations, and the "politics of orgasm" also received little attention. This reflected partially a general reticence about such matters (it was considered particularly crude or "uncultured" for women to talk openly about sex), and partially the view of some Maria members (particularly Goricheva) that celibacy was preferable. This was not unknown in the West; the Cambridge feminist collective Female Liberation advocated celibacy in its early publications in 1969–70. But celibacy was not a mainstream feminist approach in the West. Here again, Mamonova was closest to the dominant trends in the West, advocating in her writings and speeches free sexual expression, both heterosexual and homosexual, in the spirit of early Soviet sexual policy. For Mamonova, love had many forms; she condemned narrow judgment about sexual behavior.⁴⁰

Lesbianism, a taboo Soviet subject, was the topic of one essay, and one love poem was published in the 1980 *Woman and Russia Al'manakh*. It appeared, not surprisingly, in discussions of women in prison and of the noted poet Marina Tsvetaeva (to reclaim her love poems to women), and in a description of coming out written by a young Lithuanian advocating "the right to be myself." Soviet policies toward homosexuality varied from extremely progressive, in the regime's early years, to very repressive, from Stalin's reign to the fall of the Soviet Union. The USSR was the first state to legalize homosexuality (in December 1917), but seventeen years later, Stalin reinstated criminal penalties for men. Although lesbianism was not a crime, if discovered, lesbians were considered deviant, and could be institutionalized. In any case, the general conditions of Soviet life did not make same-sex relationships easy. Housing was assigned to families or single individuals, not to two unrelated people of the same sex. Reflecting state priorities, families with children received preference for new apartments, while the unmarried and childless couples were at the bottom of the list. Even among the dissident feminists, there was disagreement about lesbian and gay rights. At least one of the *Maria* editors considered it an "alien" issue.⁴¹

The feminists exposed the reality behind Soviet propaganda about women's liberation. The much-touted system of free health care was one target. For example, how did free abortion on demand work in practice in the USSR? Natasha Maltseva, in "The Other Side of the Coin," gave a chilling account of a typical abortion. Concerns about the declining Russian birthrate made the authorities extremely reluctant to encourage abortions. At the same time, the paucity of alternative forms of birth control (the pill was considered too dangerous; condoms were in short supply and so thick that they were called "galoshes") made abortion often the only means of fertility control. Nevertheless, a woman who wanted an abortion had to cope with intimidating bureaucratic procedures (even by Soviet standards) and the hostility of her doctors. If she persisted, she would find herself at an abortion clinic such as the one on Leningrad's Lermontov Prospect, which treated 200 to 300 women a day. The clinics were called "slaughterhouses" by the women who used them. There was no privacy; two to six patients were operated on at the same time; those waiting in the

operating room saw "the faces distorted in torment and the bloody mess flowing out of the women's wombs."⁴²

Choosing to have a child was not much better, from a medical point of view. The descriptions of unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, and staff callousness showed childbirth as an often nightmarish experience. The Soviets pioneered natural childbirth techniques, but feminist accounts indicate that inadequate training, isolation (no outside visitors, including the father, were allowed during the birth or for seven to ten days following childbirth), and an overburdened staff left women largely to recover on their own in Soviet maternity hospitals.⁴³

Those with children had access to an extensive network of child care centers and summer camps. But again theory and practice differed widely. In a 1980 article Vera Golubeva assailed the quality of care in these facilities. She indicted the venality and indifference of day care workers, which she attributed to the low pay and low status of their jobs. Child care centers were overcrowded and staffed by "middle-aged and elderly women" who were so economically strapped that they would steal food and supplies. Golubeva reported that at summer camps and sanatoria conditions were no better, hygiene was a sham, and disease a common occurrence.⁴⁴

Soviet women spent a large part of their time at paid work, and several essays in the feminist journals described working conditions at different levels of society. At the bottom rungs of the industrial economy, long hours and arduous work were the rule; safety was often ignored and protective legislation disregarded in the pressure to fulfill quotas. Valentina Dobrokhotova, in "Woman Laborer," observed that much of the heavy, monotonous, and dirty work of Soviet society was performed by women. Indeed, there is no word for cleaning *man* in Russian. Dobrokhotova, describing her job in the mailroom of a train station north of Leningrad, noted that in one twelve-hour shift a woman was expected to handle 300 parcels weighing between fifteen and twenty-two pounds. In the rail yards and on trains women worked the least desirable jobs, "sweeping out passenger cars, cleaning up the floor after drunks, endlessly wiping off tables, making up berths and cleaning out toilets." Most accepted the notion that this was "woman's work," but some escaped to another time-honored form of female labor—prostitution—which "flourishe[d] in our train stations."⁴⁵

For the skilled professional, alienation took other forms. Malakhovskaya, in "The Most Female Profession," described how bureaucratic regulations crippled creativity and individual initiative among high school teachers. The educators, mostly women, had to contend with large classes (averaging between thirty and forty students), standardized lesson plans (the same lesson was taught on the same day in schools from Vladivostok to Leningrad), and constant supervision. In the more prestigious types of careers, women were not treated equally. A career scientist interviewed by Galina Grigorieva noted that women seeking professional advancement were treated differently from men and subject to "constant degradation." And, despite laws mandating equality, it was mothers who shouldered the bulk of child care responsibilities. Such discussions were not off-limits in the official press. Letters to the widely read *Literaturnaya gazeta* (Literary Gazette) echoed similar themes. A 1983 article in the Gazette was occasioned by a letter from a female reader claiming that women could achieve career advancement only at the expense of all personal life.⁴⁶

But even those women who did focus on their homes and families often found little shelter at home from the frustrations of Soviet daily life. Both *Maria* and *Woman and Russia* devoted a good deal of space to critiquing the Soviet family and relations between the sexes. Their central theme was simple: Soviet men were not holding up their half of the sky. Men may have given up their traditional responsibilities, but not their traditional rights. Mamonova, in "Human Birth," pseudonymously attributed to Rimma Batalova, lamented that socialism did not change the basic division of labor. Women brought forth children in pain; men controlled them once they were born. Men had no interest in changing the system, she wrote, they'd rather "build new rockets" or "start new wars, which will destroy your children." Feminists wrote that once a year, on International Women's Day, men would dust the furniture, or sometimes "help" with the dishes or take care of the baby. But real emancipation was not their concern.⁴⁷

Looking to the past for different models, Malakhovskaya, in "The Matriarchal Family," argued the traditional family had more equality, with its "balance of pain, balance of risk, and balance of work." In contrast, the modern Soviet family fostered an imbalance. Women did all the work; they bore children, nurtured and fed them, reared them and supported them. Soviet conditions did not make this easy. Employers did not like to hire women with children, for they feared their taking too many sick days. In Soviet conditions with frequent consumer goods shortages, feeding the family meant standing in long lines for hours on end. The only lines with a majority of men were those at beer stands.⁴⁸

Answering the standard Russian revolutionary question popularized by Lenin in the first years of the twentieth century, "What is to be Done?" Malakhovskaya envisioned the emergence of the matriarchal family. Woman "has to become everything, so she is becoming everything." Responsibilities became rights; women "who have not known male support will never agree to become the appendage of a man . . . Soon they will be both the physical and spiritual creators of the future world."⁴⁹

Malakhovskaya found solace in an image of matriarchal self-sufficiency; Goricheva looked to the past for her vision of the future. Echoing the dominant theme in the *Maria* journals, she rejected the ideology of emancipation, condemning it for blurring the distinctions between the sexes, creating "doubly castrated" male "hermaphrodites" and coarse, hard women "deprived of all attraction and romanticism." In place of emancipation, she urged a return to Biblical Christian models. Soviet men should study "God and his image"; Soviet women should abandon their "infantile egoism," "discover the Other," and learn from the Madonna. Soviet models of equality were flawed; sex differences should be celebrated, she maintained. Goricheva also argued for a rediscovery of the feminine in women and "defeminizing" men, but she was vague about the implications of this return to the destiny of anatomy. She did not advocate a return to tsarist laws clearly defining patriarchal authority in marriage. Although dubious about their practical value, she favored equal rights laws.⁵⁰

Other Club *Maria* members went further than Goricheva in rejecting emancipation and embracing more traditional concepts of sex roles to the point that they represented a reaction not only to Soviet concepts of women's liberation but to any notion of feminism. Representing an extreme but not atypical perspective in constructing an anti-Soviet view of women, Galina Grigorieva argued against abortion and defended

the *Domostroi*. This was the infamous sixteenth-century Russian tract prescribing female obedience, describing women's domestic duties, and laying out in detail methods for "disciplining" wives. In Grigorieva's view, Soviet women needed to learn "humility."⁵¹

In Soviet society, with its carefully defined vision of the future, those seeking an alternative vision often looked to the past or to the heavens. For the Maria women, the cult of the Madonna offered a welcome contrast to the cult of Lenin. The Russian Orthodox Church, with its established institutional framework, identification with national aspirations, rich tradition of female devotion, and some history of protest against tsars and especially commissars, offered an alternative to the all-powerful secular state. The patriarchy of the Church and the ideology of the Club Maria complemented each other. Indeed, some Orthodox men praised the Club for championing "the traditional role of wife and mother, the anchor, the disseminator of stability and the moral health of the family." Continued KGB harassment only cemented this alliance. And if Grigorieva's confession was as reported, the police taught a bitter kind of humility.⁵²

Tatyana Mamonova also found inspiration in the past, but from the ideals expressed by Lenin and the hopes kindled by the Bolshevik Revolution. These included not only political but also social and cultural changes. Mamonova, the only married woman among the feminist exiles, was the least committed to the traditional family, or to traditional sex roles. She embraced the concept of the hermaphrodite, noting its origin in the ancient myth that the gods did not have time to divide human beings into two distinct entities and therefore the two sexes yearn for each other. Before current debates about the construction of polarized gender identities and "performing gender," Mamonova presciently argued for the union of the sexes, not their further differentiation. She adamantly rejected restrictive laws and customs, arguing that they held women in bondage for centuries. Arguing for plurality rather than uniformity of expression, she asked, "Why fear . . . diversity?"⁵³

The interplay between traditional Western feminism and the Orthodox worship of the feminine continued to be a theme and defining motif for Goricheva and Voznesenskaya. Goricheva has been the most steadfast in arguing that the Orthodox Church is the true vessel of feminism and gender equality. She has produced a steady stream of books and pamphlets advocating for this view. The most ambivalent about emigration, soon after arriving in the West she questioned in her diary, "Is it possible that emigration has set me back?" Reflecting the age-old Russian ambivalence toward the West, she turned Russia's suffering under the Soviets into a positive: "Russia today is going through the ninth circle of hell and at the same time the luckiest people in the world live in it."⁵⁴

Voznesenskaya's path was less straight. After living in various German cities with her two sons, she moved to a Russian Orthodox convent in Normandy, France, in the last years of the twentieth century. As the new century dawned she returned to Germany, where she lived as part of the émigré community until her death in Berlin in February 2015.

Malakhovskaya has explicitly rejected the Orthodox beliefs of her early exile, when she was part of the Club Maria. For the last nine years she has contributed

to Mamonova’s journal *Woman and Earth*. Mamonova has remained steadfast in embracing the feminist label, continuing to publish *Woman and Earth*, an eclectic mélange of art, travel information, archival material, and essays on various woman-related topics.⁵⁵

Mamonova’s feminism is largely invisible in her native land as well as in the West. Western fascination with Soviet-style women’s liberation cooled long ago as the reality of Soviet life became undeniable. In this, Mamonova and her group played a role. The feminists never received anywhere near the attention, support, and lucrative prizes received by many of their male dissident counterparts. On the cover of *Ms. Magazine* in 1980 and touring the country with *Ms.* founder and editor Robin Morgan, they dropped from the spotlight several years later. The thirtieth anniversary of the feminists’ exile was not considered worth noting in the pages of *Ms.*⁵⁶

Valerie Sperling is prominent among the scholars who have argued that under the rule of the hypermasculine Vladimir Putin, feminist protesters such as Pussy Riot and the lesser known *feministki* have the best chance of articulating a persuasive alternative view. As Sperling notes, a feminist analysis can be effective in “shining a light on the ramifications of hierarchically arranged gender norms for democratic politics.”⁵⁷ Given the current political climate in Russia the success of such attempts at opposition are dubious.

Nevertheless, the erasure of awareness of an autonomous feminism during Soviet times contributes to a distortion of women’s history not only in the post-socialist space but globally. As Jennifer Suchland observes, “despite the relative absence of the second world in the global turn in U.S. women’s studies, women in the region have always been a part of the global.”⁵⁸ In the case of the Soviet feminists, a true transnational approach, one that does not privilege first world experiences and narratives, can make more visible this pioneering autonomous feminist resistance in the second world socialist space.

Notes

- 1 The author is grateful to Tatyana Mamonova for her enormously helpful feedback on this article. Parts of this essay appeared in a previous article (Rochelle Ruthchild, “Sisterhood and Socialism,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7, 2 [1983]: 4–12).
- 2 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “The Tasks of the Working Women’s Movement in the Soviet Union,” in *The Women Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1951), 50–51.
- 3 Masha Gessen, *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014), 118.
- 4 https://slon.ru/russia/prigovor_pussy_riot-821705.xhtml, accessed November 27, 2015, 32.
- 5 Redi Koobak, *Whirling Stories: Postsocialist Feminist Imaginaries and the Visual Arts* (Linköping: Linköping Studies in Arts and Sciences, 2013), 37.
- 6 Koobak, *Whirling Stories*, 35. See also Jennifer Suchland, “Is Postsocialism Transnational?” *Signs* 36, 4 (Summer 2011): 837–62.
- 7 Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild, *Equality and Revolution: Women’s Rights in the Russian Empire, 1905–1917* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 125.

- 8 Gessen, *Pussy Riot*, 61–62; Valerie Sperling, *Sex, Politics, & Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 248.
- 9 The following are the sources of Soviet *feminist* writing cited in this article: English language: *Woman and Russia: An Almanac for Women about Women* (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1980)—hereinafter cited as *WR* (Sheba)—is the only English translation of the first volume of *Woman and Russia*. The anthology *Women and Russia: Feminist Writings from the Soviet Union* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) edited by Tatyana Mamonova, contains material culled from the first five volumes of *Woman and Russia*. French language: *Rossianka* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1980); *Femmes et Russie* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1981); and *Voix de Femmes en Russie* (Paris: DeNoel/Gonthier, 1982) are the second, third, and fourth volumes of *Woman and Russia*. *WR* (Beacon) contains some articles from each issue, but there is no complete English translation of these works. *Maria* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1981) is the French translation of the first volume of *Maria*. The second and third volumes of *Maria* were published in the West by the Club Maria: in Frankfurt am Main (1982) and Paris (1982), respectively. The appeal is in *Maria 2* (Paris, 1981).
- 10 For the most comprehensive contemporary English account of this incident, see Robin Morgan, "The First Feminist Exiles from the USSR," *Ms.*, November 1980, 49–56, 80–3, 102, 107–8.
- 11 A good survey of the prerevolutionary women's movement and early Soviet efforts at women's liberation is Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, 1991).
- 12 Norton T. Dodge, *Women in the Soviet Economy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 65–6; Michael Paul Sacks, *Women's Work in Soviet Russia* (New York: Praeger Press, 1976), 56.
- 13 Dodge, *Women in the Soviet Economy*, 65–6.
- 14 See Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Nancy Lubin, "Women in Soviet Central Asia: Progress and Contradictions," *Soviet Studies* 33, 2 (April 1981), 182–203; and Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Soviet Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).
- 15 Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989), 140.
- 16 Mamonova's edited collection *Women and Russia* contains a representative sample of articles reflecting the range of views of the feminists before they split into separate factions with their own publications.
- 17 Mamonova, *Women and Russia*, xiv. For Mamonova, "Sakharov had a healthy democratic mind. He was not for revival of the Church in Russia, he was not for legalization of pornography, he respected women, Elena Bonner, his wife was an example of it." Tatyana Mamonova, email message to author, February 3, 2016.
- 18 Tatyana Mamonova, "La nouvelle chasse aux sorcières," *Rossianka* (Paris, 1980), 37–9; *WR* (Sheba), 10–11.
- 19 Information about Mamonova's life can be found in Morgan, "First Feminist Exiles"; "Mamonova: Roots of a Russian Feminist," *Sojourner* (March 1981): 5; "Tatyana Mamonova: A Feminist Speaks," *Dialoh* 13, 69 (March 1981): 4–5, 10. Alix Holt, "The First Soviet Feminists," in *Soviet Sisterhood*, ed. Barbara Holland (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985), 237–65, is a good contemporary survey of

- the feminist’s activity. After her exile, Mamonova eventually settled in the United States. She lives in New York City. She published the journal *Woman and Russia Almanac* from 1979 to 1991 and has published *Woman and Earth* from 1991 to the present.
- 20 Morgan, *Sojourner*, 5. For an informative study of natural childbirth in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, see Paula Michaels, *Lamaze: An International History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 - 21 On Voznesenskaya, see Morgan, “First Feminist Exiles,” 51. Malakhovskaya referred to her parents in a speech at the Wellesley Conference on Women Writers, April 1981.
 - 22 Morgan, “First Feminist Exiles.”
 - 23 Morgan, *Sojourner*, 53; and Julia Voznesenskaya, “Le mouvement féministe dans notre pays,” *Maria* 1 (Paris, 1981), 37–8.
 - 24 In exile, Voznesenskaya’s most well-known publication was real-life stories from the camps. See Julia Voznesenskaya, *Women’s Decameron* (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1986).
 - 25 Morgan, “First Feminist Exiles,” 53; Voznesenskaya, “Le mouvement féministe dans notre pays,” 38–9.
 - 26 Morgan, “First Feminist Exiles,” 83.
 - 27 For an excellent explanation of the role of Sophia in Russian Orthodoxy and its links to feminism, see Brenda Meehan, “Wisdom/Sophia, Russian Identity, and Western Feminist Theology,” *Cross Currents* 46, 2 (1996): 149–68.
 - 28 Morgan, *Sojourner*, 54–6.
 - 29 For a concise summary of the Maria group’s views, see “Réponses aux questions du journal français, *L’Alternative*,” *Maria* 1 (Paris, 1981), 85–102.
 - 30 Voznesenskaya, “Le mouvement,” 41.
 - 31 Morgan, “First Feminist Exiles,” 56.
 - 32 Goricheva was the most forthright exponent of this view. See Tatyana Goricheva, “Des sorcières dans l’espace,” *Maria* 1 (Paris, 1981), 53–60, the *L’Alternative* interview, and Morgan, “First Feminist Exiles,” 54–6.
 - 33 In this period of early exile, Goricheva contributed articles and reviews to three major émigré publications, *Russkaia mysl’*, *Kontinent*, and *Possev*. All discuss various aspects of the theology, especially Russian Orthodox theology. Although Goricheva continued to be a frequent contributor to *Maria*, her writings in this period made no mention of feminism, nor did they indicate any special concern with women’s issues. See, for example, *Kontinent* 26 (1980): 415; and *Kontinent* 28 (1981): 416–21. Voznesenskaya wrote frequently for *Possev*. Her contributions to émigré publications also indicated no special interest in women, even when the topic seemed to warrant it. See, for example, her article on Soviet street people: “Eschche odin klass?” *Possev* 3 (1983): 31–4. She did, however, write the *Women’s Decameron*. In the early years of her exile Voznesenskaya lived in various German cities, at first with her two sons. From 1996 to 1999, she resided in the Lesna convent of the Blessed Virgin in France affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, in Provemont, Normandy. There, with the blessing of the Mother Superior Athanasius, she wrote a novel-parable, “My Posthumous Adventures.” From 2002 she lived in Berlin where she died on February 20, 2015 (<http://www.pravmir.ru/v-berline-skonchalas-yuliya-voznensenskaya/>, accessed February 2, 2016). Information about Malakhovskaya is partially from personal communication, February 17, 1983. Malakhovskaya’s *Trivia* article is “Terra Incognita: On Women and Writing,” *Trivia* 1 (Fall 1982): 27–36. Her exchange with *Women and Revolution* is “Open Letter to the Editors of the Journal *Women and*

- Revolution*," *Women and Revolution* 23 (Winter 1981–82): 7. See also Holt, "The First Soviet Feminists," 258–60. For the past nine years, Malakhovskaya has contributed to Mamonova's *Woman and Earth*, and according to Mamonova "strongly opposes the Orthodox church in contemporary Russia . . . and has become a real feminist" (Tatyana Mamonova, personal communication, February 1, 2016).
- 34 Morgan, "First Feminist Exiles." Mamonova, personal communication, 2016.
- 35 Tatyana Mamonova, International Women's Day Speech, Edmonton, Alberta, March 1981.
- 36 Tatyana Mamonova, "The Feminist Movement in the Soviet Union," in *Women and Russia*, xiii–xxiii. The 1968 quote is from p. xiv.
- 37 The Editors (this appears to be mostly Mamonova), "Actions and Counteractions," in *Women and Russia*, ed. Mamonova, 235–44, 237.
- 38 The Editors, "The Everyday Gulag," in *Women and Russia*, ed. Mamonova, 229–33, 231.
- 39 Information about harassment can be found in Mamonova, "The Feminist Movement," in Mamonova, *Women and Russia*, and Voznesenskaya, "Le mouvement," 51–2. Information about Lazareva is from Mamonova, "The Everyday Gulag," 230; *Possev* 7 (July 1982): 4; *USSR News Brief*, May 31, 1982, 6. The news about Grigorieva's confession is from *USSR News Brief*, September 30, 1982, 6.
- 40 For Goricheva's views, see "Rejoice, Redemption from the Tears of Eve," *WR* (Sheba), 27–33; and "La femme et l'Église," *Maria* 1 (Paris, 1981), 103–12. For Mamonova's views, see "A propos de liberté sexuelle," *Rossianka* (Paris, 1980), 75–83. For a description of life in a dormitory for women workers and the lack of privacy for marrieds and unmarrieds alike, see Lidia Koulagina, "Le foyer de travailleuses," *Voix de femmes* (Paris, 1981), 87–93.
- 41 See Inessa Tominaite, "The Right to Be Myself"; and Elena Lastenko, "Verses from the Cycle 'to My Contemporary';" both in Mamonova, *Women and Russia*. Tominaite is on 145–9; Lastenko is on 151–3. On prison, see Galina Grigorieva, "The Woman and Prison," *Freedom Appeals* 5 (May–June 1980): 8–12. On Tsvetaeva, see Zhanna Ivina, "With the Grandeur of Homer and the Purity of Sappho," in *WR* (Sheba), 95–102; and in Mamonova, *Women and Russia*, 155–63. In the Sheba version, Ivina's essay is incorrectly attributed to Ivina Tallin.
- 42 Natasha Maltseva, "The Other Side of the Coin," in Mamonova, *Women and Russia*, 111–16. The quote is on pp. 115–16. The same essay, translated as "The Other Side of the Medal," is listed as written by Vera Golubeva in *WR* (Sheba), 51–6; and as "The Other Side of the Coin," in *Freedom Appeals* 5 (1980), 3–7. For corroboration of this account, see William Knaus, *Inside Russian Medicine* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), 210–211.
- 43 For a contemporary Western scholarly account of Soviet practices, see Jean Ispa, "Childbearing Experiences and Attitudes: A Comparison," *Slavic Review* 42, 1 (Spring 1983): 1–13. See also Paula Michaels, *Lamaze*; and for a comprehensive survey of post-Soviet conditions, see Michele Rivkin-Fish, *Women's Health in Post-Soviet Russia: The Politics of Intervention* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).
- 44 Golubeva, "The Other Side of the Coin," *Freedom Appeals*, 6–7.
- 45 Valentina Dobrokhotova, "Woman Worker," in Mamonova, *Women and Russia*, 5–9.
- 46 Natalia Malakhovskaya, "The Most Female Profession," *Maria* 5 (Leningrad, 1981); Galina Grigorieva and Svetlana Sonova, "Interview with a Career Woman," in Mamonova, *Women and Russia*, 11–19; Sil'va Kaputikian, "Byt' zhenshchinoi – velikii trud," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 30, 1983, 13.

- 47 Rimma Batalova, “The Birth of Humanity,” *WR* (Sheba), 43–9.
- 48 Natalia Malakhovskaya, “The Matriarchal Family,” *WR* (Sheba), 35–42.
- 49 Malakhovskaya, “The Matriarchal Family,” 35–42.
- 50 Goricheva, “Des sorcières dans l’espace,” 53–60.
- 51 Galina Grigorieva, “Smirenje i poslushanie: psikhologicheskii podkhod i opyt,” *Maria* 3 (Leningrad; Paris, 1982), 10–12.
- 52 Russian “Feminist Dissidents” vs. *Women and Revolution*,” *Women and Revolution* 23 (Winter 1981): 6–17.
- 53 Mamonova, “A propos,” 81–3.
- 54 Tatiana Goricheva, *Talking about God Is Dangerous: The Diary of a Russian Dissident* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 95. Both quotes are from the same February 1981 entry in Goricheva’s diary. Goricheva’s other major published works are *Docheri Iova: Khristianstvo i Feminizm* (Daughters of Job: Christianity and Feminism) (Saint Petersburg: “Alga-Fond” “Stupeni,” 1992); *Tol’ko v Rossiii est’ vesna! O tragedii sovremennogo zapada* (Only in Russia is There Spring! On the Tragedy of the Modern West) (Moscow: Russkii Khronograf, 2006); and selected essays from the religious journal *Nadezhda* (Hope), collected by its editor, Zoya Krakhmalnikova, and edited and published by Goricheva, *Cry of the Spirit: Witnesses to Faith in the Soviet Union* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).
- 55 Mamonova maintains an apartment in St. Petersburg, and in 2008 was named Woman of the Year by the Vishnevskaya Association of that city. She has no plans to return to her native land. In 2011 she was granted US citizenship. *Woman and Earth 35th Anniversary issue* 10 (2015): 124.
- 56 A friend, Bonnie Marshall, and I wrote a letter to the editor; this was the only way the anniversary was noted.
- 57 Sperling, *Sex, Politics, & Putin*, 308–9. Chandra Niles Folsom, an associate of Mamonova, has been in contact with members of Pussy Riot (Mamonova, personal communication, February 2, 2016).
- 58 Suchland, “Is Postsocialism Transnational?,” 848.

Part Two

Reconsidering “Second Wave”
Feminist Genealogies

On the “F”-Word as Insult and on Feminism as Political Practice: Women’s Mobilization for Rights in Chile

Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney

Women’s activism in the first decades of the twentieth century: Fashioning feminist beliefs and cross-class alliances

In 1922, Chilean educator Amanda Labarca addressed her audience at a gathering in the United States and declared that she expected “a new feminist creed” to develop in the Latin American Southern Cone. She envisioned a feminist practice that was “more domestic, more closely linked to the future of the home, the family, and the children” than the “Saxon feminism” marked by the “exaggerated individualism” that she had encountered in the United States.¹ As a student at Columbia University and the Sorbonne, Labarca had come across feminist ideas in New York and Paris. She returned to Chile with the conviction that Chilean women needed a feminist consciousness that originated from their own historical experiences.²

Labarca’s engagement exemplifies the direction of feminine activism within the Chilean elite and middle sectors during the first decades of the twentieth century. Labarca and others promoted education as a key tool to extend the range of political rights and obligations of citizens, and they sought to pave the way for women’s political participation through such organizations as the *Círculo de Lectura* (the Women’s Reading Circle), which Labarca founded in 1915. Educated women, like Labarca, also brought their vision of how to improve society to the *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres* (the National Council of Women), an organization that endorsed an extension of women’s civil and legal rights.³ In 1944, Labarca became the president of the *Federación Chilena de Instituciones Femeninas* (the Chilean Federation of Feminine Institutions, FECHIF) which justified its advocacy for female suffrage and women’s political participation by arguing that women should be both responsible citizens and mothers. The FECHIF followed goals comparable to another women’s organization, the *Movimiento Pro-Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena* (the Movement for the Emancipation of Chilean Women, MEMCh), that lobbied for women’s suffrage but used a different mobilization strategy, discussed below.⁴

In the first decades of the twentieth century, many Chilean female activists prioritized political participation in service of the improvement of family and community life and rejected those feminist projects that sought women's emancipation exclusively for the sake of new individual freedoms. They expected that women who mobilized for political rights would also give adequate attention to motherhood. Women's activism, at times, mirrored benevolent maternal engagement. Indeed, women who sought to expand their political responsibilities often used references to motherhood as a justification for their actions—a pattern that fit what historian Karen Mead succinctly characterized as beneficent maternalism, referring “to any organized activism on the part of women who claim that they possess gendered qualifications to understand and assist less-fortunate women and, especially, children.”⁵ Chilean women employed both religious references as well as the understanding of women's “natural” maternal responsibilities to overcome the institutional hostilities of their patriarchal environment. Roman Catholic religious practice emphasized the view of womanhood as synonymous with motherhood, thereby contributing to the gendered expectations of women's biologically determined qualities as benevolent caregivers driven by compassion. Elite women's beneficent activism in urban settings often consisted of charitable missions aimed at saving poor women who lived difficult lives in a tense urban environment.⁶

In Santiago, Chile's capital city, women engaged in this form of beneficent maternalist activism in such organizations as the Liga de Damas Chilenas (Chilean Ladies' League), which sought to alleviate the alarming consequences of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization. They presented political positions in their publication *El Eco de las Señoras de Santiago* (The Echo of the Ladies of Santiago), claiming that they had to step in where men had failed to protect the proper values of their nation. They claimed to be obliged to get involved in the political process not for their own sake, but for the sake of the fatherland.

Why ... remain cold spectators of the political-religious drama that started to unravel in the Chamber of Deputies ... Because we are ladies? NO. You have declared us unfit to elect representatives of the nation, ... You have excluded us from political meetings ... But you have not sealed our lips, nor can you seal them, AND WE WILL TALK. We have the right to write AND WE WILL WRITE. Yes, we will defend the threatened institutions, the violated religious rights, and the dignity of the tainted fatherland.⁷

The Liga united elite women who sought to resolve their society's problems also by correcting the misguided behaviors of the poor, both men and women. They made it their mission to “uplift” poor women and sought to improve working-class motherhood.⁸

Historian Asunción Lavrin asserts that maternalist activism was quite common not only in Chile but throughout the Latin American Southern Cone, where feminists extended women's role at home to society at large. According to Lavrin, women's “‘innate female qualities’ ... were called forward to serve the general cause of social reform and to validate women's presence in politics. Their presumed ‘higher sensitivity’ to others' feelings and their higher sense of moral duty were the bases for their claim

to a place in the sun.”⁹ Political scientist Elsa M. Chaney even identified women she called *supermadres*. She coined the term to show that a woman who accepted a political position often defined her own role “as a kind of supermadre, tending the needs of her big family in the larger *casa* of the municipality or even the nation.”¹⁰

Women, as mothers, often expanded the realm of their involvement in politics by accepting multiple tasks outside the home, but in this capacity, they did not eradicate the restrictive effects of the Chilean patriarchy of the time. Women's activism remained situated in a patriarchal society that constrained women's political and economic participation and placed extraordinary restrictions on married women: the Chilean Civil Code secured the uncontested legal authority for male heads of household to control the lives of wives and children. Political leaders rejected proposals to reform the Civil Code to return to women the rights they had lost in marriage; in their view, changing the code would have seriously challenged not only the authority of the *pater familias* but also the entire social order.¹¹

Although they did not seek to overturn the foundations of the patriarchal regime, women nonetheless sought to break old boundaries by challenging those biological determinisms that limited women's political and professional choices. Not all women simply accepted women's “natural” role as mothers. Some contested the biologically determined traditions and simplified gendered binaries that assigned political responsibilities to men and domestic duties to women. In her writing on feminism, Labarca insisted that “not all men have the aptitude for abstract ideas or a vocation for the political struggle; it is the same with women. Modern science has demonstrated that there are no fundamental differences between the two; but rather an immense variety of types among one and the other, happily.”¹²

Individual women's writings offer rich evidence to show the “immense variety of types” of women activists that Labarca defined as a reality of life. In the 1930s, Chilean author and feminist Marta Vergara wrote a memoir in which she exposed the ill-effects of what she considered the misguided biological determinism that limited the choices women could make about their lives. She described her own difficulty with conforming to societal norms and to the culturally prescribed expectation that a wife would obey her husband's rules. She asserted that women had to take action and expressed her support of the extraordinary campaigns of the MEMCh. *Memchistas*, she asserted, adequately addressed the concerns of “women of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat” and confronted issues ranging from “the right to vote to the spread[ing] of methods of contraception among the destitute.”¹³

Memchistas, women, workers, and the political left

In the 1930s, MEMCh became the first women's organization to effectively cross class boundaries, connect the issue of women's rights to the discourse of the political left, and make a case for the expansion of women's rights as citizens. *Memchistas* spoke out for maternalist mobilization as well as the individual rights and responsibilities of women workers, and they helped women gain the right to vote in municipal elections in 1934 and win unrestricted suffrage in 1949.

Memchistas effectively linked issues of motherhood to the needs of working women, taking as their cue the discourse of multiple leftist initiatives.¹⁴ They took up the call for suffrage and demanded the improvement of women's legal status, subjects promoted earlier by such leaders as Luis Emilio Recabarren, founder of the 1912 Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Obrero Socialista), which later became the Communist Party.¹⁵ Both male and female workers participated in actions to improve wages and working conditions, in keeping with socialist and anarchist political agendas. Women workers also formed unions of their own, and male-dominated labor unions relied on the participation of both men and women.

While women workers helped carve out new spaces for women to be leaders and brought feminist positions to labor struggles, working-class feminists did not challenge normative gender roles. Historian Elizabeth Hutchison shows that political elites addressed what they saw as the challenges caused by industrialization and modernization by supporting the growth of an industrial female labor force without compromising fundamental components of patriarchy and the gendered definition of citizenship.¹⁶ Working women sought to improve their labor conditions and challenged some aspects of gender-based discrimination; they contributed socialist feminist critiques of capitalism that significantly strengthened the political presence of the Chilean left, but the transformative power of working-class feminisms was compromised because male-dominated unions and political parties incorporated and marginalized their demands. However, despite the marginalization of feminist claims in some contexts, *Memchistas* could still draw directly on extant notions, presented by leftist parties, of women's rights as mothers' and families' rights.¹⁷

The progressive agenda of the MEMCh emerged within the accelerated climate of mobilization for social reforms in the 1930s and the new channels of political participation provided during the Popular Front period.¹⁸ Starting in 1935, *Memchistas* were most active in Santiago and also maintained a national presence. They followed political developments and legislative proposals, submitted proposals of their own, and provided a regular forum for the discussion of significant and timely questions from a woman's perspective. Addressing the needs of working women with particular urgency, they demanded "equal pay for equal work" as a central ingredient of women's emancipation.¹⁹ *Memchistas* defended women's choices in the labor market and commanded better working conditions for mothers, and they also changed the discourse of women's rights by addressing women as *individual* wage earners.²⁰ The latter helped provide arguments for maternity leave as a woman's *right*, not as a privilege.²¹ From the perspective of *Memchistas*, rights and responsibilities went hand in hand; ergo, national politics should not remain an exclusively male affair.²²

Testing the "F"-word: On "feminist silence" and new paradigms of women's rights

Chilean feminists have often lamented a so-called feminist silence that allegedly ensued in the 1950s, in the aftermath of their successful struggle for the right to vote; ostensibly, this silence was due to a lack of feminist demands that could incite new

rounds of action. Feminist activist Julieta Kirkwood, who coined the term, traced women's activism and found a lack of public engagement as well as an absence of relevant publications by Chilean feminists from the 1950s to the 1970s. Indeed, we find less evidence of publications and activism by organizations that challenged patriarchal gender systems and provided spaces where women organized as women, for women. But we cannot conclude that women withdrew from political participation altogether.²³

Recent studies that trace the history of a women's movement in Chile have examined women's political engagement and feminist activism in the context of traditionally male-dominated political parties and "traditional" political networks. Historian Anna Travis explores the changing roles of women in Chile's political parties from 1950 to 1970 and agrees with Kirkwood's assessment of a change in activist patterns. She confirms that women's diverse ideological and class interests stood in the way of activism comparable to *memchista* mobilization—thus preventing the consolidation of a cross-class and multiparty women's movement. However, Travis also shows that Chilean women hardly "retreated" from politics after gaining the right to vote. Parallel to the contraction in the realm of women's independent organizing, women increased their participation in political parties and mobilized within the system rather than outside of it. We can thus conclude that women consolidated their political presence and adopted new strategies to integrate feminist perspectives into party politics in the 1960s.²⁴

In the 1970s, a key decade of change, we find new feminist practices that are inseparable from the politics of dictatorship. When deaths, disappearances, and human rights violations affected all people in the nation, women defended both practical gender needs and strategic gender interests as they defended their families and protested against the regime. In the process, they helped legitimize feminism as a political practice. Chilean activists also benefited from new international paradigms of women's rights that legitimized feminism as a vehicle for social change.²⁵

Contradictions of patriarchal pacts under military dictatorship (1973–89): From women's resistance to the forging of feminisms

On September 11, 1973, a military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet terminated the democratically elected government of President Salvador Allende and the Unidad Popular coalition. The violence committed by the military junta is well documented in testimonial accounts, international human rights commissions, and, more recently, truth commissions that help support the reconciliation effort in a re-democratizing nation. Arrests, political assassinations, and "disappearances" followed immediately after the coup—and military leaders remained as ongoing threats. The military defended the supreme authority of the regime, as well as patriarchal, authoritarian values, to "save" the nation. The use of violence had gendered dimensions, which also

contributed to the resistance strategies that different groups of women adopted in the course of almost two decades of dictatorship.

The military's effort to consolidate "traditional" gendered expectations proved critical in the formation of the new regime. Its politics revealed quintessential expressions of patriarchal values; in the words of sociologist Maria Elena Valenzuela, "The Junta, with a very clear sense of its interests, has understood that it must reinforce the traditional family, and the dependent role of women, which is reduced to that of mother. The dictatorship, which institutionalizes social inequality, is founded on inequality in the family."²⁶ Officials placed public rhetoric on the family and gendered responsibilities center stage, creating the model of "natural," transhistorical characteristics of family life in service of the nation. First Lady Lucía Hiriart de Pinochet proclaimed that "the family is the basic unit of society. It is the first school . . . , the mold in which the moral character of each citizen is formed, [so that] the Nation is truly the reflection of the hearth."²⁷ Governmental institutions, like Mothers' Centers and the Women's Secretariat, helped consolidate the connection between women's patriotic duties, proper family values, and the fixed, unchanging notion of *family*.²⁸

The new First Lady helped promote feminine virtue in speeches and publications, confirming that military leaders sought to emphasize the "natural" duties of women as mothers and wives and advocated rigid gendered family traditions even as they attacked the families they claimed to defend. Hiriart de Pinochet encouraged Chilean women to excel in their natural "inborn" responsibilities as they served others in "self-surrender." She insisted, "The current role of women in Chilean society has undergone substantial change. After holding an outstanding position within its structure, they have now directed all their inborn generosity, so singular to our idiosyncrasy, to serve others. This self-surrender has had only the national interest in view and, above all, a concern for the actual advancement of women in our country."²⁹

Women who witnessed military violence observed that the regime dishonored the same family values and alleged sanctity of motherhood that it claimed to defend. A woman we know only as Hilda, a *pobladora*, or shantytown resident, remembered the fear of residents of Santiago's shantytown Nueva Havana on the day of the coup. People could, initially, gather and try to plan collectively, but the *junta*'s curfew soon made all gatherings high-risk affairs. Residents who violated curfew laws were the only ones able to observe soldiers in military vans arresting people or firing shots at fellow residents, turning neighborhoods into battlefields.³⁰ We know now that Hilda's experiences paralleled others' throughout the city. A woman from the shantytown La Victoria, for example, testified: "every day new bodies arrived, nude and headless. They floated in the river . . . We cried, please no more. They took my husband on the twelfth [of September, the day after the coup]. A police patrol arrived . . . The wife of my older son was six months pregnant. She was disappeared . . . we learned that anything was possible."³¹

While the military praised the family as a pillar of stability, few families remained untouched by curfews, arbitrary raids, arrests, and disappearances. Women, in public discourse honored as mothers and wives who protected the moral values of family and nation, witnessed the regime's violations of these allegedly sacred roles. Some women who saw their families destroyed by arrests and disappearances responded to the contradictions of gender-based doctrines that sought to prevent them from expanding

their range of economic and political responsibilities even when male breadwinners could no longer fulfill their patriarchal duties. Women began to redefine their familial responsibilities immediately after the coup, and that redefinition encouraged feminist critiques of the gender system that prioritized the rights of men. In the process of seeking to address immediate threats to their families, some women recognized that the authoritarian and patriarchal practices used by the regime to control the nation resembled those employed by men to control women at home.³² As a result, some women took an active role not only by braving the streets in public protests against the dictatorship in the 1980s, but also by demanding the interpretive power to shape the politics of re-democratization in the 1990s.³³

Scholars and activists have provided rich documentation of the histories of women's activism under dictatorship and have pointed to self-help, human rights, and feminist initiatives to show the variety of responses to military violence.³⁴ Women's organizations were part of survival strategies in which collective action helped overcome practical gender issues, such as financial problems and food shortages when male breadwinners were arrested or disappeared. Through soup kitchens, for example, women found more affordable ways to feed their families. Solidarity groups and self-help organizations included consumer cooperatives, and in Santiago alone, over three hundred groups remained active in neighborhoods all over the city.³⁵ Women used references to their families as they organized to document the disappearances of relatives and to search for their whereabouts. But they also addressed what Maxine Molyneux called strategic gender interests.³⁶ In the midst of women's collective strategies for survival and resistance, they exchanged information and experiences and engaged in awareness-raising processes that encouraged critiques of patriarchal structures. Examples from one organization, the *Círculo de Estudios de la Mujer* (the Women's Studies Circle), illustrate the types of interactions that helped encourage feminist formations.³⁷

Women who joined the *Círculo*, one of many women's groups active during dictatorship, initially relied on the protective umbrella of the Catholic Church through the *Vicaría de Solidaridad* (the Vicariate of Solidarity), founded by Raúl Cardinal Silva Henríquez in response to the massive human rights violations in the nation.³⁸ The Vicariate documented human rights abuses, kept records on the "disappeared," and offered help and support to individuals whose family members were missing.³⁹ It also offered such services as workshops to teach women to make *arpilleras*, quilts, with scraps of recycled cloth. Indeed, *arpilleras* became part of women's practical survival strategies, both as a way to express the horrors of dictatorship as well as to earn a small income. The quilts often depicted life—and deaths—under the dictatorship and gained such prominence that they were sold all over the world.⁴⁰ In 1975, Silva Henríquez added an academic branch to the Vicariate, the *Academia de Humanismo Cristiano* (the Academy of Christian Humanism), which provided meeting spaces for human rights groups and study circles, and also offered the first safe haven to the *Círculo*.

The *Círculo* offers insight, first, into gender-based expectations which cast suspicion and distrust on women who acted as individuals, independent of their families. Reminiscent of traditional gender systems, the women who came to the academy were deemed trustworthy only when they submitted personal data on their families.

Academy representatives requested a list of names and occupations from *Círculo* members, and it was not until women identified themselves through their husbands that they were deemed acceptable. Second, it reveals the remarkable transformation of women's organizing, from maternal- and family-based demands to quests for gender equality and rights. Women formalized their institutional affiliation in 1979, only after they overcame prejudices against women's mobilization. They also increased their negotiating power through external support from the Ford Foundation, which lent credibility to their actions.⁴¹

The expertise of the individual women who sponsored the call to the first *Círculo* gathering further strengthened the initiatives. They were about twenty professional women who already had connections to feminist traditions, or to left-of-center politics, and who sought to create an organization that would "struggle against all forms of discrimination and oppression against women."⁴² In 1979, they sent out invitations to a gathering aimed at discussing "the situation of women in Chile," and the response they received exceeded all expectation: over three hundred women replied that they would attend.⁴³ They defined their mission as "political, since it proposes to eliminate a form of domination that is strongly embedded in the social, economic and cultural spheres." They also elaborated on "feminist praxis" by asserting, "The Feminist commitment entails revolutionary changes because the elimination of sexual oppression compromises all forms of social relations. And it is necessarily democratic because only in conditions of equality between the sexes is it possible to create a social project that is just and libertarian."⁴⁴ For participants, resistance to the oppression by dictatorship in particular, and to gender-based oppression in general, went hand in hand. In the words of some of the founding members in a publication used in the first meeting, women had to start thinking critically about their roles because "one is not born a woman, one learns to be a woman."⁴⁵

Comments by women who participated in *Círculo* activities not only illustrate a shared sense of solidarity and collectivity, but also show that the group provided unprecedented spaces for women of different backgrounds and a wide range of experiences to articulate and define solutions to their problems. A woman we know only as Ema, for example, was impressed by the safe space provided in the midst of diverse women:

When I left I had the worst argument with my husband; so when I came to the meeting I felt very bad, guilty, that I had caused trouble again, that my marriage would end. And the best thing was that the meeting started with everybody talking about how difficult it had been to get there, everybody had encountered similar problems: those who were married, with children, were feeling terribly guilty, felt that they had put the family in second place. And, at the same time, their fears were connected to the coup and the dictatorship; well, for many people it meant that they had to shut the doors of the house, stay inside, and the family was the most important, trying to carry on in spite of the dangers outside.⁴⁶

Indeed, *Círculo* participants like Ema found a platform to draw conclusions about their roles within the family, community, and nation—and inspiration to organize

for their rights.⁴⁷ Women began to work collectively to defend human rights and to mobilize for *women's* rights.⁴⁸

Círculo practices reveal the effectiveness of *concientización*, consciousness-raising, as a first step toward a new feminist praxis of human rights. In meetings and publications, participants sought to identify some of the roots of gender-based inequalities, including the political and the personal. Themes ranged from institutional discrimination in the legal system to individual women's internalization of repressive roles.⁴⁹ Círculo women also challenged the military dictatorship and articulated the urgent need for action.⁵⁰ Emphasizing that arrests, disappearances, torture, and rape were hardly compatible with the military's ideological exaltation of femininity and its quintessential incarnation, motherhood, they insisted that "we believe that it is our, and only our, responsibility to demand that women receive their rights. If we don't fight for ourselves, no one will fight for us."⁵¹

On this basis, women also challenged the understanding of maternal responsibilities; just as the military addressed all women as "natural" mothers, Círculo women were compelled not only to question motherhood as a generic and naturalized identity, but also to address *women*, not *mothers*, first. One document, prepared for the Círculo's initial outreach gathering, presented a reassessment of the meanings of motherhood.

We have learned that motherhood is the fundamental reason for our existence ... We have learned to love our children, not as independent and autonomous people but as extensions of ourselves, as if we existed, for the world, only to the extent that they exist ... We have learned to use motherhood as a justification for what we do and what we don't do ... Some of us have learned to emancipate ourselves ... We work, we read, we are up-to-date with work issues, we can have conversations, analyze, intellectualize ... Nevertheless, we are between waves of guilt as a result of having abandoned the house and the children.⁵²

Here, the authors encouraged a critical assessment of the exploitation of women's reproductive labor—linked to the contradictions of a capitalist, patriarchal society that depended on the domestication of women. Motherhood, in this discourse, remained central to womanhood and remained the signifier of a collective identity in which non-motherhood represented a void. The striking novelty in Círculo initiatives lay in the challenge it posed to motherhood as a fixed, essentialized identity and the link it established to a new political praxis.⁵³ While women of the Círculo did not make a radical break from the "motherist" agenda, their discussions reveal a new brand of "radical feminism": women were adopting new responses to experiences of gender-based violence and taking on new obligations under the extreme conditions of military rule. Chilean feminists tracked the increase in women's mobilization and showed that "since the foundation of the Círculo in 1979, the nongovernmental organizations that addressed [the role of] women in research and social activism multiplied: in 1987, there were eighty-seven institutions."⁵⁴

There is limited evidence to document just how much appeal the feminist arguments of the Círculo, or the new range of feminist publications, had for shantytown women, but we have evidence to show that *pobladoras* had their own mobilization strategies that

addressed gender and class-based inequalities.⁵⁵ As one *pobladora* confirmed, collective organizing had been a familiar strategy long before the military coup: "We have always been organized; just like that. We had to, with our problems ... we formed a committee to address unemployment. And we asked the Church for help."⁵⁶ Another *pobladora* activist made clear that feminist activists in shantytowns set different priorities than did activists with means: "We could never count on the support of maids ... we had to organize ourselves. Some women go to meetings with [all of] their children, I take just the younger ones."⁵⁷ Even if the realities of shantytown women set them apart from educated, professional women, self-help strategies through collective organizing and the critique of the double oppression of dictatorship and patriarchy were present in both.

The history of the Comité de Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer (the Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights, CODEM), illustrates just how effective *pobladoras'* organizing could be. Since its foundation in 1980, CODEM has addressed such subjects as women's health and the need for birth control. In 1981, it launched its own journal and documented the implications of the changes in the health care system for women's health, including high maternal mortality rates. The committee also studied such problems as teenage pregnancy, the ill-effects of the lack of sexual education, and gender-specific demands that overlapped with other feminists' critiques of Chilean society.⁵⁸ In May 1982, CODEM, in collaboration with middle-class feminist organizers, held its first national meeting. Participants joined discussion groups that addressed such themes as "women and identity" and "women and sexuality." They also concluded that "women had to be integrated into the struggle for health, housing, work, [and] social and legal change." They had to organize as women "to confront repression."⁵⁹ Women presented a platform of demands and strategies to overcome the lack of gender equity in Chilean society and to ensure women's participation in the re-creation of democratic rule.⁶⁰

They also strengthened the ties between the many organizations formed by women in poor neighborhoods—even if not all agreed that gender-based inequalities needed more attention than class-based inequalities. In May 1982, *pobladora* leaders brought together twelve smaller organizations under one central leadership, now called the Movimiento de Mujeres Pobladoras (the Movement of Shantytown Women, MOMUPO).⁶¹ Shantytown women engaged in feminist organizing, but for some, class-based inequality remained central to collective protests. Some MOMUPO members admitted that the double exploitation of women needed attention but prioritized their working-class identity: "MOMUPO sees [itself] as part of the working class and understands that our class as a whole [including men] needs to confront ... oppression."⁶² The competing priorities, which pitted those who prioritized mobilization to eradicate class-based causes of inequality against those who sought to address gender-based inequalities, were neither new in Chile nor in the Americas.⁶³

Class or gender, *políticas* or *feministas*: Rethinking the "F"-word

In 1998, I asked a Chilean socialist who had been particularly active in struggles for women's rights under dictatorship if she thought of herself as a feminist. I provoked an

angry reaction and a response filled with a high degree of hostility. She explained that feminism, surely, is not a proper preoccupation for those who demand the eradication of the true inequalities in society, class-based hierarchies, given that women's exploitation and the inadequate rights of women workers are the by-products of capitalism. Her explanations were reminiscent of a position held by Latin American leftists in earlier decades, when many women of the left rejected feminism as a misguided, decadent project of the bourgeoisie, and held that feminism and struggles that prioritized women's rights over those of men were bourgeois and divisive. Cuban women had a particularly strong voice among leftists in the Americas, and while the official Cuban position on feminist activism was hardly static or undivided, some rejected any association with feminism. In 1977, Cuban communist and head of the Cuban Women's Federation, Vilma Espín, asserted that feminism was not only a dangerous project of the bourgeoisie but a manifestation of the imperialist influence of the United States; she claimed that Cuba "never had a feminist movement. We hate that. We hate the feminist movement in the United States. We consider what we are doing is part of the struggle. We see these movements in the USA which have conceived struggles for equality of women against men! That is absurd!"⁶⁴ Outspoken orthodox women of the left still mixed and mingled with a wide range of others who set out to mobilize for women's citizenship rights, often blurring the divide between class-based and feminist activism. But international conferences—as well as local manifestations such as the one cited above—confirm that the division did have an impact on feminist organizing.

Feminist *Encuentros* in the Americas

Beginning in 1981, and roughly every two to three years thereafter, Chileans joined others who attended international *Encuentros Feministas* (Feminist Encounters), which were hosted by women's groups of different Latin American and Caribbean countries and provided unprecedented spaces for exchanges and networking among women activists in the Americas. These gatherings were inspired, initially, by middle-class, professional, and educated feminists who sought to create new spaces for women to share experiences, ideas, and strategies for change. The *Encuentros* served as markers of shifting (feminist) priorities, and, according to some participants, they represented "springboards for the development of a common Latin American feminist political language."⁶⁵

The *Encuentros* had a liberating effect. Those women who came from countries under military rule experienced the 1981 Bogotá *Encuentro* as a place that was finally free of censorship and fear, in stark contrast to curfews and violence at home. In the words of Julieta Kirkwood, Bogotá became a "(re-)conquest of space," where women gained access to an international realm that was, until then, a patrimony of patriarchal culture.⁶⁶ Other Chilean participants learned to connect the domestic violence against women in patriarchal societies to the political violence against women exhibited by military regimes. They translated this understanding into specific demands for "democracy in the nation and democracy at home" and, subsequently, into the motto that guided their mobilization against dictatorship at home.⁶⁷

The *Encuentros* also helped foment collective strategies to protest violence, human rights abuses, and, specifically, violence against women. Women met others who shared their concerns about the power of patriarchal institutions and realities of violations of women's rights. In formal presentations and informal discussions, attendees provided critiques of both state-led violence and family violence as tools that perpetuated male dominance. All agreed on the need to reduce gender-based violence, and collectively declared November 25 as the International Day of Nonviolence against Women. However, due to participants' seemingly irreconcilable commitments to either party politics or feminism, disagreements persisted on the strategies of women's involvement in the future.⁶⁸

Participants brought with them multiple experiences of political activism and feminist organizing and did not always agree on the best, most effective mobilization strategies. At *Encuentros* in such places as Lima (1983), Brazil (1985), and México (1987), women discussed the priorities of feminist organizing, and Chilean feminists found their international counterparts to be as ideologically divided as they were themselves. Participants agreed on the importance of consciousness-raising, solidarity, and collective learning. But they were split by competing histories of political militancy and feminist organizing.⁶⁹ Women in the Americas, and in Chile as well, had long negotiated the disagreements between the *políticas*, women who prioritized their active engagement in party politics, and *feministas*, feminists who were primarily dedicated to feminism, including socialist feminism.⁷⁰ Both *políticas* and *feministas* agreed on the need to promote women's rights and gender equity but often disagreed about the most appropriate path to implement change. In Chile, questions of feminist strategy gained prominence as the power of the military regime crumbled.

Parallel to the international *Encuentros*, women actively protested the violence of dictatorship in Chile; in a period many refer to as *Las Protestas* (the Protests), they introduced a new intensity of resistance to dictatorship. In December 1983, over ten thousand women of different political and class backgrounds came together at the Caupolicán Theatre in Santiago to participate in what was the largest public gathering since the military coup. Those who came to the theatre argued that women had a role to play in politics, that they had to help bring down the dictatorship, and, indeed, that "freedom has a woman's name."⁷¹ Women's protest continued in the midst of critiques of dictatorship in the country, and from such places as the United States, the latter no longer willing to tolerate human rights violations uncritically. Women not only demanded "*Democracia en el país y en la casa*"—democracy in the country and at home—but also had an active voice in the collective organization of a referendum that promised to end Pinochet's rule.⁷²

Women met, marched, and mobilized in preparation for the 1988 plebiscite proposed by General Pinochet to secure the longevity of his regime. Chileans voted *Sí* or *No* to the question of ongoing support for the military. Over 1.9 million women, or 51 percent, supported the *No* campaign, as did 58 percent of male voters.⁷³ Significantly, conservative women who supported the *Sí* campaign in the plebiscite appealed to the idealized image of womanhood that the military relied upon: proper Chilean women, often addressed as mothers, would collaborate with the military and would help conserve a stable, reliable system for the sake of their families. Such right-wing

women's organizations as *Mujeres por el Sí* (Women Vote Yes) relied on considerable resources to mobilize women as a conservative force and also claimed to represent the legitimate moral guidance for the nation. In their campaigns, they appealed to women's maternal responsibilities of helping to prevent anarchy and bloodshed by relying on military power, a strategy which helps explain why more women than men supported Pinochet.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, other women who framed their campaigns in support of human rights for all Chileans challenged this "natural" connection, and their victory signified the first official step toward the return of democratic elections in 1990. From that moment, women's demands for rights appeared in a new light, connected to the right of equal citizenship under an elected government. There was hope for a new positioning of women's rights, but the changed political climate under re-democratization, combined with a new dynamic of women's activism, also posed obstacles to gender equity in the 1990s.⁷⁵

From redemocratization in the 1990s to the new millennium

The process of re-democratization—referring to the implementation and consolidation of the political culture, mechanisms, and institutions that define a democratic government—offered opportunities as well as challenges for feminists who sought to expand women's citizenship rights. Indeed, those who partook in the efforts to implement a basic set of democratic institutions encountered authoritarian enclaves left behind by the Pinochet regime. These enclaves, or authoritarian legacies, had legal, political, and cultural dimensions. In 1980, the military had ratified a new constitution with multiple restrictions on popular sovereignty, including Pinochet-controlled senatorial appointments, anti-majoritarian features in the electoral system, and the autonomy of the military from civilian control. The many unresolved cases of human rights violations, as well as the lingering presence of Pinochet himself as commander-in-chief of the Chilean armed forces, represented "authoritarian enclaves" that disproportionately affected women.⁷⁶

Feminists who had mobilized for rights, including reproductive rights, experienced firsthand the contradictions between two final acts of the Pinochet dictatorship: the abolition of therapeutic abortion and the signing of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).⁷⁷ Just as the dictatorship paid lip service to the international norms of women's rights defined in the Convention, it violated women's rights to bodily integrity at home. In August 1989, as one of its last legal acts, the military replaced Article 119 of the Chile Health Code with Act No. 18.826, stating that "no action may be executed that has as its goal the inducement of abortion."⁷⁸ Jaime Guzmán, lawyer and influential ideologue under the regime, was adamant about the need to outlaw abortions and to prosecute those who violated the law.⁷⁹ He asserted, "The mother must give birth to her child, even if it will be born abnormal, if she did not plan it, if it was conceived as a result of a rape, and even if giving birth will kill her."⁸⁰ Guzmán also succeeded in having a right-to-life clause added to the Constitution. In 1995, the Chilean CEDAW representative reported "that although abortion was illegal in Chile, in 1990 one out of every three pregnancies

had ended in abortion."⁸¹ Five years later, doctors documented that illegal abortion remained one of the main causes of maternal mortality in the nation.⁸²

Yet, feminists could claim accomplishments in other spheres, including their success in convincing the democratic government to make a public and official commitment to gender equity; in 1991, the persistent demands of Chilean women's groups helped establish the National Office for Women's Affairs (Servicio Nacional de la Mujer, SERNAM). SERNAM successfully supported a number of feminist campaigns, including the feminist mobilization to end violence against women. The office sponsored research on domestic violence and lobbied for legislative changes to help victims.⁸³ In October 2005, the Chilean government passed a new law on family violence, which facilitated police intervention and efforts to prevent domestic violence.⁸⁴ The following year, the Chilean daily *El Mercurio* reported that sixty family courts with over 250 judges were prepared to tackle the issue.⁸⁵ Victims of violence could also access information on legal procedures on the website *Trámite Fácil* (Simple Procedure),⁸⁶ where links led to a network of Regional Domestic Violence Prevention and Services Centers that provided psychological counseling.⁸⁷

Feminist activists agree that the attention to family violence has introduced some important changes in the understandings of women's needs, but they also note that it places limits on gender-specific demands. The legislation about domestic violence focuses on the family unit, seeks to strengthen the family through therapeutic measures, and emphasizes such goals as family reconciliation. While this legislation can, potentially, save lives, it fails to address some of the root causes of violence against women. Unequal power relations within the family unit, which can lead to violence against women, remain interconnected with institutionalized gender-based inequalities in Chilean society and with a culture that ignores the links between gender inequality and violence. Indeed, feminist critiques of the dangerous consequences of patriarchal hierarchies remain relevant to re-democratization. SERNAM and other institutions addressed questions of women's rights, but at times they weakened an independent feminist discourse that sought to problematize sexual violence against women. The politics of democratization created spaces for restructured patriarchal relations and sought to silence candid feminist demands that questioned male privilege. Ongoing debates about sexual violence against women, as well as reproductive rights and the quest for the legalization of therapeutic abortion, are just a few examples on a long list of queries that remain goals of feminist organizing. Furthermore, the neoliberal reorganization of Chilean society, one of the legacies of the dictatorship, has widened the gap between wealthy and poor Chileans. Patriarchal structures, in conjunction with the myth of a Chilean economic miracle, disproportionately affect women who struggle with higher levels of poverty than men. Over the years, data on the gender gap promises a more equal distribution of rights and an increase of the choices women can make: in 2015, for example, the UN documented that women's enrollment in secondary education remained equal to that of men and that women's tertiary education surpassed that of men.⁸⁸

The real gains of state-led feminism have remained the subject of ongoing debate, and some feminists claim that SERNAM continues to isolate their demands from mainstream politics. They point out that gender-specific legislation receives varying



FIGURE 6.1. Feminist demonstration against capitalism and machismo, March 2016.

Source: Photo by and with permission of Adriana Gómez Muñoz

<http://articulacionfem.cl/ante-la-agresion-y-violencia-machista-voz-propia/>.

degrees of attention depending on the changing interests of elected governments. SERNAM still continues to mediate multiple demands by women's groups and feminist activists. At times, this process can help promote feminists' contributions to policy designs for particular government programs.⁸⁹ Alternatively, SERNAM may reject propositions that appear too radical from the perspective of the governing party. In the past decades, the agenda of the Christian Democrats, for example, made it hard for feminists to convince the ministry to prioritize their urgent quests for reproductive rights.

At the same time, there is rich evidence to show that SERNAM promotes women's education, professionalization, and public presence in a nation that continues to negotiate new paths toward economic and social modernization, including modernization of gender roles. In 2009, the number of women in higher education exceeded that of men—and economists expect a dramatic growth of the female skilled labor force.⁹⁰ While political leaders emphasize that the growth of an educated labor force in Chile has produced promising social and economic effects and has strengthened the country's human capital, women stress that the wage gap between men and women remains large and that gender-specific discrimination within the labor force needs to remain on the public agenda.⁹¹ SERNAM continues to inspire alternative, decentralized activism in support of women's rights that addresses these and other remaining shortcomings in the realm of gender equity. In the new millennium, we can

document a wide variety of women's activism through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and through groups that build on multiple traditions of women's activism in Chile. According to feminist scholar Sonia Alvarez, this new terrain of women's activism has created multiple feminisms and a new degree of heterogeneity, but she states that it also suffers the ill-effects of fragmentation.⁹²

Conclusion

Chilean feminism as a powerful political practice, I argue, is inseparable from the history of military dictatorship (1973–89), when women's mobilization contributed to the acceptance of feminism as a vehicle for the promotion of women's citizenship rights. Even as the military glorified women as wives and mothers who "naturally" protected the moral values of family and nation, women reacted to the regime's parallel destruction of "sacred" families. Responding to arrests and disappearances, women protested both the patriarchy of the military authoritarian regime and patriarchal practices at home, and created new forms of resistance. Feminists, like Julieta Kirkwood, wrote about *nudos*, knots of wisdom that helped untangle the contradictions between feminist theory and activism, thereby encouraging women to "weave" new feminist knots and feminist knowledge to help shape feminist politics. We can map the close connections between feminist, self-help, and human rights mobilizations that formed during the dictatorship, and we can trace the continuity of activism—in changing forms and manifestations—through the period of re-democratization in the 1990s and into the new millennium. In short, Chilean and Latin American feminists who protested authoritarian rule and the abuses of military dictatorships in the Cold War period tested the usefulness of a range of previously untested strategies of feminist resistance, contributed dynamic methods of activism, and explored new theoretical considerations. Focusing on those contributions encourages us to rewrite the history of feminisms in a way that moves beyond the framework of "waves," which can easily reduce complex feminist trajectories to abstract, streamlined chronologies.

Epilogue

*A woman holding the reins of a country . . . is serving . . . as a catalyst to the cultural changes that move us toward greater equality and towards the more horizontal relations which we are already seeing in other countries.*⁹³

—Michelle Bachelet

More work is needed to explore the multiple sources of Chilean women's empowerment and to test the strategies of political leaders as well as grassroots feminist activists. In 2006, Michelle Bachelet made history by becoming Chile's first female president. A socialist by political affiliation, she pledged to take a path toward "change with continuity," and promised to address the needs of women and the poor.⁹⁴ Some of her political weight stemmed from real and symbolic connections to military rule, from her

personal experience of prison, torture, and forced exile from Chile, and from her loss of family; the dictatorship killed her father. Completing her first term, President Bachelet could claim some credit for an increase in women's access to political positions, which rose to a remarkably high level in some sectors of government.⁹⁵ She has also been a controversial figure in Chilean politics. Based on historical evidence, we know that "a woman holding the reins of a country" can represent a catalyst for cultural change and the creation of greater gender equality. But surely, in light of the new constraints on women's choices in Chile that are firmly anchored in the Constitution, as well as the persistence of cultural legacies that promote gender bias, strategies for political change must reach across class and ideological divides. Feminism, with its roots in political protest and activism, and its status as an accepted vehicle for the promotion of women's citizenship rights, still holds tremendous value as a strategy for democratic, political mobilization.

Notes

- 1 As cited in Estelle B. Freedman, *Feminism, Sexuality, and Politics: Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 91.
- 2 For more detail on Labarca's views on women's activism in the United States, see Amanda Labarca, *Actividades femeninas en los Estados Unidos* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta universitaria, 1914); For information on her political engagement, see Amanda Labarca and Peter J. Sehlinger, "Educator to the Women of Chile," 1970. Educator to the women of Chile/oral history transcript Amanda Labarca; Peter J Sehlinger, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library, BANC MSS Z-Z 100:158. See also Patricia Pinto Villarroel, "Mirada y voz femeninas en la ensayística de Amanda Labarca: Historia de una anticipación chilena," *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 2, 4 (Segundo Semestre de 1989): 57–67.
- 3 For some of the priorities that Labarca set in the context of the turmoil of transition of the nation, see Richard J. Walter, *Politics and Urban Growth in Santiago, Chile, 1891–1941* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 179–81.
- 4 For the competitions between FECHIF and MEMCh, see Karin Roseblatt, *Gendered Compromises: Political Cultures and the State in Chile, 1920–1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 243–7.
- 5 See Karen Mead, "Beneficent Maternalism: Argentine Motherhood in Comparative Perspective, 1880–1920," *Journal of Women's History* 12, 3 (2000): 120–45; quote on p. 120.
- 6 Ericka Verba, *Catholic Feminism and the Social Question in Chile, 1910–1917: The Liga De Damas Chilenas* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2003); see also Elizabeth Q. Hutchison, "Señoras y Señoritas: Catholic Women Defend the *Hijas de Familia*," in *Laborers Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 171–97.
- 7 For background information on the Liga and full quote, see <http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-article-100790.html>
- 8 For a detailed account of early elite and middle-class women's mobilization, see Ericka Verba, "The Círculo de Lectura de Señoras [Ladies' Reading Circle] and the Club de Señoras [Ladies' Club] of Santiago, Chile," *Journal of Women's History* 7, 3 (Fall 95):

- 6–33; and Verba, *Catholic Feminism and the Social Question in Chile, 1910–1917*. Also see Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).
- 9 Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change*, 48.
 - 10 Elsa Chaney, *Supermadre: Women in Politics in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 21.
 - 11 Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change*, 211–16.
 - 12 Amanda Labarca, *Feminismo Contemporáneo*; citation in Roseblatt, *Gendered Compromises*, 244.
 - 13 Marta Vergara, *Memorias de una mujer irreverente* (Santiago de Chile: Editora Nacional Gabriela Mistral, 1974), 174.
 - 14 On MEMCh, see Corinne Antezana-Pernet, "Mobilizing Women in the Popular Front Era: Feminism, Class, and Politics in the Movimiento Pro-Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena (MEMCh), 1935–1950," PhD diss., University of California at Irvine, 1996, 176–85.
 - 15 Judy Maloof, *Voices of Resistance: Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 117.
 - 16 Elizabeth Q. Hutchison, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900–1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); and Hutchison, "La Mujer Esclava to 'la Mujer Limón': Anarchism and the Politics of Sexuality in Early-Twentieth-Century Chile," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 81, 3/4 (2001): 519–53.
 - 17 Roseblatt, *Gendered Compromises*; and Antezana-Pernet, "Mobilizing Women in the Popular Front Era," both draw conclusions that support this characterization of the role of the MEMCh. Both help link the details of political discourses by the Partido Obrero Socialista (POS) and Partido Comunista de Chile (PCCh) to MEMCh activists—and to make discursive connections to individual feminists such as Olga Poblete and Elena Caffarena.
 - 18 Antezana-Pernet, "Mobilizing Women in the Popular Front Era: Feminism"; and Corinne Antezana-Pernet, "El MEMCh en provincia. Movilización femenina y sus obstáculos, 1935–1942," in *Disciplina y desacato. Construcción de identidad en Chile, siglo XIX y XX*, ed. Lorena Godoy et al. (Santiago: Eds. CEDEM-SUR, 1995), 287–329. For information on women's mobilization and suffrage, see also Antezana-Pernet, "Chilean Feminists, the International Women's Movement, and Suffrage, 1915–1950," *The Pacific Historical Review* 69, 4 (2000): 663–88; Edda Gaviola Artigas et al., *Queremos votar en las próximas elecciones: Historia del movimiento Femenino Chileno 1913–1952* (Santiago: Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Condición de la Mujer, 1986); Diamela Eltit, *Crónica del sufragio femenino en Chile* (Santiago: SERNAM, 1994); Asunción Lavrin, "Suffrage in South America: Arguing a Difficult Case," in *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (Auckland: Auckland University Press-Pluto Press, 1994), 184–209; Erika Maza Valenzuela, "Catholicism, Anticlericism, and the Quest for Women's Suffrage in Chile," Working Paper 214, The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame (1995): 184–209.
 - 19 See "La mujer obrera es doblemente explotada," and "Proyecciones del movimiento emancipacionista femenino," *La Mujer Nueva* 1 (November 1935): 1–2.
 - 20 See "Los niños proletarios tienen hambre," *La Mujer Nueva* 1 (November 1935): 2.
 - 21 *La Mujer Nueva* 22 (December 1938): 4.

- 22 See, for example, "La Mujer y la Política," and "Manifiesto," in *La Mujer Nueva* 13 (March 1937): 3. Both articles evoke women's responsibilities to participate in the political process. For more context, see Jadwiga Pieper Mooney, *The Politics of Motherhood: Maternity and Women's Rights in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), pp. 13–43.
- 23 For some of the key texts on Chilean feminisms and women's activism, see Julieta Kirkwood, *Ser política en Chile. Las feministas y los partidos políticos* (Santiago: FLACSO, 1986); Edda Gaviola, Ximena Jiles, Lorella Lopresti, and Claudia Rojas, *Queremos votar en las próximas elecciones: Historia del movimiento femenino en Chile 1913–1952* (Santiago: CEM, La Morada, 1986); Paz Covarrubias, "El movimiento feminista chileno," in *Chile, mujer y sociedad*, ed. Rolando Franco and Paz Covarrubias (Santiago: UNICEF, 1978); Patricia Chuchryk, "Protest, Politics and Personal Life: The Emergence of Feminism in a Military Dictatorship, Chile 1973–1983," doctoral thesis, York University, 1984; Adriana Muñoz Dálbora, *Fuerza feminista y democracia: utopía a realizar* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Documentas, 1987); Alicia Frohman and Teresa Valdés, "Democracy in the Country and in the Home: Women's Movement Chile," in *Serie Estudios Sociales* no. 55 (Santiago: FLACSO, 1993); Marcela Ríos, "Socialización política y acción colectiva: Organizaciones de pobladoras en Chile 1973–1993," master's thesis, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales México, 1994; Josefina Rossetti, *Las mujeres y el feminismo* (Santiago: Cuadernos del Círculo de Estudios de la Mujer, 1993); Teresa Valdés, "Movimiento de mujeres y producción de conocimientos de género, 1978–1989," in *Mujeres y participación política. Avances y desafíos en América Latina*, ed. Magdalena León (Bogotá: TM Editores, 1994); Teresa Valdés and Marisa Weinstein, *Mujeres que sueñan: Las organizaciones de pobladoras en Chile 1973–1990* (Santiago: FLACSO, 1993); Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 24 Anna M. Travis, "Consolidating Power: Chilean Women in the Political Party System, 1950–1970," PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2007.
- 25 Maxine Molyneux, "Analyzing Women's Movements," *Development and Change* 29, 2 (2002): 1467–7660.
- 26 Maria Elena Valenzuela, "El fundamento de la dominación patriarcal en Chile," paper presented at the Second Chilean Sociology Congress, August 1986, Santiago, Chile, as cited in Marcela Ríos Tobar, "'Feminism is Socialism, Liberty and Much More': Second-Wave Chilean Feminism and Its Contentious Relationship with Socialism," *Journal of Women's History* 15, 3 (2003): 129–34.
- 27 Chile, *Valores patrios y valores familiares*, Cuadernos de Difusión no. 7 (Santiago, Chile: Secretaría Nacional de la Mujer, 1982), 11.
- 28 The Secretariat worked to promote patriotic and family values, primarily addressing middle- and elite-sector women. The Mothers' Centers were dedicated to the promotion of the same values, but had the potential of empowering women.
- 29 Sra. Lucía Hiriart de Pinochet, First Lady, introducing the new CEMA-CHILE. *Cema Chile* (Santiago: CEMA-Chile, n.d.).
- 30 Taller de Acción Cultural (Santiago, Chile), *La Organización fue como nacer*, 87.
- 31 As quoted by Judy Maloof, *Voices of Resistance*, 122.
- 32 Kirkwood, *Ser política en Chile*, 180.
- 33 Nelly Richard, "Género, valores y diferencia(s)," in *Residuos y metáforas. Ensayos de crítica cultural sobre el Chile de la Transición* (Santiago: Cuarto Propio, 1998),

- 201, as discussed in Mary Green, "Diamela Eltit: A Gendered Politics of Writing," *Cardiff University New Readings* 6 (December 5, 2000), <http://www.cf.ac.uk/euros/newreadings/volume6/greenm.html#14>. I also discuss these processes in detail in Pieper Mooney, *The Politics of Motherhood*, 134–62.
- 34 For the distinction between self-help, human rights, and feminist organizations, see Jo Fisher, *Out of the Shadows: Women, Resistance and Politics in South America* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1993); for examples on Chilean feminist activism, see Fisher, *Out of the Shadows*, 177–200. For key texts, see n. 23.
- 35 Luis Razeto, *Las Organizaciones económicas populares la experiencia de las nuevas organizaciones económicas populares en Chile: situación y perspectivas* (Santiago: Programa de Economía del Trabajo, Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, Arzobispado de Santiago, 1983).
- 36 For context of the term, see Maxine Molyneux, *Women's Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 140–202.
- 37 Also referred to as Círculo de Estudios de la Condición de la Mujer. I use Círculo de Estudios de la Mujer, and will refer to it as Círculo hereafter.
- 38 For the role of the Church and moral resistance, see Pamela Lowden, *Moral Opposition to Authoritarian Rule in Chile, 1973–90*, St. Antony's Series (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).
- 39 On the Vicariate of Solidarity, also see Hugo Fruhling, "Resistance to Fear in Chile: The Experience of the Vicaria de la Solidaridad," in *Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America*, ed. Juan E. Corradi, Patricia Weiss Fagen, and Manuel A. Garretón Merino (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 121–41.
- 40 Eliana Moya-Raggio, "Arpilleras': Chilean Culture of Resistance," *Feminist Studies* 10, 2 (1984): 277–90; Baldez, *Why Women Protest*, 130.
- 41 See Chuchryk, "Protest, Politics and Personal Life," fns 28 and 29, 360–1. Ford Foundation grants, already supporting a number of South American progressive women's groups, significantly eased the negotiations between the Academy and Círculo women. Cornelia Butler Flora, personal correspondence with the author, January 2007.
- 42 Círculo de Estudios de la Mujer, "Reflexiones sobre la práctica feminista," paper presented at the III Encounter for Popular Education, Santiago, June 1983, as cited in Marcela Ríos Tobar, "'Feminism is Socialism, Liberty and Much More' Second-Wave Chilean Feminism and Its Contentious Relationship with Socialism," *Journal of Women's History* 15, 3 (2003): 129–34.
- 43 Rosa Bravo, María Isabel Cruzat, Elena Serrano, and Rosalba Todaro, "Y así va creciendo . . . el feminismo en Chile," in *Movimiento feminista en América Latina y el Caribe: balance y perspectivas* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Isis Internacional de las Mujeres, 1986), 26.
- 44 Círculo de Estudios de la Mujer, "Reflexiones sobre la práctica feminista," 129–34.
- 45 See Bravo et al., "Y así va creciendo," 26.
- 46 As cited in Edda Gaviola, Eliana Largo, and Sandra Palestro, "Si la mujer no está, la democracia no va," *Proposiciones* 21 (1992): 81.
- 47 Claudia Adriasola et al., *Algunas ideas respecto a la condición de la mujer* (Santiago, Chile: Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, 1979). Also see Chuchryk, *Protest, Politics and Personal Life*, 280.
- 48 Patricia Crispi, ed., *Tejiendo Rebeldías: escritos feministas de Julieta Kirkwood* (Santiago: CEM La Morada, 1987); Julieta Kirkwood, *Feminarios* (Santiago: Ediciones Documentas, 1987).

- 49 See Annabel Ipsen, "The Women's Movement in Chile, From Grassroots to Nongovernmental Organization: A Case Study of La Casa de La Mujer, La Morada," master's thesis, University of New Mexico, 2000, 96–7; Bravo et al., "Y así va creciendo," 26.
- 50 Adriasola et al., *Algunas ideas*, 14.
- 51 Ibid., 14.
- 52 Ibid., 4–6.
- 53 For more detail on the working groups, see Cornelia Butler Flora, "Socialist Feminism in Latin America," Women in International Development, Working Paper No. 14 (East Lansing: Michigan State University, Office of Women in International Development, 1982), 21.
- 54 Valdés and Weinstein, *Mujeres que sueñan*, 195.
- 55 Ton Salman argues that women, more than men, engaged in *collective* resistance under dictatorship; he also proposes that the lasting political involvement of shantytown social movements under re-democratization was compromised by the top-down incentives that inspired their mobilization. Ton Salman, *The Diffident Movement: Disintegration, Ingenuity and Resistance of the Chilean Pobladores, 1973–1990* (Amsterdam: Thela, 1997), 8–31.
- 56 Patricia López-Stewart and Elisabeth Gumberger, "Ich bringe das Salz" *Chilenische Frauen berichten: Erfahrungen, Situationen, Positionen* (Bremen: Edition CON, 1985), 108.
- 57 Eda Cleary, *Frauen in der Politik Chiles zur Emanzipierung chilenischer Frauen während der Militärdiktatur Pinochets* (Aachen: Alano, 1988), 225.
- 58 See, for example, *Vamos Mujer* 3 (1989): 7–8, 10.
- 59 Cleary, *Frauen in der Politik Chiles zur Emanzipierung chilenischer Frauen während der Militärdiktatur Pinochets*, 214.
- 60 For references to CODEM and MOMUPO, also see Martina Schöttes, *Lebensbedingungen, Widerstand und Verfolgung von Frauen in Chile* (Berlin: Berliner Institut für Vergleichende Sozialforschung, 1991), 47–8; and Cleary, *Frauen in der Politik Chiles zur Emanzipierung chilenischer Frauen während der Militärdiktatur Pinochets*, 206–33.
- 61 For details on demands, see "Mujeres, volveremos a casa?" in *Chile, No estás Muerto: compromisos y demandas desde la Iglesia de los pobres* (Santiago: Centro Ecueménico Diego de Medellín, n.d.), 34.
- 62 Cleary, *Frauen in der Politik Chiles zur Emanzipierung chilenischer Frauen während der Militärdiktatur Pinochets*, 221. Patricia Richards argues that class-based concerns remained central to pobladora activism; see Patricia Richards, *Pobladoras, Indígenas, and the State: Conflicts Over Women's Rights in Chile* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 84.
- 63 For contexts of Círculo, MOMOPU, CODEM, and other initiatives, see also Pieper Mooney, *The Politics of Motherhood*, 134–62.
- 64 Maxine Molyneux, "State, Gender, and Institutional Change: The Federación de Mujeres Cubanas," in *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America*, ed. Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneux (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 299.
- 65 Nancy Saporta Sternbach, Marysa Navarro-Aranguren, Patricia Chuchryk, and Sonia E. Alvarez, "Feminisms in Latin America: From Bogotá to San Bernardo," *Signs* 17,2 (1992): 396.
- 66 Kirkwood, *Ser Política en Chile*, 233–49; Marysa Navarro, "El primer encuentro feminista de Latinoamérica y el Caribe," in *Sociedad, Subordinación y Feminismo*, ed.

- Magdalena Leon (Bogotá, Colombia: Asociación Colombiana para el estudio de la población, 1982), 261–7.
- 67 Chilean feminist, *Círculo* founder, and *Encuentro*-attendee Julieta Kirkwood coined the rallying cry, "democracy in the nation and democracy at home."
- 68 "Testimonio," *Boletín* no. 6 (September–October 1981): 5.
- 69 At the 1985 *Encuentro* in Brazil, for example, academics, labor leaders, union organizers, and political activists lamented a "lack of resolutions, strategies and theories" and left dissatisfied. Others felt that the presentation of theories and resolutions "would handicap the dynamic thought process which is the very nature of an *Encuentro*." Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach, "Gracias a la Vida: Recounting the Third Latin American Feminist Meeting in Bertioga, Brazil, July 31–August 4, 1985," *Off Our Backs* 26, 1 (January 1986): 1.
- 70 Marcela Ríos Tobar, "'Feminism Is Socialism,'" 129–34.
- 71 Teresa Valdés, *Las mujeres y la dictadura militar en Chile*, Material de Discusión, No. 94 (Santiago: FLACSO, March 1987), Anexo III, 35.
- 72 "Democracy in the country and in the home." See Alicia Frohmann and Teresa Valdés, *Democracy in the Country and in the "Home": The Women's Movement in Chile*, Serie Estudios Sociales No. 55 (Santiago: FLACSO, 1993) for insights into women's reconceptualization of democracy.
- 73 *La Epoca*, October 7, 1988, 9.
- 74 Catherine M. Boyle, "Touching the Air: The Cultural Force of Women in Chile," in *Feminist Communication Theory: Selections in Context*, ed. Lana F. Rakow and Laura A. Wackwitz (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 147.
- 75 Marcela Ríos Tobar shows the difficulties of Chilean feminists to secure spaces for gender-based concerns and access to political participation. Ríos Tobar, "Chilean Feminism(s) in the 1990s," in *Gender and Civil Society: Transcending Boundaries*, ed. Jude Howell and Diane Mulligan (London: Routledge, 2005), 139–62. See also Marcela Ríos Tobar, Lorena Godoy, and Elizabeth Guerrero, *Un nuevo silencio feminista? La transformación de un movimiento social en el Chile posdictadura* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios de la Mujer, 2003).
- 76 Manuel Antonio Garretón, "Human Rights in Democratization Processes," in *Constructing Democracy: Human Rights, Citizenship, and Society in Latin America*, ed. Elizabeth Jelin and Eric Hershberg (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 39–56; Manuel Antonio Garretón, "Human Rights in Processes of Democratisation," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26,1 (1994): 221–34. Garretón distinguished between multiple authoritarian enclaves, the institutional enclave, the military enclave, and the ethical-symbolic enclave—and argues that human rights policies were part of a comprehensive transition strategy that could have helped in the process of overcoming the ill-effects of authoritarian legacies.
- 77 The end of therapeutic abortion violates a number of basic women's rights, including reproductive rights. See José Barzelatto, María Cristina Calderón, Stephen Isaacs, and Lidia Casas B., *El aborto en Chile elementos para el debate* (Santiago, Chile: CORSAPS, 1996).
- 78 *Annual Review of Population Law* 16 (1989): 28.
- 79 Lidia Casas-Becerra, "Women Prosecuted and Imprisoned for Abortion in Chile," *Reproductive Health Matters* 5, 9 (May 1997): 29.
- 80 Actas Oficiales de la Comisión Constituyente, Sesión 87 del 14 de noviembre de 1974. "La madre debe tener al hijo aunque éste salga anormal, aunque no lo haya deseado, aunque sea producto de una violación o, aunque de tenerlo, derive en su muerto ..."

- As cited in Claudia Lagos Lira, *Aborto en Chile el deber de parir* (Santiago: Lom Ediciones, 2001), 11.
- 81 See Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Concluding Observations: Chile, UN Doc. A/50/38, 105–159 (1995). <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/cedaw/cedaw-chile.htm>
 - 82 Pieper Mooney, *Politics of Motherhood*, 134–62 and 193–202; Jorge Szot and Cristina Moreno, “Mortalidad por aborto en Chile: Analisis epidemiologico, 1985–2000,” *Revista chilena de obstetricia y ginecología* 68, 4 (2003), 309–14.
 - 83 See Carlos A. González, *Ley de violencia intrafamiliar* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Publibey, 1998); for references to the problem of sexual violence, see Verónica Oxman, *La Violencia sexual en Chile* (Santiago, Chile: SERNAM, 1995); for a study of domestic violence and police response, see Uca Silva and Ximena Ahumada, *Sensibilización sobre violencia intrafamiliar a carabineros de Chile SERNAM, 1992–1993* (Santiago, Chile: Servicio Nacional de la Mujer, 1994).
 - 84 *El Mercurio*, July 22, 2006; August 16, 2006, 13/14.
 - 85 *El Mercurio*, August 16, 2006, 12. <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/ndp/ref/?action=view&doc=chl102427fe>
 - 86 *El Mercurio*, October 27, 2005. <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/ndp/ref/?action=view&doc=chl102427fe>
 - 87 *Centros Regionales de Atencion y Prevencion en Violencia Intrafamiliar, El Mercurio*, June 19, 2006, <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/ndp/ref/?action=view&doc=chl102427fe>
 - 88 For data on gender gap index, see <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/economies/#economy=CHL>
 - 89 For different views on the role of SERNAM, see Merike H. Blofield and Liesl Haas, “Defining a Democracy: Reforming the Laws on Women’s Rights in Chile, 1990–2002,” *Latin American Politics & Society* 47, 3 (2005): 35–68; and Susan Franceschet, *Women and Politics in Chile* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 111–15.
 - 90 <http://en.mercopress.com/2010/08/10/since-last-year-chilean-women-are-a-majority-in-higher-education-and-increasing>
 - 91 For comments on women’s roles and the (limits of) policy changes under President Bachelet, see <http://www.economist.com/node/7281220>
 - 92 Sonia Alvarez, “Feminismos Latinoamericanos,” <https://periodicos.ufsc.br/index.php/ref/article/viewFile/12008/11293>; Sonia Alvarez, “Reflexiones Teóricas y Comparativas sobre Feminismos en Chile y América Latina,” *Conversatorio, Universidad de Chile, Santiago de Chile*, April 2–3, 1998.
 - 93 Elizabeth Q. Hutchison, Thomas Miller Klubock, Nara B. Milanich, and Peter Winn, *The Chile Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 597.
 - 94 See Larry Rother, “A Leader Making Peace With Chile’s Past,” *New York Times*, January 16, 2006; Larry Rother, “Chile Inaugurates First Woman to Serve as Its President,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2006.
 - 95 In 2006, Bachelet elevated the presence of women in Parliament to 15 percent (slightly below the Latin American average) and female senators to 50 percent (the highest percentage in Latin America). About 18 percent of the seats of national legislatures in Latin America and the Caribbean were held by women. Pamela Marie Paxton and Melanie M. Hughes, *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2007), 228–9.

Beyond the “Development” Paradigm: State Socialist Women’s Activism, Transnationalism, and the “Long Sixties”

Magdalena Grabowska

Introduction

In 2010, historian Francisca de Haan called for acknowledging the role of post–Second World War Eastern European women’s activism in shaping so-called second wave feminism. She pointed to the need for recognizing various, diverse, and complex—but largely forgotten—contributions of state socialist women activists to shaping women’s agendas locally and internationally before the revolutionary decade of the 1960s.¹ Existing historical narratives about transnational feminism still overlook the role of women from the Eastern Bloc in forming international women’s activism after 1945. They build on stereotypes of state socialism that survived the fall of the Berlin Wall—ones that represent women as passive victims of authoritarian regimes—and emphasize the leading role of women from the West and their postcolonial counterparts as forces behind the formation of a transnational women’s movement.

In this chapter I follow de Haan’s call for recognizing various forms of women’s activism under state socialism. I argue that acknowledging socialist states as sites for the development of supranational women’s movement agendas before the 1960s, particularly after the Second World War, can expand dominant understandings of the relationship between global politics and concepts of modernity and social progress that have been conceived of and transformed within European “gender equality” narratives. My goal is to recast state-socialist women’s activism as part of the genealogy of women’s movements globally by taking a closer look at women’s international activism post-1945. In particular, I examine the transformation of the work of Polish women within the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), a socialist-feminist organization that was created in 1945 in Paris at the International Congress of Women. During the 1960s, women’s activists’ political focus underwent a paradigm shift from “peace activism” to the “development” framework of international organizations. I wish to trace this transformation by examining the changing face of Polish women’s activism after the Second World

War, particularly the erasure of Polish women's original thought and engagement with the international women's movement. I will argue that the eradication was particularly prominent during the UN-sponsored Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 when Eastern European women activists coined the term "non-region" to indicate the exclusion of Eastern Europe from the space of the international women's movement following the division of the world into First, Second (Soviet Union and East European countries), and Third World categories of the Cold War era.² Conceptually, I utilize the idea of the "long sixties"³ to argue that revolutionary changes that took place during the 1960s and 1970s were rooted in the 1940s. Methodologically, I approach the question of the agency of women under state socialism as rooted in a political, institutional, and cultural context within which postwar Eastern European socialist activists worked on behalf of women's equality, both nationally and internationally.

In formulating my argument I rely mostly on primary sources: fieldwork and archival documents. This chapter is part of a larger project based on semi-structured interviews with women who were active in communist parties and women's groups during the 1970s and 1980s in Poland and Georgia and archival sources, particularly the documents of the Women's Department of the Polish United Workers Party collected by the Archive of New Records in Warsaw, and the Women's International Democratic Federation documents available at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. In addition I use the material collected for my PhD dissertation, "Between East and West: The formation of Polish feminist identities," for which I interviewed thirty Polish women activists.⁴ I hope that my revised analysis of primary sources⁵ will destabilize and challenge the predominant representation of state-socialist women activists in secondary sources as passive witnesses unable "to organize and defend their collective interest."⁶

Many of the materials I use do not contradict the common understanding that Soviet-style women's emancipation was imposed in Poland "from above" in 1945. And yet, these sources illustrate that the project of state-socialist women's emancipation varied across time and depended on the changing political climate and the women who were involved in the workings of the state apparatus. They confirm that developments toward the advancement of women's rights after the Second World War in socialist states and in a larger transnational context cannot be represented as disconnected. State policies toward equality and women's activism under state socialism in Poland did not exist as an entity shaped solely by the Soviet Union without contact with the outside world. Polish members of women's organizations traveled internationally to Women's Congresses where, particularly during the immediate postwar period, they spoke about issues important for women globally. They shaped international organizations' agendas to include equal pay and the need to facilitate a work-family balance, two important goals of Western feminism that developed later, in the 1960s and 1970s. Research for this essay confirms arguments of recently published work that suggest that the socialist state accommodated some diversity and agency in terms of issues activists emphasized locally (nationally) and transnationally and the tools they employed to achieve goals of women's equality.⁷ My research also supports an argument that second wave feminism did not emerge exclusively in the West. Rather, it

was shaped by and contributed to ongoing transnational women’s activism that crossed the boundaries created by the Cold War.

The framework of the “long sixties” provides a conceptual tool to re-periodize and redefine the second wave of feminism—most often narrated as originating in the United States and Western Europe during the 1960s—as a longer movement that emerged from the postwar struggles of women around the world. As approached from a broader historical and geopolitical perspective, second wave feminism, particularly at the international level, could be reconceptualized as connected to the history of post–Second World War activism by women in Eastern Europe. Within this framework, the struggles of activists involved in international women’s movements before the 1960s can be seen as a basis for the transnational women’s movement more commonly identified as coming together in the 1960s and later.

Fighting for progress and against “reactionary forces” after the Second World War

Debates about international women’s movements during the postwar period have often underestimated international women’s antiwar (peace) activism. Furthermore, the work of state-socialist activism has gone unrecognized as being essential to the international antiwar movement. Not only was state-socialist activism a leading force behind the foundation of the Women’s International Democratic Federation in 1945,⁸ it also consistently foregrounded women’s equality through institutional tools (constitutional changes, health and social provisions) and laid the foundations for future international emancipation discourses, including that of the European Union’s “gender mainstreaming,” that focused on the economic equality of women and men, the labor market, and the balancing of work and life activities. In these processes, individual women and women’s groups—political women’s departments and state funded “women’s” organizations—were not only reacting within the frame provided but also were actively shaping and reshaping it.

The WIDF played a crucial role in shaping the agenda of the international women’s movement during the first two postwar decades. The organization’s founders, socialist activists Eugenie Cotton and Marie-Claude Vaillant-Courtourier, defined WIDF’s mission as focusing on four major concerns: antifascism, international peace, child welfare, and the status of women. One of the early documents penned by the Federation defines the rights of women in a number of life areas:

AS MOTHERS: the rights to have children in a world free from fear, misery and war, the provision by every government of good social services and adequate housing. As WORKERS: the right to work in all industries and professions and to receive equal pay for equal work, the same opportunities of vocational training and advancement as men, an end to the exploitation of women as cheap labor and the improvement of working conditions. As CITIZENS: equality with men before the law and full democratic freedom of expression, the possibility to vote and to

be members of communities, justice and national and international administrative bodies.

Between 1945 and 1969 WIDF organized six international World Congresses of Women.⁹ The principal activities of these gatherings included the presentation of reports as well as speeches by national delegates and the networking among delegates from around the world. Women from Eastern Europe, including Poland, participated in all six Congresses, although, as we shall see below, the role of the delegates from Soviet Bloc countries later declined.

In the late 1940s, WIDF managed to bring together a number of women activists representing different states and affiliations: Soviet communist Nina Popova; and continental antifascist activists such as Elizabeth Acland Allen and French scientist Irene Joliot-Curie. Joliot-Curie was the daughter of Polish-born Maria Skłodowska-Curie (and like her mother, a Nobel Prize winner) and did not shy away from expressing her support for WIDF as an organization uniting women from various geographical backgrounds. In the preface to the Federation's first report, Joliot-Curie stated:

It is absolutely clear that all the peoples who suffered directly from air-raids and occupation want peace, and we are sure that the people of the United States or other countries far from the theater of war also desire peace. The Women's International Democratic Federation, which unites numerous women's organizations from all countries, is one of the essential elements in this crusade for peace.¹⁰

The Congress of American Women, a member organization of WIDF, was founded in New York City in 1946 and featured some prominent female activists, including Elinor S. Gime, a New York-based activist and a supporter of universal child care and of the doctrine of "positive peace," an idea popular among American socialists in the 1930s and 1940s. Supporters of the positive peace doctrine argued that phenomena such as European colonization and Jim Crow laws in the United States were instances of institutional racism and international imperialism that had the same origins as institutional violence against women and discrimination against women. The American Congress of Women was a strong opponent of racism, and included among its leaders African American women such as educator Charlotte Hawkins Brown.¹¹

In the context of the Cold War, WIDF, which brought together women committed to socialism,¹² anti-imperialism, and antifascism, not surprisingly sided with the Soviet Bloc. Where women's political rights were concerned, the Federation strongly supported the idea that women's emancipation was fully possible only under socialism, and pointed to the ways in which civil rights were subject to violation in the United States and in Western Europe. During the early decades of WIDF activities, socialist states were represented, and they did so as beacons of women's equality, particularly when compared to the West. "The Report on the Defense of Economic and Political Rights of Women," presented by American delegate Helen Phillips in 1948 at the Second WIDF Congress in Budapest, reads:

History shows that equality for women is inseparable from the victory and development of democracy. Now we can say that in the number of Eastern European countries where there now exist democratic regimes, the new Constitutions proclaim the equality of women in political, economic and cultural life. The achievements of the governments of those countries, as regarding schooling, professional training, medical care, child protection and maternity care, give women a chance to exercise their rights.¹³

In Federation documents, which the Western and Eastern European delegates cocreated, the Soviet Union was represented as an unquestioned leader of women's equality in the world. The 1948 WIDF report claimed that the Soviet Union had reached the stage of complete equality in women's rights, equating equality with the fact that women constituted one-third of the deputies in the Supreme Soviets of the Soviet Republic. "This number is greater than the total number of women members in Parliaments in the [rest of the] entire world," the report concluded.¹⁴

Compared to the Soviet Union, the delegates to the WIDF meeting viewed the state of women's political rights in Western countries as leaving much to be desired.¹⁵ US delegates to WIDF, that is, members of the Congress of American Women (CAW), shared the Federation's commitment to socialism. In 1948 Muriel Draper, an American writer and a delegate to the WIDF Congress in Budapest, presented examples of the US government silencing Americans who expressed leftist political sympathies, including activists like herself:

The Congress of American Women (that held its first meeting on March 8th, 1946) is on the subversive list, put there by the authority of our Attorney General, Tom Clark. This means that we are under strict vigilance both as to telephone calls, the post and all our literature, and may any moment be called before a Court of Investigation. Some of our members are losing their jobs in their professions, are being brought before investigation committees, threatened with imprisonment and deportation and in general, subjected to terrorism. This takes place against the background of anti-Communist hysteria and hostility to the Soviet Union initiated by reactionary elements in our government, with help of monopoly press, radio, film and other means of propaganda. The American Negro people in particular are being subject to violence and terror ... The work of the Congress of American Women and the whole progressive moment is to expose the methods to the American people, and urge them to uphold our true tradition of love of freedom, peace and abundant life for all—and to fight for it.¹⁶

The US House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) denounced the WIDF as a tool of the Soviet Union. This led the CAW to disaffiliate from the WIDF in 1949 and to disband in 1950.

Assessing the situation regarding political and economic rights of women under capitalism and socialism was a crucial preoccupation of WIDF. While the report prepared for the Budapest Congress claimed "the economic inequality of women, the inequality of their wages" was the most flagrant social injustice; the authors noted that

"in most of the capitalist countries women do not enjoy economic rights equal to those of men."¹⁷ In 1948 Western nations' achievements in the area of economic rights for women lagged when compared to the representatives of the Soviet Bloc. In 1948 only seven out of forty-eight states in the United States featured provisions that guaranteed equal wages for women and men. In Britain, the wages of women employed in industry were 50 to 55 percent lower than those of men. In light of these conditions, the WIDF portrayed socialist states as ahead of Western countries in the area of economic equality. The 1948 report stated that:

In the new (socialist M.G.) democracies women's economic equality is assured by law. The state takes steps to protect women workers and to provide maternity benefits. The law guarantees equal pay for equal work, paid maternity leave and financial assistance to nursing mothers, childbirth premiums, interruption of work to permit the nursing of infants, pensions to widows and orphans, free medical care, a vast network of consultation centers for children, nurseries and kindergarten.¹⁸

Particular socialist states' paths to women's equality were documented in the early WIDF reports. In the case of the Eastern European states such as Poland that suffered great material and demographic losses as a result of the Second World War, the goal of equality for women in the workplace was represented as intersecting with the need to repopulate the nation. New policies regarding women's work and maternity were presented as fulfilling the two goals of Poland's "new democracy": that is, adding extra sets of hands to rebuild the country and rebuilding the population. During the postwar period, socialist states claimed to occupy leading positions in these areas, at least on paper, when compared to Western and Northern European states. The report for the Third World Congress of Women held in Copenhagen in 1953 criticized Scandinavian countries where, it asserted, there were no laws providing maternity leave or special consideration for nursing mothers.¹⁹ In comparison, the World Congress of Women report noted that socialist countries, including Poland, were leading the way in the area of rights for working mothers:

Matrimony and family are protected by the People's Republic of Poland. Families with many children are specially [*sic*] cared for. Illegitimacy does not lessen the child's rights. Since 1950 Poland has a new law that provides for complete equality of man and woman in the family. Parents jointly exercise their lawful rights over the children and jointly decide the future of their children. Thus all former disseminations regarding the positions of women in the family and society are abolished. There are now 136000 students compared to 48000 in 1938. 40% of the total are women.²⁰

Within the context of Cold War discourse, socialist states, particularly those that experienced the hardships of the Second World War, became poster children for socialist women's equality at the WIDF forums. Public support expressed at the international level by activists from the states that had become socialist after the Second World War helped to legitimize the claim about Soviet supremacy in the area

of women's rights. Polish delegates present at WIDF congresses emphasized their dedication to the idea that the elimination of the reactionary forces of imperialism, capitalism, and religious fundamentalism—active both locally and globally—was crucial to achieving progress in women's rights. Izolda Kowalska, a prewar communist activist and representative of the League of Polish Women, declared during the Second World Congress of Women in 1948: "We promise you to tighten our ranks of Polish women around our Federation even more to fight actively with it against the menace of imperialist war, against the forces of international reaction, against the forces of imperialism."²¹

In the case of Poland, the level of women's equality was measured by comparison with the prewar period, and it was presented in the context of the effects of the Second World War on the nation's material and human resources and the successful prevention of potential new armed conflicts that could arise from the "reactionary forces" of capitalism and imperialism. Polish delegates to WIDF, such as prewar socialist activist Eugenia Pragerowa, demonstrated full support for the new developments in their country:

Before the war, [a] female teacher or public employee lost her position on marriage, a woman with children found all doors closed, and [a] pregnant woman who had to earn her own living was in a helpless situation. At present my country does everything that is necessary for women to be able to unite their professional work with the main duty of a mother, the education of children. Women workers in Poland receive 12 weeks paid leave at the time of childbirth. In her sixth month of pregnancy a woman has to be transferred to easier work without reduction of wages. For feeding the baby she has half an hour off twice daily. The woman enjoys special facilities and priority rights in concluding or ending working agreements. All aid in connection with pregnancy and confinement is given to women gratis, including the baby's layette.²²

For local activists, the WIDF forum became a way of featuring the distinct experiences and histories of Polish women, as distinguished from those of women of other countries, including Eastern Bloc countries. The Federation provided a space for sharing their specific needs and achievements. Polish representatives at the Congress emphasized that the country suffered particularly from the effects of the Second World War, a position that legitimized their strong opposition to any new military conflicts. A report from the Polish delegation at the First WIDF World Congress of Women in Moscow in 1945 reads:

The mass deportations for compulsory work in Germany, the conditions of life which were difficult to support and the death camps of Auschwitz, Maidanek and Treblinka decreased the number of school children to a terrifying extent. Before the war, there were 5 million, now there are only three and a half million. The weight of newborn children has decreased by 30%. Lack of milk results in rickets and other infant diseases. In certain regions infant mortality reaches 40 or

50 percent. The physical development of children is retarded by three or four years. Tuberculosis, which in 1939 reached 2%, was 25% and even 35% in 1945. More than a million children must be fed, clothed and shod. The war has left 400,000 orphans and almost a million children who have lost one parent.²³

In the narratives of Polish representatives at the WIDF, fighting "reactionary forces" was an important task. In WIDF rhetoric, reactionary forces represented imperialism; in Polish rhetoric, they were often conceptualized as representing the Catholic Church and a Polish government in exile that challenged the legitimacy of socialism. As many of the Polish delegates were themselves devoted prewar communists or socialists, the fight for women's rights was also a part of the larger struggle against imperialism. Thus, WIDF fit their political beliefs that had been shaped by personal wartime experiences. During the first WIDF Congresses, Polish representatives drew a connection between the devastating experiences of the war and the rise of new imperialist and militaristic forces after the war. Edwarda Orłowska—head of the Women's Department of the Polish Workers' Party (PWP) and a prewar member of the Association for Communist Youth beginning in 1920 who had been jailed for her involvement in the Communist Party of West Belarus in 1934—argued in 1948:

I speak here in the name of women of one of the countries most devastated by Hitler's fascism. We still mourn and weep for 6 million Polish men, women and children killed during the war. One must see the ruins of our capital, Warsaw, in order to understand the full meaning of the word "war," "war" the word so lightly played about with by those who know how to profit from it, how to turn blood into gold. It is not astonishing that Polish women are fighting with all their strength to safeguard peace and freedom. It is not astonishing either that we should be fearful of the attempt to rebuild German imperialism and of Anglo-American imperialist intrigue, which contrary to all international agreements, is making the Ruhr into a new base for aggression against the countries whose sole desire is peace.²⁴

Locally, for Polish communist and socialist women's activists, the period from 1945 to 1953 was a time of intense and diverse developments in the area of women's rights. They combined various strategies to implement women's equality, including politicization of women's issues, consciousness raising, institutionalization, and work toward fighting patriarchal cultures. Engaging with international organizations, both as venues for the promotion of women's equality in the workplace and as institutions that could help legitimize new policies in a variety of different countries, was an important element of this activism. In postwar Poland, attracting women to communism and encouraging them both to enter the workforce and to reproduce became the first and most profound tasks of the Polish Socialist Party (PSP) and the Polish Workers' Party (PWP) Women's Departments.²⁵ Attaching these efforts to international institutions and movements was one of the elements of building the new communist regime's legitimacy. During the late 1940s the activities of communist women's activists in Poland generally fit the overall representation of the "new democracies" (postwar communist countries)

as progressing in the area of women's equality and endorsing world peace that was promoted at the international level through organizations such as the Women's International Democratic Federation. At the local/national level, Polish communist and socialist activists' membership and visibility in WIDF provided them with solid arguments to justify actions taken in the name of women's equality.

The commitment of the Polish Workers' Party Women's Department (WD), founded in 1946 and led by experienced prewar communists—"true believers" such as Edwarda Orłowska—was to emancipation, which was understood as part of the Communist project rather than as a feminist project. The activist goals of the WD were to build a communist women's movement at the local level that intersected with the mission of WIDF and mobilize the masses of women on the ground, in local villages and working communities; to establish institutional mechanisms for the promotion of women in workplaces and in local power structures; and to fight the social and cultural attitudes concerning women's roles represented by the patriarchal structure of the Communist Party and by the traditional views of the Catholic Church.

In 1946 one of the members of the WD argued, "We must organize a mass, democratic, cross-party women's movement—take into our influence half a million women—this is a matter of honor of the PWP [Polish Workers' Party] women."²⁶ For her and her colleagues, achieving the mass involvement of women in the new regime required both creating a strong institutional base for carrying out tasks related to women's equality at the local level and working toward the mass membership of women in the Social and Civil League of Women, one of two women's organizations—Circles of Rural Women was the other one²⁷—that existed legally under socialism. The Social and Civil League of Women (hereafter League of Women) claimed continuity with the prewar organization of the same name that was founded in 1913. In 1945 the League was established as an autonomous organization that retained close, personal ties with the exiting political parties, the Polish Socialist Party and the Polish Workers' Party. The founding committee consisted of three representatives of the Workers' Party, two representatives of the Socialist Party, one representative of the People's Party, and one representative of the Social Democratic Party. The newly established Polish Workers' Party Women's Department believed that tapping into existing organizational resources on the ground could help build an institutional base for a women's movement:

Our goal is to wrest women from the influence of [reactionary forces], to create the women's organization—powerful. The women's party apparatus has to be strong. Women's departments in the provinces should consist of 5 to 7 women representing the League of Women, Trade Unions, and Rural Self-Help. We should expand the county women's departments; wherever we have strong cadres [party operatives], we can build units with the full-time employees.²⁸

Women's Departments in the Polish Workers' Party carried out positive actions to facilitate women's participation in the workforce while working against conservative forces represented by the patriarchal culture inherited from the prewar period and embodied by the Catholic Church. To promote women's workforce participation, they demanded provisions for working mothers: maternity leave, child care institutions

including factory day care facilities and seasonal child care in countryside areas, the liberalization of divorce and parental law, health care for pregnant women and infants, and nursing breaks and breast milk banks. Some of the postwar state policies that were introduced included an increase in the number of beds for expectant mothers from 6,645 in 1945 to 9,977 in 1948 and the funding of 4,300 preschools, of which 400 were to be attached to factories, providing care for 250,000 children. The changes that aimed at improving the work and life conditions of working mothers were inspired by activists working at the national level. They copied some of the reforms introduced by the Soviet Union, which were implemented by the state from above. Many of these state reforms resonated with activists on the ground, however. Wiesława (to preserve anonymity, interviewees' first names and initials were changed), who started her career as a factory worker and ended up as director of the factory, said of her 1950s experience as a working mother: "We had only 3 months of maternity leave, and after these 3 months a woman was back at work. I'm such a mother who went back to work after 3 months. But I had a daycare behind the wall of the shop floor. Day and night."²⁹

Recruiting women to the party proved to be a daunting task, as activists faced patriarchal bias in their own party and struggled against an even more pervasive system of cultural domination represented by the Catholic Church. The work of postwar activists against "reactionary forces" was twofold: it focused on the regressive attitudes within the Communist Party—which could prevent the mass mobilization of women within the communist frame—and that of the strong position of the Catholic Church in society. In the mid-1940s, the idea of women's equality was still foreign to many Polish communists despite official policy: many local party leaders protested against the existence of "women's instructors" (paid representatives of Women's Departments in the field). At a 1946 Women's Department meeting Orłowska reported, "Regional committees do not appreciate women's work. In Lubelskie voivodeship, the country secretary, comrade Tomaszewski, forced the women's instructor to replace his stenotypist, who was on holiday, for months. In Kieleckie, the party secretary does not invite women's instructors to party meetings."³⁰ While the successes of the instructions about "women's work" issued by the Central Committee of the PWP proved to be limited—they were generally ignored by the local secretaries—Women's Department members discussed a number of alternatives, including on-the-ground strategies to fight their male comrades' bias. One of these involved the communists' wives. At another 1946 meeting of the WD, one of its members stated, "we have to organize meetings with our comrades' wives—without their husbands' knowledge ... Let them get involved." She added, "Get their families and friends involved."³¹

The Catholic Church made up another locus of resistance to the idea of women's equality. During the postwar period in Poland, the official line of the party was not to fight the Church openly. Although the socialist state positioned itself as secular and supportive of emancipation from traditional family structures, it hesitated to implement radical emancipation provisions that would go against the Church. The new regime was aware that the Church, which throughout the war and postwar periods (particularly during the Holocaust and the resettlement of nonethnic Poles) had become increasingly dominant in Poland, could not be ignored as an important political force. In return, Church authorities supported many of the new regime's

policies; in particular, they expressed their approval of the Stalinist-style antiabortion law because they claimed abortion "prevented the health of citizens."³²

The Women's Department officially followed the strategy of maintaining a silent truce between the state and the Church. During its meeting in July 1946, the regional WD representative argued: "The [reactionary forces are] spreading propaganda that that PWP is fighting religion ... We have to say that we do not fight religion."³³ Yet, in the privacy of party meetings the Church was represented as a reactionary force that kept women from the party and needed to be monitored. "We have to gain control over particular institutions ... The merciful ladies attached to the Church ... have large sums of money at their disposal, and we do not know how they spend it, none of our people are there ... We need to put our people in, so there are no mistakes," argued one of the members during the WD meeting in May 1946.³⁴ Simultaneously, "on the ground" the fighting between the WD members and the Catholic priests was, at times, severe. At the WD meeting in June 1946, the representative from Białystok reported:

Our comrade Roszkowska disseminated 100 membership League declarations in Bielski county. When the priest found out about it, he announced from the pulpit that the League is a Komsomol.³⁵ Women returned the declarations to comrade Roszkowska when she returned the next Sunday. Comrade Roszkowska was then attacked by a group of men and kidnapped into the forest.

In comparison to the strong emphasis on politicizing the issue of women's equality made by the WD of the Polish Workers' Party, the WD of the Polish Socialist Party focused on convincing women to join the League of Women and focused on securing equality in the workplace. The PSP WD had been established before the Second World War, and it featured committed socialists including Eugenia Pragierowa, a historian and member of the Association of Workers' Universities, and Zofia Wasilkowska, the first female minister in Poland (Wasilkowska led the Ministry of Justice during 1956–57). Their work, nationally and transnationally, focused mostly on issues related to women's work and fit the international WIDF agenda that represented socialist states as leaders in introducing women's equality in the economic sphere.

At the local level, PSP women often argued against unification of the efforts for women's equality under the banner of communism, which the Polish Workers' Party's WD supported. Rather, the PSP's WD stressed the desirability of greater diversity within the socialist women's movement, including the relative autonomy of the League of Women from the Communist Party. Their efforts to forward women's equality in law and the workplace were completed when the principle of women's equality was written into the Polish Constitution. Pragierowa, who, as a head of the Department of Care in the Ministry of Labor and Social Care between 1919 and 1925, had been involved in issues of economic equality since before the Second World War, reported in 1953:

The Polish People's Republic is a country where the full and real equality of rights of women is now a fact ... These principles were laid down with the emphasis of our new constitution on July 23, 1952 ... The principle of equal pay for equal

work is rigorously carried out and has become an iron law in the daily life of our country.³⁶

Globally, as active participants of WIDF, Polish socialist women led efforts to incorporate issues such as equal pay for equal work into the agendas of international institutions. As vice-president to the Women's International Democratic Federation, Pragierowa summarized these efforts during the 1953 Congress of WIDF as follows:

I shall speak here of one of the most important questions for working women—their wages. This question symbolizes the basis of the independence of women ... In recent times this problem has been three times the object of deliberation on an international level, precisely in connection with its importance to the conditions of women's lives. The World Federation of Trade Unions has placed before the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations organization a memorandum concerning the recognition by the UN of the principle of "Equal Pay for Equal Work" as a regulation to be applied in its fullest sense. After having discussed this question vigorously, the Council has declared that this question comes under the jurisdiction of the International Labor Organization, to which it was transmitted. But at the International Labor Organization, after long discussion, the question was withdrawn from the agenda ... The discussion ... shows that the just and equitable principle of "Equal Pay for Equal Work" today encounters strong resistance from representatives of the capitalist classes ... In the very near future the question of equal pay for equal work will again be the object of discussion at the Conference of the International Labor Organization. The representatives of the New Democracies will take a positive attitude on this question as they have done up to now, an attitude in favor of working women's interests.³⁷

The work of the Polish communist and socialist women activists between 1945 and 1953 was inspired by their international contacts at the WIDF Congresses, and conversely, their locally gained expertise shaped the politics of women's movements internationally. Lobbying for economic equality at the level of the United Nations, the International Labor Organization, and the World Federation of Trade Unions, socialist women's activists, including Polish women, helped to set priorities and create paths for future generations of women's activists. At home, the active engagements with international public figures, including members of WIDF such as Irene Joliot-Curie, served as a tool to legitimize the women-centered policies of the new communist regimes. Tying the work of local organizations to WIDF helped to represent women's equality in the newly communist countries as a part of international activism. The reports on the proceedings of the WIDF became an important aspect of pro-communist propaganda beginning in 1946, with the aim of portraying the new regimes' agendas as being in line with international trends. The draft of the speech to be delivered to Polish women on March 8, 1950, which had been proposed by activists in the Polish Workers' Party WD, is a good example of the linkage of the new Polish women's movement and transnational women's rights activism:

After the end of the Second World War, which broke the power of Hitler's Germany, on the wave of revolutionary ideas and growing sympathy of the working masses of the world for the Soviet Union—the unquestioned winner of the war in 1945—the Women's International Democratic Federation was created in Paris, during the Congress of Women, by 40 states. The Women's International Democratic Federation proposed the following goals for the women's movement: to fight for lasting peace, to fight against the remnants of fascisms in the world, and to fight for the equality of women and men and childcare. Around these goals the Federation mobilized 80 million women from 56 countries. In 4 years it became, next to the World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Youth Organization, the most powerful force for world peace. Already in 1945 when the League of Women was created—which now consists of 1.5 million women—the organization called for its access to the Federation ... The League of Women works on consciousness raising and on increasing the level of education and culture among the masses of women. It helps women to acquire working skills which will allow them to advance socially, and it cares about helping women and their children ... The League is an active participant in all Federation (WIDF) works.³⁸

The international "long sixties" and the decline of Polish women's activism

The decades that followed the 1950s mark the decline in the importance of socialist states within the international women's movement. While state socialism continued to be cited in many international documents in the 1960s and 1970s, including WIDF and UN reports, as the only system within which true equality could be achieved (see UN reports from Mexico, Cairo, Nairobi), changes in the structure of the Communist Bloc and in the language of international forums led to the declining importance of socialist states in international feminism. An examination of WIDF documents from the Federation Congresses illustrates the erosion of the heterogeneous voices of Eastern European activists. This transformation was accompanied by the shift at the global level from a focus on "peace" to a focus on "development," as well as a backlash against women's rights, which led to the transformation of equality policies at the local level.

From the 1960s onward the Soviet Union and some chosen loyal satellite states (including Bulgaria) became major representatives of the whole Eastern European Bloc to the WIDF, leaving no room for the representation of complex trajectories of women's experiences of equality in various countries from the 1950s to 1970s. (For example, we have seen that Polish women stressed their suffering and loss in the Second World War as characteristic of their national experience that affected the kinds of women's policies necessary in the postwar years.) A unified perspective of the state of women's rights in the region was articulated by the USSR delegates, such as Valentina Tereshkova, Soviet cosmonaut and a member of the Supreme Soviet. During the Helsinki World Congress of Women in June of 1969, delegate Tereshkova laid out a new political geography for the women's movement in a report titled "Women at Work." The document reads:

Characteristic of our time is the existence of a world of socialist, capitalist and developing countries, with differing social systems. An objective analysis of the position of women cannot be made without taking this fact into consideration, without showing their role in labor, or determining the problems related to women.³⁹

Within a world divided into three parts—the capitalist countries, the socialist countries, and the developing nonaligned postcolonial countries—the socialist states were still, in Tereshkova's words, in a leading position in comparison to the West in regard to women's emancipation:

In socialist countries, where exploitation of man by man has been done with, the woman receives equal rights with the men and the opportunity to take an active part in all walks of life. The state policy is directed towards guaranteeing full equality for women in the society, towards creating conditions which help them combine outside work with running the home and bringing up the children . . . In the countries of the capitalist world, where the economic reins are in the hands of the monopolies, the employers, as well as the state as a whole, do not take responsibility . . . for them. For this [reason], conflicts and contradictions arise connected with women's participation in social production.⁴⁰

In the new narrative, presented in Tereshkova's paper, "development" replaced "peace" as a central principle of the international women's movement. This approach would later be at the center of the International Women's Year and UN Conference agendas that inspired contemporary gender equality politics, including that of "gender mainstreaming" in the European Union. This new development paradigm led to the end of the earlier prominence of the Eastern European countries such as Poland whose wartime suffering had served as a justification for the feminist focus on peace efforts. Compared to the capitalist Western world, women's equality under socialism was now presented as a path that women's emancipation in postcolonial states should follow, not as an example of a route to peace:

The peoples of countries which have recently been liberated from the colonial yoke are waging a constant struggle against the evil heritage of colonialism. It became a task of importance in the developing countries that have won political independence to draw women into public work, to solve the complicated questions of their vocational training, to improve their living and working conditions. In those countries where colonialism still holds sway, women are subjected to particularly cruel exploitation and racial oppression, and are in the most grave position.⁴¹

While Polish women continued to participate in events, including WIDF and United Nations Conferences, their involvement consisted rather of representing the nationally and internationally created idea about progress in the area of women's equality, instead of shaping it. The fact that the agenda was set from above limited the scope of women's

involvement to certain areas and specific exchanges with women representatives from other countries. Halina, a former head of a women's organization and a member of the Women's Council in the 1960s and 1970s, described her work at the international level: "There was the Decade of Women, then conferences in Denmark and Nairobi that I went to. I must say that Poland had a very good standing in these organizations (the WIDF and the UN), for a number of things including research, knowledge, for lobbying the government, in terms of maternity leave and part time employment, and so on." Halina was, however, aware of the divisions created by the Iron Curtain: "There were not many tensions between the women representatives themselves. Maybe there were conflicts between the governments, but not between the women (from the East and from the West)."⁴²

The decline of the diversity of socialist women's activism internationally, and its ultimate demise during the 1960s and 1970s, correlated with transformations of women's activism at the local level. In countries such as Poland, the late 1950s marked the evolution of the state's commitment to women's equality, from building strong political support for socialism among women to practical activism that focused on alleviating the double burden of work and home life. In 1948, Women's Departments of PWP and PSP merged to form a single unit, as the Polish United Workers' Party was established, only to be dissolved in 1953. During the period from 1953 to 1956, following the death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, a new way of approaching the issue of women's rights emerged. The "Polish road to socialism" combined socialist ideas of women's equality with prewar traditional attitudes toward the role of women. Locally in Poland, the 1960s marked a process of depoliticization and repression against female activists who had initiated taking a stand against the authorities in the late 1950s. Units from the League of Polish Women were banned from the workplace after 1966, but the process of depoliticization of the organization can even be traced further, back to 1953 and the period of "thaw" that followed Stalin's death. As it happened, the thaw had some ambivalent consequences for women; many 1950s developments were positive while others were not. In her book, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*, Małgorzata Fidelis examines the ambiguous effects of the "thaw" on women's agency. She argues that in the 1950s "women did not have to work as much as in the early postwar era. The space for claims for respect of workers' rights had opened and they could voice their opinions on various topics, including discrimination in the workplace. Some women, who wished to, could stop working and devote themselves to the household."⁴³

Important legal and institutional transformations marked the political shift of the 1950s during the post-Stalinist "thaw," and the new abortion law that was introduced in 1956 was one of them. While in the mid-1950s the Polish state was no longer interested in maximum demographic growth (as it had been immediately after the war), improving the living conditions of "already living" children became the main focus. The new law allowed abortions for social reasons, and was thus aimed at limiting the number of births among women who already had children. Access to abortions required a doctor's permission, however, and Polish women had to wait until the 1960s for a further liberalization of the law and the chance of making an independent decision regarding an unwanted pregnancy.

Changes introduced after 1953 were also aimed at reconstituting the prewar gender contract, in particular, sealing the existing gender division of labor based on the unpaid family work of women and putting new constraints on women and their activism.⁴⁴ The "humane socialism" proposed by the government leader and PWP head Władysław Gomułka after 1956 aimed to build a new order using old forces; the socialist state was seen as being rooted in concepts of tradition and family, to which the figure of "Mother Poland" remained crucial. The new emphasis on motherhood as a crucial women's role is noticeable in the ways in which Polish representatives spoke at the Fourth Congress on "The Defense of Life" in Vienna held from June 1 to 3, 1958. ("Defense of Life" was the name of the congress and it focused on peace. It did not have the antiabortion connotation this phrase has in the United States.) Wanda Piemiczna declared:

We Polish women, who suffered particularly through the war, want to continue to work in peace as we have done in the past 13 years ... In our country there is no one family which was not directly affected by the horrors of the war. We lost 6 million people and that means that in our country there is no woman who has not lost either her husband, son, brother or daughter. I personally lost my husband, my only son and one of my daughters, and I myself made that terrible acquaintance with concentration camps ... As a mother, and grandmother, as a Pole, as a Catholic, as Deputy of the Polish Provincial Parliament, I am conscious of what the Rapacki Plan⁴⁵ [Poland's proposal for a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe] which is quoted so often in the whole world means.⁴⁶

New institutions were established to help women facilitate the "double shift" of work both inside and outside the home. They focused on practical rather than political activism. The Committee for Household Economics, founded in 1957 and structurally tied to the League of Women, combined the goal of supporting women's emancipation with maintaining traditional gender roles by teaching women how to become rational and effective "working housewives." According to Basia Nowak, a historian who researched post-1945 women's activism in Poland, women's organizations performed several important functions during the immediate postwar time period, including teaching skills that helped women to become good working housewives, providing legal advice and psychological support, and creating "women only" spaces for relaxation and entertainment.⁴⁷ While in the 1950s women's organizations focused on fighting illiteracy and facilitating legal changes in the areas of child care and divorce, creating domestic skills courses became the main area of their "practical activism" during the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁸

The Committee for Household Economics was an organization—quite elaborate, almost Byzantine in structure—that combined the promotion of women's economic emancipation with maintaining traditional gender roles. Anna, who worked at the Committee for thirty years, describes its work:

We had administrative training and economic departments. We conducted research on the organization of the household: furnishing, budgeting, and economics in general. We also did research on household supplies: washing machines,

kitchen robots and refrigerators . . . and we had scientific literature, from Germany and France . . . The training department organized workshops where we taught women how to use these appliances. We organized annual workshops for trainers who then worked with the local League of Polish Women units.⁴⁹

Like many other women, the courses organized by the Committee through the League chapters helped Barbara acquire a variety of household skills that she otherwise would not have learned at home. She remembers: "I was really bad at household work, I left home at age 15 and my mom hadn't taught me anything. But there were fully equipped facilities there [in the League's offices] and they taught us how to cook, and all kinds of other things."⁵⁰ In 1968 the number of leaders of the League was slashed as a result of the anti-Semitic stance adopted by the Polish United Workers' Party. Jewish leaders and the wives of Jewish communists, who had played active roles in the Party, found themselves removed from the national organizations. This further depoliticized the work of the League. In the 1960s and 1970s the Committee for Household Economics continued to focus on educating women about traditional gender roles that were to be combined with new roles in the labor market in order to carry out the Party's orders among women and to ease the "double burden."

As the character of female-centered policies changed, so did the profile of the activists, not to mention their relationship with the Party. The passionate commitment of the first generation to communism had eroded as a result of the cleansings within the Party and activists' personal transformation away from communism,⁵¹ and was replaced by the more practical, technocratic attitude of the next generation. The activists that succeeded the first generation lacked the previous generation's passionate commitment to communism and followed different life trajectories: ones that featured Party membership as a rational and practical choice. Halina, born into a small town, middle-class family, a former member of the Council of Polish Women (founded in 1966), and a former director of the Committee for Household Economics, argued: "I was apolitical, but I wanted to be active, so I was . . . During the time I was active, all of this seemed rational."⁵² Institutional circumstances created by the previous generation attracted various other groups of women too, including working-class women and the wives of male party members. Barbara, a paint factory worker, recalls: "I joined the League, I think, maybe on Women's Day. I went to the celebration as a young woman and met ladies from the workplace unit of the League."⁵³ Janina, an accountant and a former head of the local branch of the League of Women, confesses: "I became a member in 1956, partially because my husband was in the Party, but also because I wanted to participate in meetings; I wanted to know what was happening here, I wanted to get involved with the workplace and town politics."⁵⁴

Polish women's activism in the "long sixties" can be characterized by the search for a new paradigm that could follow the strong political and ideological commitments of the first generation activists at the local and global level. The new identities emerging in the mid-1950s onward were marked by personal, national, and global transformations that contributed to the ultimate invisibility of the Polish activists in the international women's movement of the 1970s. At the personal level, the continuity was broken between the first generation of prewar communist and socialist activism and the more

pragmatic approach that emerged in the 1950s and the 1960s. The new attitude was shaped by the transformations at the national level and the turn to nationalism and traditionalism that took place in the 1950s following Stalin's death. At the level of the international women's movement, activism that focused on peace building, to which many postwar Polish activists were devoted, was replaced by an approach that centered on development and on the dialogue between the West and the Global South. This transformation accompanied the marginalization of WIDF within the UN Decade for Women and the declining of the presence of the Eastern European countries within the UN Conferences on Women that concluded with the Beijing Conference in 1995.⁵⁵

A tale of "Non-Region": Eastern European women's activism and the United Nations world conferences on women

Within the grand historical narrative of transnational feminism, which focuses on the period from 1975 to 1995, a period that included four World Conferences on Women sponsored by the United Nations, the activism of women who represented the Women's International Democratic Federation and the Eastern Bloc is conspicuously absent. Scholars of state socialism are now arguing that this exclusion is an aftermath of the persistence of the Cold War divides that dominated the politics and historiography of transnational feminism. Among them, Francisca de Haan demonstrates that even though WIDF took an active part in drafting the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and preparation for the International Women's Year, it was marginalized during the Mexico City Conference in 1975 due to the Cold War dynamics. (WIDF organized a separate International Women's Congress in Berlin in 1975.) She argues, furthermore, that the decline of WIDF's impact on the women's international movement has roots in the general dismissal of communism as a site where authentic progress in the area of women's rights could emerge and of historiography's focus on Western feminism as a site of struggles for gender equality.⁵⁶ But the Cold War divisions remained in the center of identity narratives of the post-state socialist women activist as well, prohibiting the inclusion of state socialism as an important part of genealogical narratives of the region's feminisms. While most of the works on post-state socialism still operate within the convergence framework that renders the Eastern European women's movement as "catching up" with their Western counterparts, they perceive the era of state socialism as a gap in the history of feminism.⁵⁷

The concept of "Non-Region" coined during the Beijing conference was symptomatic of the ambivalent status of women from Eastern Europe and their invisibility within existing conceptualizations of feminism and transnationalism. The "Statement from a Non-Region," a joint document published by representatives of the post-socialist states reads:

Our group of countries is a Non-Region because there is no recognizable political or geographic definition for the region composed of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. We are bound by the common

problems associated with the transition to democracy. In this difficult and uneven transition, the most serious problem is the consistent and drastic decline in the status of women. The Governments have failed to incorporate the needs and interests of women in their reforms. For example, women face problems with unemployment, trafficking in women and increased violence. Many women have been forced from their home as refugees from war ... This transition has also created many new opportunities for women. Notably, for the first time in the history of the United Nations, we, as independent NGOs from this region, are able to speak for ourselves.⁵⁸

Within the document, women from Eastern Europe defined themselves through their common experience of oppressive state-socialist regimes and often through failed or unfinished transformations of those regimes. Activists from the post-state socialist states argued that changes brought about by the 1989 transformations had not been entirely satisfying for women, and they found it inappropriate to talk about progress in relation to the gender systems that had been a result of what was often described as bloodless revolutions. At the same time, these activists were eager to cut the ties between themselves and the women who worked on behalf of women's rights before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. As such, they claimed to be newcomers to transnational women's activism, ones that were not easily classified as representing "developed" or "developing" countries. In the eyes of some of the activists involved in establishing the new identity of women's movements in post-socialist states, the "Non-Region" of Eastern Europe had "missed the boat" in regard to transnational activism, spanning from the 1970s through the 1980s. This period included the first UN-sponsored World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975 and culminated with the third UN-sponsored World Conference on Women in 1985 in Nairobi, which featured a dialogue between the "Global South" and "Global North" as one of its central conversations. In an interview I conducted anonymously in 2006, a Polish activist and head of the regional women's coalition on reproductive rights argued:

When it came to the women from the developing countries, they started much earlier, about 20 years earlier. International feminism has been visible since Nairobi in 1985, and it was well established (in Beijing) ... When it came to our region, we were generally "late" and there was no interest in our region, there was no responsibility, no feeling that they owed us something in the global sense ... Moreover while everything was already defined in the south-north paradigm it was extremely hard for the transitioning countries to enter this paradigm.⁵⁹

Since the 1970s, transnational feminist debates were structured around and in relation to the problematic category of the "West." The so called "Second World"—that is, the Soviet Union and the socialist industrialized states of Eastern Europe—remained largely absent from the transnational feminism that emerged as critical of US-centric, second wave-based, feminism and of the homogenizing notion of the "other women" of the Third World or the Global South. In addition, constructions of post-socialism represented Eastern European societies as uniformly onboard with processes of

Westernization and excluded the Eastern European space from the geography of critique of the West and the First World.⁶⁰ In these conceptualizations, generalizations about the relationship between "center" and "periphery" and Eastern European marginality in dominant "Western" historical narratives still masked particularities in favor of universal categories and the binary representation of transnational feminist politics. Stereotypical images of Eastern Europe that represented the region as failing to enter the process of modernization, or as delayed in the process of modernization in comparison to the West, also completely neglected the period of state socialism as a time when a mode of women's activism alternative to Western second wave feminism was developed.

Finally, although delegates from socialist countries were present at the UN Conferences on Women, there was little or no connection between the Polish feminist organizations that emerged after 1989 and women who represented the socialist states in international organizations and at the UN forums before 1989. This was partially due to the idea, dominant during the transformation of the 1990s, that women involved with the socialist state did not represent authentic grassroots women's voices and that their activism was to a large extent designed by the Soviet Union and imposed from above. To that, one can add the generally hesitant attitude toward the socialist past represented in this quote by a Polish feminist and the scholar who began her activism as a part of the Solidarity movement (the interview was conducted anonymously):

When I hear "socialism" I'm all turned off, I just don't like socialism. I like the welfare state and I like social policy but socialism repulses me ... I was brought up by the opposition movement and in the axiom that the free market guarantees freedom of speech ... So on one hand I repel socialism, on the other I know that socialism emancipated women.⁶¹

As a result, the state-socialist project regarding "women's equality" that emerged from the work of nineteenth-century Eastern and Western feminists and was practiced by activists such as Alexandra Kollontai in the 1920s in the Soviet Union remains unexamined as a source of resistance that developed in both postcolonial contexts and in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In most of the existing literature, the formation of transnational feminism is linked to the process of the institutionalization of women's activism and the ongoing dialogue between women from the West (the Global North) and women from postcolonial countries (the Global South).

Conclusion

In studies of social movements, the framework of the "long sixties" helps to overcome oversimplifying interpretations of twentieth-century history in the United States and elsewhere. It illuminates that transformations and revolutionary events that took place in the 1960 and 1970s United States have to be seen in the broader historical perspective from the Second World War to the 1980s.⁶² Studies on state socialisms expand this approach by pointing to the importance of the spatial dimension of the

"Global Sixties" which destabilizes the perception of the Cold War period as a time when tightly sealed political boundaries separated the East and West.⁶³ Seen from the perspective of the "long sixties," women's activism pre- and post-Beijing can be conceptualized as a phase in a longer movement that spanned from the late 1940s and early 1950s through the 1990s. A closer examination of the immediate post-Second World War period, when international women's movements originated in relation to state-socialist women's emancipation, reveals the development of an international women's movement during the "long sixties." This long historical view supports the argument that the second wave feminist movement that emerged in the 1960s in the United States and in Western Europe was shaped by international struggles for peace and development among women in Eastern Europe.

Such an analysis of the history of second wave international women's movement goes hand in hand with the emerging interest in women's activism under state socialism. Some authors argue that women's involvement in the emancipatory policies of the socialist state make a case for reactive agency, one that can be characterized as acting upon someone else's will.⁶⁴ Such an approach agrees with the existing accounts of life under state socialism that are mostly narrated in language that represents women as passive witnesses to the workings of the system, caught up between the authoritarian socialist state, the "double burden" of professional work and household responsibilities, and a lack of sincere political representation.⁶⁵ Other analyses that connect state-socialist emancipatory projects with women's participation demonstrate that various forms of women's agency were also possible within the socialist state.⁶⁶ Fundamental to these conceptualizations is the pursuit of the notion of agency "as the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act," the argument that conceptions of agency and practices of women's movements vary from context to context, as do their interpretations.⁶⁷ They also point to the fact that every agency is to a certain extent limited, and the representation of agency as based solely on "free will" favors the Western tradition of a political philosophy that centers on rationality and autonomy. Finally, these new accounts remind us that women's agency under state socialism cannot be treated as homogenous, either in terms of time, and/or space.

The case of the transformation of postwar women's activism in Poland, locally and globally, which was the focus of this essay, concurs with such presuppositions. In Poland, paradoxically, while the 1989 transformations served as an opening process for new female activism, they also strengthened the process of marginalizing Eastern Europe within the realm of the transnational. The convergence approach undertaken by many women's organizations from the region, and the breaking of the genealogy between the socialist past and the post-transformational mobilizations, led to the perception of the Eastern European women's movement as being delayed in the process of women's emancipation when compared to the West. Without a doubt, from the point of view of women's activism in Poland, several historical periods marked the transformation of the agendas, goals, and possibilities for acting within local and global structures of power. For instance, the 1950s ideas of "sending women back into the home" that occurred in Eastern Europe corresponded to global transformations and a backlash against women's rights in the United States and Western Europe during the same period. The ideologies that were projected, that is, a re-traditionalization

of women's roles, varied depending on the geographical location, but they carried a similar message to women. The year 1968 initiated a lasting process of political transformation that came to an end in 1989. In Eastern Europe these transformations were focused on a political battle for democracy and rarely contained a gender- or sex-equality component. Simultaneously, there was a trend toward depoliticizing state-funded women's organizations and reshaping their focus and methods. Internationally, these processes were accompanied by the shifting agenda of global women's movements and organizations, and a move away from the focus on "peace" to one focused on "development." Taken together, these processes led to the marginalization of the diverse state socialist women's activism from international women's movements, and eventually to their absence from conversations about transnational feminist theory and practice.

In the introduction to their 1994 anthology *Scattered Hegemonies*, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan articulated the need for the visibility and connectivity of feminisms from various locations based on a careful delineation of the "map of debates around cultural production and reception of the diverse feminisms around the globe." In the context of current debates about the place and the status of state-socialist women's activism in the genealogies of the women's movement locally and transnationally, strengthening transhistorical connections and solidarities through learning about the experiences of women from various locations and time periods—without naturalizing the mainstream narratives that represent socialism as universally "bad" for women—emerges as a crucial task for feminist scholarship in the region and beyond. Recovering the impact that women from socialist states, including Poland, had on shaping an agenda for the Women's International Democratic Federation, an organization that laid the priorities of the international women's movements for decades to come, including the fight for peace, development, and economic equality, can surely contribute to reestablishing Eastern Europe as an important site of the formulation of transnational feminist theory and practice. Reconceptualizing state-socialist women's activism as representing not only a commitment to communism, but also as proto-feminism, can help assess its contribution to advance women's status globally. Finally, rethinking the significance of the Cold War activism for transnational feminisms can also contribute to the demolition of the lasting stereotypes of Eastern European women's movements that survived the fall of the Iron Curtain and continue to shape our narratives of the history of women's movements.

Notes

- 1 Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* (September 2010): 547–73.
- 2 "The Statement from a Non-Region. Countries in Transition in ECE Region East-East European Caucus" (statement presented at Plenary Session of the IV World Conference on Women, September 13, 1995, Beijing, by Wanda Nowicka).

- 3 See, for example, Arthur Marwick, "The Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties: Voices of Reaction, Protest, and Permeation," *The International History Review* 27, 4 (2005): 780–806.
- 4 Magdalena Grabowska, "Between East and West. The Formation of Polish Women's Movement Identity," PhD diss. Rutgers University, 2009, <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/26287/>, accessed February 18, 2016.
- 5 The research with members of the communist parties and women's organizations before 1989 in Poland and Georgia was conducted between 2010 and 2013, during which I was a Marie Curie Re-Integration fellow at Warsaw University (grant number 256475). The fieldwork was conducted with the support of the Polish National Science Center (*Okruchy Wolności: Aktywna podmiotowość kobiet w socjalistycznej Polsce i Gruzji* 6731/B/H03/2011/40). This cross-national study of the state-socialist women activists in Georgia and Poland applied interdisciplinary research methods. Data collection involved conducting approximately seventy individual interviews, including tape-recordings of those interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with women involved in the policy-making within the socialist state and those affiliated with the state-sponsored women's organizations. The fieldwork was conducted in several locations, including Tbilisi and Gori in Georgia and Warsaw and Łódź in Poland. The "snowball" method was used to recruit women for the interviews. Methodologically, this research utilized the narrative interview, which deploys a flexible topic guide or questionnaire and is organized in thematic fields.
- 6 Sławomira Walczewska, "Liga Kobiet: Jedyna organizacja kobieca w PRL," *Pełnym Głosem* 1 (1993): 4–8.
- 7 See for example, Kristen Ghodsee, "Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women's Organizations: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and the United Nations Decade for Women, 1975–1985," *Journal of Women's History* 24, 4 (Winter 2012): 49–73. Francisca de Haan, ed., "Gendering the Cold War in the Region. An Email Conversation between Małgorzata (Gosia) Fidelis, Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Jill Massino, and Libora Oates-Indruchova," *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 162–90.
- 8 For an overview of the work of WIDF, see Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organizations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* (2010): 547–73.
- 9 First WIDF Congress of Women in Paris in 1945, second in Budapest in 1948, third in Copenhagen in 1953, fourth in Vienna in 1958, fifth in Moscow in 1963, and last in Helsinki in 1969.
- 10 Irene Joliot-Curie, "Preface," *Second Women's International Congress. Account of the Work of the Congress Which Took Place in Budapest (Hungary) from the 1st to the 6th of December 1948* (Paris: Women's International Democratic Federation, 1948), ii.
- 11 Jacqueline Castledine, *Cold War Progressives: Women's Interracial Organizing for Peace and Freedom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 16; Kate Wiegman, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
- 12 Francisca de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945–1991," Central European University, http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com/help/view/the_womens_international_democratic_federation_widf_history_main_agenda_and_contributions_19451991, accessed February 18, 2016.

- 13 *Second Women's International Congress. Account of the Work of the Congress Which Took Place in Budapest (Hungary) from the 1st to the 6th of December 1948* (Women International Democratic Federation, 1948), 282.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 283.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 283–4, *The Second Women's International Congress. Account of the work of the Congress* noted, for instance, that in England where the legal status of women was, in 1948, one of complete equality with men, women could not, in fact, hold the same positions as men in political life and were not able to actually enjoy the rights granted them by the Constitution. The situation painted by the WIDF report was no better in the Scandinavian countries: in 1945 the Norwegian Parliament featured just 7 women, or 5 percent of the total membership of the chamber.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 144.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 285.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 286.
- 19 *World Congress of Women. Reports, Speeches (Extracts.) Documents* (Women's International Democratic Federation, Berlin 1953), 229.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 239.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 68–9.
- 22 *Second Women's International Congress. Account of the work of the Congress*, 230.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 382.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 196.
- 25 The Polish Workers' Party Women's department was established in 1946, while the Polish Socialist Party Women's Department continued the work by the similar unit within the prewar PSP. The two Women's Departments merged in 1948 to become the Women's Department of the Polish United Workers' Party, under the leadership of Orłowska (Pragierowa remained on the board of the Department). The Department was closed in 1952 upon the claim that women's equality was achieved in Poland.
- 26 Protocol of the Meeting of the Warsaw's Active, May 27, 1946, Archive of New Records, Warsaw, K/1/P.-46, 12.
- 27 Circles of Rural Women was the local organization first funded in 1877, with the aim of self-help and education of rural women.
- 28 The leadership of the League was initially independent; however, in 1951 Irena Sztachelska was replaced by the Workers' Party representative, Alicja Musiałowa. Until 1966 the League also had workplace units that were abolished presumably as a reaction to the League's resistance to the layoff of large numbers of women in 1958. This resulted in a significant drop in the League's membership from two million to 70,000.
- 29 Wiesława, interview by author, November 13, 2012. All quotations come from interviews with women—members of the communist parties and women's organizations before 1989 in Poland and Georgia—that I conducted between 2010 and 2014. All translations into English are mine.
- 30 Polish Workers' Party, Women's Department meeting notes, May 27, 1946, Archive of New Records, Warsaw, 26.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 32 Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 33 Protocol of the Meeting of the Regional Representatives of Women's Departments, October 10, 1946, Archive of New Records, Warsaw, K/1/P.-46, 5–6.
- 34 Protocol of the Meeting of the Regional Representatives of Women's Departments, June 4, 1946, Archive of New Records, Warsaw, K/1/P.-46, 4.

- 35 The Komsomol was a communist youth organization (ages fourteen to twenty-five) founded in 1918. The name of the organization is an acronym of the words *Kommunisticheskii soiuz molodezhi* (Communist Youth Association).
- 36 *World Congress of Women. Reports, Speeches (Extracts.) Documents* (Women's International Democratic Federation, Berlin, 1953), 229.
- 37 *Second Women's International Congress. Account of the work of the Congress which took place in Budapest (Hungary) from the 1st to the 6th of December 1948*, 297.
- 38 Materials for the speech at the 8th of March celebration, 1950, Polish United Worker's Party Archives 237/XV/38.
- 39 Valentina Tereshkova-Nikolayeva V., *Report Women at Work*, World Congress of Women, Helsinki, June 14–17, 1969.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 K. Halina interview by author, October 1, 2011.
- 43 Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*, 170.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 172.
- 45 On February 14, 1958, the Polish government sent a memorandum to the representatives in Warsaw of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and the USSR, as well as to the Swedish representative, for forwarding to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) regarding its proposal for the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe. Because NATO did not accept this proposal, it was not implemented.
- 46 Fourth Congress of the Womens International Democratic Federation, Vienna, June 1–3, 1958, Conference on "Defense of Life" (Paris: Women International Democratic Federation), 71.
- 47 Basia Nowak, "'Where Do You Think I Learned How to Style My Own Hair?' Gender and Everyday Lives of Women Activists in Poland's League of Women," in *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. Shana Penn and Jill Massino (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 45–58.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 49 S. Anna interview by author, September 14, 2011.
- 50 K. Barbara interview by author, November 11, 2012.
- 51 For instance, Zofia Wasilkowska was in her later life an active member of the opposition movement.
- 52 K. Barbara interview by author.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 L. Janina interview by author, November 13, 2012.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 De Haan, interview by author, November 13, 2012.
- 57 See for example, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Barbara Einhorn and Charlotte Sever, "Gender and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 5 (July 2003), 163–90; Peggy Watson, "(Anti)feminism after Communism," in *Who's Afraid of Feminism? Seeing through the Backlash*, ed. Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchel (New York: The New Press, 1993), 144–62.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 Quotation from an interview with the head of the Polish women's organization conducted on June 3, 2006, during fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation entitled

- "Between East and West. Polish Feminism between East and West. The Formation of the Polish Women's Movement Identity." All the quotations in this chapter are anonymous.
- 60 See for example, Małgorzata Fuszara, "New Gender Relationships in Poland in 1990s," in *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism*, ed. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 259; Tamar Sebadashvili, *Gender and Democratization: The Case of Georgia 1991–2006* (Tbilisi: Boll Foundation, 2007).
- 61 Quotation from an anonymous interview with a feminist writer and activist conducted on August 5, 2006, during fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation.
- 62 See for instance, Dan Berger, ed., *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).
- 63 Małgorzata Fidelis, "The Other Marxists: Making Sense of International Student Revolts in Poland in the Global Sixties," in *Fear and Fascination: War, Enemies, and the Other in the Soviet Bloc through the 1950s*, ed. Jophn Connelly, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 62 (2013): 425–9.
- 64 Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 21, 4 (November 2014): 344–60 (first published June 30, 2014); Kristen Ghodsee, "Untangling the Knot: A Response to Nanette Funk," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22, 2 (2015): 248–52 (first published online March 6, 2015, contribution to the Open Forum).
- 65 Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Peggy Watson, "Rethinking Transition: Globalism, Gender and Class," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 2, 2 (Summer 2000): 185; Barbara Einhorn and Charlotte Sever, "Gender and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 5 (July 2003): 163.
- 66 Magdalena Grabowska, "Bringing Second World In: Conservative Revolution(s), Socialist Legacies and Transnational Silences in the Trajectories of Polish Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, 2 (2012): 385–411.
- 67 Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17, 1 (1990): 41–55; Sherry B. Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, 1 (1995): 173–93.

“Making a Point by Choice”: Maternal Imperialism, Second Wave Feminism, and Transnational Epistemologies

Priya Jha

As outsiders, we need each other for support and connection and all the other necessities of living on the borders. But in order to come together we must recognize each other. Yet I feel that since you have so completely unrecognized me, perhaps I have been in error concerning you and no longer recognize you.

—Audre Lorde¹

Introduction

Mary Daly’s book *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, first published in 1978, is central to the canon of second wave feminist writing in the United States.² As Ross Kraemer points out in a review of the book: “it issues an invitation ‘to women who choose to be present to each other’ to undertake the perilous and arduous journey of self-becoming.”³ Drawing from Christian theology, particularly Gnostic mythology, Daly argues that the root of patriarchal oppression of women is located in the “destruction of the bonds between women and the fragmentation of the selves of women.”⁴ As a cornerstone of feminist theory and as an example of radical academic feminism during the second wave feminist movement of the 1970s and the 1980s in the United States, *Gyn/Ecology’s* significance in the formation of a field of critical inquiry is not to be underrated. The book introduces the reader to both Western and non-Western rituals that she asserts are deeply embedded in the mythico-religious realm, which she argues serves only to imprison women further in their sex and within the confines of Patriarchy (with a capital “P”)—a term deployed as uninterrogated and universal in Daly’s book. By framing her analyses of cultural sites, both in Western and non-Western contexts, within Christianity, Daly is already working within the very institution she wishes to challenge: androcentric history. For non-Western women, then, their experiences are already circumscribed within a language and vocabulary

that is removed from their local histories and the existing frameworks that have informed indigenous feminist activism and scholarship.

The "Second Passage" of the book, in particular, is of importance to this chapter. In the Passage, we learn about the Indian practice of *suttee* (widow-burning) in India; Chinese foot-binding; African female genital mutilation; European witch-burnings; and Nazi medicine and American gynecology. Even while reviews were generally favorable during the time of its publication, Margo Moore's comments in *The Australian Left Review* echo some of the central issues I take up in the pages that follow. Moore acknowledges the "visionary" and "poetic" styles of the book and its call for a celebration of women's power. At the same time, she also points to one of the book's major failings: "one most obvious example is the a-historicism of her work. The framework of Patriarchy is assumed in all instances."⁵ Moore's recognition is a pointed reminder of one of the critical and historical quagmires in much feminist work and is not to be taken lightly, particularly when it comes to Daly's lack of analysis of women in the non-Western worlds. Uma Narayan's critique of Daly's ahistorical discussion of *suttee* provides an opening into examining the mediating forces of colonial historiography and Western modernities that determine the roots/routes that these studies take and the inherent tensions in (re)casting women as belonging to/in a global patriarchal culture. The latter has some dire consequences for feminist epistemologies in relation to translating indigenous women's lives for Western academic feminism.

In Daly's case, her erasure of the cultural and historical specificities of *suttee*, both as an act and as something significant in British colonial policy, and as a Hindu religio-cultural tradition rife with its own complicated history, turns Third World women into objects of studies rather than agents of their own histories. As a cultural feminist, she sees "masculinity" itself as a threat, and a turn to an "essential female" as one that would "validate undervalued female attributes."⁶ It is in the focus on femaleness where Daly's work fails: she neglects to recognize that women throughout the world encounter a simultaneity of oppression that comes about by living in multiple patriarchal systems. Hence, the diversity of the material conditions of women's lives gets lost in Daly's work since it relies upon the premise of an essential female subject and a universal patriarchy. Constructed in and written about in this framework in Daly's book, then, non-Western women are caught in a double bind of silence.

Daly turns to Katherine Mayo, an early twentieth-century American journalist and self-proclaimed crusader for women's rights, as the authority in speaking about Indian women's continued victimization by Hindu men during the Victorian period. Interestingly enough, while *suttee* is the ostensible topic of Daly's chapter, Daly's topic was not given any space by Katherine Mayo in her often cited and famous book, *Mother India* (1927).⁷ The conflation of *suttee* with the topics Mayo did write about in *Mother India*—child brides and the unhygienic practices of Hindu *dhais* (midwives)—underscores with clarity critiques made by postcolonial and transnational feminists about how (mis)representations of cultural practices in non-Western countries "replicate some common and unproblematic Western understandings of Third-World contexts and communities."⁸ Indian women find no voice of their own in the writings of either Mayo or Daly, even as Hindu religious traditions are deployed in this "invitation . . . to undertake the perilous and arduous journey of self-becoming." What

is clear, first and foremost, is that the invitation is not extended to all women across the world; rather, the universal category of womanhood within which Daly operates has already demarcated boundaries between Western women (as scholars and as activists) and their non-Western counterparts (as victims of their own traditions). This method and act of talking about and working with non-Western women can be coded as what Barbara Ramusack has called "maternal imperialism."⁹

The notion of cross-border kinship, very much part of Victorian cultures, is most notable on the part of Victorian Christian women's desire to understand and to collaborate with Indian women. Yet, Victorian women failed to do either in their insistence on portraying and analyzing Indian women's lives through "Victorian ideals that reflected Christian influence"¹⁰ and by speaking of themselves in relation to India within a fictive kinship of family, specifically in referencing themselves as "mothers" of their more downtrodden daughters in the East.

In her book, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel*, Inderpal Grewal adds yet another dimension to this encounter between European and Indian women in the Victorian era. She discusses the socialist Sylvia Pankhurst, whose "concerns reveal a trajectory that connects the struggle for women's rights and freedom with other struggles for freedom. It suggests that some feminists in England could construct a historiography that connected 'East' and 'West' by showing connections between patriarchal power in England and colonial practices."¹¹ Grewal suggests that in spite of such radical readings of the connections between patriarchal and colonial structures of power, even Pankhurst "could not see Indian women in terms outside discursive practices of colonial discourses."¹² In a later work, an introduction to transnational feminism coauthored with Caren Kaplan, Grewal asserts that "for us, there has never been any question that the history of modern imperialism bears directly upon the condition of women and relations of gendered power in the modern period."¹³ Thus, white women's work in the colonies was also a way to shore up their positions at home in their fight for citizenship and suffrage.

Drawing upon a transnational feminist framework laid out by Grewal and Kaplan, I examine Mayo's reincarnation as "feminist" in Daly's book. I explore what we can learn about what constitutes feminism, feminist inquiry, and feminist epistemology through an analysis of Daly's use of Mayo to describe what she perceives are Indian women's experiences of patriarchal victimization. The question of Mayo's rebirth as a feminist during the second wave feminist movement (via Daly) is one that builds upon Uma Narayan's critique of Daly, as she thinks through Daly's "representations of Third-World traditions." An important point of note here is that Mayo's rhetoric of Indian-women-as-victims permeates Daly's book, coded, however, within the larger discourse of gynocentric histories. Mayo's book gives an entry point to second wave feminist scholars such as Daly to claim Mayo as a "feminist," the results of which are twofold: (1) Mayo's project in the late 1920s comes to define what a model of global sisterhood could look like; and (2) within this model, Indian women are once again robbed of their subjectivity and agency and trapped within particular rhetorical registers that render them helpless in the face of history. They have, as Amrita Chhachhi has put it, "a forced identity"¹⁴ imposed upon them. Nira Yuval-Davis has also pointed out: "Since the rise of second-wave feminism in the West, during the 1970s and 1980s,

there has been a recurrence of non-dialogue between women from 'First' and 'Third' Worlds."¹⁵

While colonial discourse analysis has been incredibly useful in untangling some of the complexities of the intersections of race, class, and gender during the time of empire, I wish to reexamine both Mayo's and Daly's projects through the lens of transnational feminism which recognizes, and indeed highlights, historical power imbalances wrought by colonial projects and challenges utopian aspirations of global sisterhood. Transnational feminist inquiry insists upon challenging the homogeneity of the nation and the national and, instead, draws upon the interdisciplinary study of women in diverse cultures in order to analyze the unevenness and complexity of relationships of women across borders. In that sense, it challenges our assumptions about shared and monolithic experiences, both historical and geographical, and addresses larger questions about power, privilege, and intersectionalities of women's experiences and their translation within academic settings. All women do not suffer similar oppressions simply by virtue of our sex. All knowledges are situated and all epistemologies are bound up in uneven power relations. Yet, the recognition of such does not preclude feminist modes of discovery. Transnational feminism, then, is an important theory and method that enables an opening in the accepted feminist discourses since it foregrounds the history of Western colonization and its impact upon native populations, with a focus on gendered experiences.

In the case of Daly's writing on Mayo, the following questions arise: What does it mean for Daly to have concentrated her inclusion of Mayo in *Gyn/Ecology* only on specific passages that fossilize Indian women within Hindu religious traditions and to have ignored the larger historical and geopolitical contexts of Mayo's overall project? How does the birth of Mayo as a contemporary feminist affect the ways in which Indian culture gets translated and understood?

Mayo's foundational text about India, *Mother India*, first published in 1927—after Mayo spent only three months in India—has been the topic of study of postcolonial nationalism and feminism by critics located in various disciplines, reaching into schools of criticism that are far-ranging in scope: from colonial discourse analysis, to women and empire, to women's history and policy studies. Both incendiary and infamous, the book, and its subsequent and multiple sequels, regurgitated the tropes that kept India bound to the British Empire. It did so by centralizing its arguments around equating the health of Indian women's domestic lives to the health of the nascent nation-state. Its critiques of child marriage and the unhygienic practices of *dhais* (Hindu midwives) were significant in reducing mainstream Americans' support for Indian independence. Existing scholarship on the book takes Mayo to task for her complicity with both British and American states and for its sole focus on the victimization of Hindu girls, both at the hands of their alleged rapist husbands and the uncaring midwives.¹⁶ Moreover, as will be discussed in the next section, Mayo's project was not as simple as it may appear; she went to India at the request of British and American officials as well as with the blessing of Indian nationalists. Thus, her subsequent writing about India, captured mostly in *Mother India*, but also continued in later works, should be seen within the larger framework of colonialism and national anxieties of different varieties that both India and Western nations felt during the

interwar period. The painstakingly detailed and important work of historian Mrinalini Sinha has awakened fresh interest in Mayo's text.¹⁷

At the same time, an interesting element of Mayo's book that has barely been given mention by critics is how the politics of representation of women and of India as woman/mother in *Mother India* came to have a particular salience well into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, both in India and abroad. When I first began graduate school in 1993, a required reading for many women's studies majors was Elisabeth Bumiller's 1990 tome, *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey into India*.¹⁸ An award-winning book, written by a *Washington Post* reporter, its popularity rested upon Bumiller's position as an insider/outsider who spent three years in the subcontinent, speaking with women from various walks of life. Bumiller's book both praises Mayo for paving the way for radical readings of Indian women and builds upon arguments that Mayo first made in 1927 and makes them palatable for a late twentieth-century audience. Moreover, the rhetorical linkage between Bumiller and Mayo also draws attention to the shifting subject position of Mayo herself. She becomes part of a discourse on global sisterhood by Western women that maps her into the cultural and political landscapes of second wave feminism. By uncritically adopting Mayo, academic feminism failed to acknowledge the intersection of gender and imperialism. This is why the analysis I undertake of Daly's use of Mayo and Mayo's work on India is an important intervention into how we come to understand, interpret, and theorize women's experiences across borders and across multiple histories of oppression.

Daly's interpretation of Mayo and *Mother India* in *Gyn/Ecology* serves as a springboard for addressing questions about border crossings that take place when women in different geographical and historical spaces come to be defined as "women" within the framework of global sisterhood, popularized by scholars such as Robin Morgan in *Sisterhood is Global* (1991) and in her more recent *Sisterhood is Forever: The Women's Anthology for the New Millennium* (2003), both of which extend Daly's vision of universal womanhood. For example, in her discussion of rape in *Sisterhood is Global*, Morgan elides the cultural specificities and localized histories that enable diverse violent masculinities that condone rape. In her analysis of rape, Morgan's non-Western women are not heard in their own voices; instead, Morgan translates and subsumes cultures of rape under the umbrella of Western feminist discourses about sexual violence against women, much as Daly did in 1978. Also like Morgan, Mayo contends that as a woman, she could see and speak more clearly than men about the victimization of Indian women. In doing a close reading of Daly's work, I hope to reveal the palimpsestic inscriptions of cross-cultural exchanges by Western and non-Western women that get folded into a larger history of "maternal imperialism"—an idea that haunts both Mayo's and Daly's texts and that is based on the backwardness of the colonized subjects vis-à-vis material ritual practices such as child brides and *suttee* in the case of India.

For Western feminists, combatting these issues in the nineteenth century—for example, through missionary work—was situated within frameworks of post-Enlightenment notions of morality and responsibility. Partly because cross-cultural feminist struggles were defined by and through the lens of Victorian morality, the results were often the erasure of the histories and voices of non-Western women as

they became victimized by the rhetorical practices of Western feminism during the colonial and the postcolonial periods. Both Kumari Jayawardena and Inderpal Grewal have historicized encounters between Western and non-Western women during the colonial era and demonstrated with acuity that, for Victorian women, their "missionary position" was part and parcel of larger concerns about gaining citizenship rights at home and that Victorian cultural morality was central in the work they undertook to uplift women in the colonies.¹⁹ The same lens of morality creeps into Daly's work in the late twentieth century, a morality that is blind to, as Audre Lorde puts it trenchantly in the epigraph to this chapter, "recognizing" non-Western women as sources of their own knowledge production.

Mayo, *Mother India*, and Indian nationalism

During the First World War, the Indian Gaddar party in the United States fueled the Indian nationalist movement and spirit through financial support as well as by gaining American support for Indian independence.²⁰ By the end of the war, nationalist agitation in India traveled into the United States. Along with the India Home Rule League of America, founded by Lala Lajpat Rai, and the Gaddar party, "a new organization called the Friends of Freedom for India was launched in New York in March 1919."²¹ At the same time, the international community noted that the nationalist movement in India was no longer Hindu in nature; rather, Muslims also joined in the agitation owing to the "dismemberment of the Turkish Empire at the end of the war."²² This is a significant point in that Mayo's book deliberately set out to pitch Hindus against Muslims in the second edition of the book, where she changes "Indian" men to "Hindu" men, in line with her negative perspective on Indian nationalism, in which Muslims are victimized in the national imaginary. In his book, *Katherine Mayo and India*, Manoranjan Jha explains in great detail the cultural politics of the events that led up to the writing of *Mother India* and the subsequent controversy surrounding it. He argues that, "[i]n tune with the British policy of pitting one against another, Mayo highlights the passionate monotheism of Islam and the vitality, sturdiness and practical-mindedness of the Muslims against the 'degenerate materialism' of the Hindus which 'masquerades' as spiritualism."²³ In addition, Mayo encouraged translations of her book into Urdu "with a view toward driving a wedge between Hindu and Muslim public opinion of *Mother India*. In private communications about the book, for example, she admitted to changing the Muslim names of characters in the original stories in order to deliberately make Hindus of them."²⁴

Daly, however, does not mention this shrewd move on Mayo and her publisher's part, designed to continue the colonial policy of "divide and conquer," the resulting communalism of which continues to haunt South Asia to this day. Instead, in *Gyn/Ecology*, the Hindu practice of *suttee* is collapsed onto the *entirety* of Indian cultural practices. India, then, is moved outside of time and history, much as Edward Said theorizes the Orient in the Western imagination in *Orientalism*.²⁵ India then is more of an *idea*, rather than a place, with its politics steeped so deeply in myths that progress seems impossible. As a concept, India and its many diverse cultures can then be

distilled into a set of Hindu religious and cultural rituals in which women, regardless of their religious, class, or caste memberships, ultimately suffer the most. It would appear that it is always easier to fight an essentialized notion of Indian patriarchy than to tease out the cultural differences that would develop a nuanced understanding of the subcontinent.

Additionally, the rise in Mohandas K. Gandhi's popularity in the West, especially in the United States, led to an anxious alliance between the United States and the British. Earlier, the United States had remained steadfast in its support for Indian Home Rule. So, how did the United States go from this position of alignment with the Indian peoples to the imperialist position that Mayo espoused? Manoranjan Jha suggests that it was the surging economic interest in the United States about the Indian market and the prominent role of Gandhi which contributed in part to the change that was to come.²⁶ The British were alarmed at the rate at which Americans were becoming sympathetic to the Indian cause. As a way of countering propaganda about India in the West, the British authorities decided to "educate" Americans about India. Thus, they suggested that an American "writer who commands the largest number of readers"²⁷ be sent to India to study the country and its ability for self-rule, and that they would defray the costs for a three-month visit.

Enter "writer and journalist" Katherine Mayo who, in the postwar years, fought to promote good relations between the United States and Great Britain.²⁸ In a move that is quite ironic in retrospect, she founded a group called "The British Apprentice Group" with herself as the leader. Her "apprenticeship" was to begin soon after the founding of the club whose aim was to promote "World Peace" through the friendship of the "two great English-speaking nations."²⁹ Her alliance with the British authorities in the conception and writing of *Mother India* was soon to follow. The British were particularly pleased with her high antinationalist and pro-British stance.³⁰

Mayo first arrived in India in 1925 at the behest of both American and British officials, and was met with excitement and interest by Indian nationalist leaders, who hoped her "study" would finally show to the West India's capacity for self-rule. Upon her arrival in India, Mayo describes herself as a "foreign stranger, prying about India ... I would like it to be accepted that I am neither an idle busybody nor a political agent, but merely an ordinary American citizen seeking test facts to lay before my own people."³¹ The test facts that she references ultimately found their voice in *Mother India*. The controversy surrounding the book after its publication yielded multiple responses, mostly decrying Mayo's arguments about India's incapacity for self-rule and charging her with self-interest that was closely aligned with the United States' anxiety about the role it would and should play on the global stage, economically and culturally. The ostensible topic of Mayo's study of Indian culture was an examination of the daily lives of men and women in India; in particular, she studied the issue of child brides and the unhygienic practices of Hindu *dhais*. The public health argument she levied in relation to India's backwardness hinged directly on women's victimization by Hindu men. The underlying text, however, because it offered an "objective" account for the potential for Indian self-government, sought to undermine any real possibilities for self-rule in postindependence India, in part by suggesting that Hindu men exercised a sexual tyranny over women. These arguments bear striking

resemblance to her book on the Philippines and the buildup on her books to revamp the Pennsylvania patrol system.

Both Mayo's personal history and her motivations for undertaking this project determined, in large part, the major arguments she presented in the book. Her personal background was one of class privilege deeply rooted in American history (she traced her lineage back to the Mayflower). A self-proclaimed social reformer and crusader for women's rights, Mayo wrote herself into American history when, in 1917, she authored a book entitled *Justice to All*.³² The book, along with her other volumes like *The Standard Bearers* (1918) and *Mounted Justice: True Stories of the Pennsylvania State Patrol* (1922), "expressed her concern for law and order and her moral indignation at the sexual indignities imposed on women by drunken husbands, ruffians, and rapists."³³ These early themes are significant in that they continued to resonate in her subsequent texts. *Justice to All* so impressed Theodore Roosevelt, who wrote the introduction for it, that he used it as a model for rethinking state patrol systems throughout the United States and successfully legislated the establishment of police force systems similar to that of Pennsylvania. Thus began Mayo's career as a crusader. Mayo's reformism crossed national boundaries. As a champion for women's rights and seeker of truths, her 1925 book *Isles of Fear: The Truth about the Philippines* can be read as a dress rehearsal for the widely acclaimed *Mother India*.³⁴ This book, like *Mother India*, argued that "Britain and the USA shared a common responsibility for the 'backward' peoples of the colonies and must resist native demands for independence."³⁵

She felt a deep sense of responsibility to voice the concerns of "backward peoples," and to help them by ensuring that they continued to benefit from colonial rule, Mayo followed with great interest a political event that directly affected Indians in the United States and sparked her interest in India: an immigration case which came before the US Supreme Court during the debates in the British parliament about the appointment of a Commission to adjudicate political reform and independence struggles in India. The landmark case was that of "Bhagat Singh Thind in 1923 ... in which the Supreme Court upheld the denaturalization of forty-two of the approximately seventy to a hundred Indians who had been naturalized as US citizens between 1907 and 1923." According to Sinha, Mayo was also concerned about the "introduction in the US Senate of the Hindu Citizenship Bill,"³⁶ or, as it is more widely known, the Copeland Bill, which sought to classify Indians in the United States as white persons, based on racial genealogy.³⁷

Mayo, at that time, was fearful that "expatriate Indians in the United States were a source of potential threat to the dominant religious and cultural fabric of the nation,"³⁸ a fear that increased with the growing popularity of East Indians such as Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Gandhi. Mayo felt deeply that there was a dangerous influence of Eastern spirituality that "saw itself as superior to the materiality of the West."³⁹ The succumbing of Americans to the "superficial charms" of these speakers and visitors led her to criticize "the activities of expatriate Indians in the United States both on behalf of their struggle against British rule in India and for citizenship rights for Indians residing in the United States."⁴⁰ She became one of the many who advocated for the Asian Exclusion Act in the United States and thus

followed Thind's case very closely.⁴¹ These reasons motivated her to discover the "real" India and, most significantly, share her views with the world. On a personal note, Mayo claimed that she was deeply invested in Indian politics and culture because, while she was living in Guyana, an Indian man saved her from drowning.⁴²

However, many of Mayo's critics have correctly pointed out that her complicity with the British and American governments was not as innocent as it may have appeared. For example, Liz Wilson emphatically writes that Mayo was not an advocate for women's rights and an objective seeker of truths. "Even if Katherine Mayo was not a conscious advocate of colonialism, as I believe she was," she states, "but rather a politically neutral observer, it probably does not, in the final analysis, *really matter*."⁴³ Wilson argues that ultimately the harm that this book did for views on India and Indians worldwide had severe implications for the "geo-political uses of feminist critique."⁴⁴ Jha's book and the more recent work by Sinha provide political, social, and theoretical tools to flesh out the interconnections between Mayo and her larger Western audience as well as the reception of Mayo and her book within India.

Mother India was first published in 1927⁴⁵ to very receptive audiences both in the East and in the West.⁴⁶ Both popular and notorious for its seemingly objective evaluation of India's bid for independence, this book epitomized a Western rationale for legitimating and retaining British colonial rule in India. For example, Sinha points out that the book, in spite of its notoriety or maybe because of it, was made available to a large reading public, was translated into various Indian and European languages, and, in fact, "spawned a mini-industry."⁴⁷ Additionally, she states that "[a] survey of some 350 adults in the United States in the 1950's revealed that *Mother India* was second only to the works of Rudyard Kipling as the most popular source of information in the United States on India."⁴⁸ Interestingly, it shared many stylistic traits with the contemporaneous Indian nationalist mode of returning to Hindu theology and culture in order to rethink a modern model of nationalism in the period following colonialism. Inasmuch as the book itself propagated a colonialist fantasy of India through its emotive and imperialist argumentations, the responses to *Mother India*, both at the time of its publication and in the present, draw attention to the still shaky foundations of postindependence Indian nationalism.

The sociopolitical context in which the book was published and became popular contributes to its orientalist and colonizing reading of India through its women—an idea which had been playing itself out in mainstream Western feminism since the nineteenth century. Additionally, the ambiguous position of women within the Indian nationalist party lent silent support for a project such as Mayo's. Partha Chatterjee characterizes women's positions in the emergent nationalism within the political milieu of the construction of the social order just prior to the prominence of the Indian nationalist struggles. The paradox he presents is one in which nineteenth-century debates about and mobilization for women's issues suddenly "disappeared" toward the end of the century as discourses of nationalism became privileged.⁴⁹ This "disappearance" is most notable in the nationalist slogan "India cannot be free until its women are free" and is one that continues to haunt discussions on the status of Indian women and also that of Indian feminist movements. Women, then, served as nothing more than symbolic representation for India, and Indian nationalists hoped

Mayo's book would show, through an "objective" study of Indian life, India's readiness for sovereignty. Instead, because the active role of Indian women in Indian society was severely de-emphasized in the book, where they were depicted as silenced within any Indian model of true progressive change, the book justified the continuation of Western British imperialism in the early twentieth century. For example, because Indian women were always seen as perpetually victimized, oppressively silenced by Indian men, the backwardness of the country and its inability to project itself into a prosperous future was highlighted.

Mayo's presentation of India does not include Indian voices, and especially those of the Indian women about whom she was writing. Her gaze is one which largely is unreturned since women are ahistorical objects for study. Thus, the consent of Indian nationalists in accepting Mayo as an "expert" to come to India is all the more perplexing. However, Indian feminists were rightfully skeptical, although it was not until the publication of the book that women such as Sarojini Naidu spoke out about the colonialist tropes that were represented in the book and the effects of the book on the lives of Indian women, particularly those who were already fighting to combat violence against women. The bifurcation between nationalist and feminist practices in India was revealed where the nationalist movement attempted to swallow wholesale women's contributions to the new nation; this, then, sustained the imperial discourses on Indian home rule. At the same time, what was also being underscored within India was the conflation of Indian with the Hindu/Brahmin which Mayo would capitalize upon as a way of ensuring a Hindu/Muslim split in India and, thus, the continuation of British rule.⁵⁰

Framed in *suttee*: Requiem for Indian women

In the preface to *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly suggests:

This book can be heard as a Requiem for that "women's movement," which is male-designed, male-orchestrated, male-legitimated, male-assimilated. It is also a call to those who have been unwittingly tokenized, to tear off their mindbindings and join in the Journey. It is, hopefully, an alarm clock for those former Journeyers who have merged with "the human (men's) community," but who can still feel nostalgia for the present/future of their own be-ing.⁵¹

In other words, Daly's aim is not only to critique liberal feminism that can be traced from Mary Wollstonecraft to the suffrage movement and to Simone de Beauvoir, but to develop a radical vision of a liberatory feminism that can be found in gynocriticism, with its emphasis on deconstructing and evaluating male exercise in power and authority over women's bodies and their "be-ing." For Daly, the liberal feminism of the dominating humanist feminism can find ways of be-ing only in and through "male-designed, male-orchestrated, male-legitimated, male-assimilated" modes of knowledge production. It is this notion of patriarchy that Daly tackles in the hopes that women will travel "into feminist time-space [of] Hag-ocracy, a place where we govern."⁵² One

of the best examples in the text can be found in the epigraphs to her chapter on *suttee*, particularly the one referenced to Lynn Caine from her book *Widow*. Caine's quote reads as follows: "Widow' is a harsh and hurtful word. It comes from the Sanskrit and it means 'empty' ... I resent what the term has come to mean. I am alive. I am part of the world." Caine's attribution to Sanskrit as the root of the word "widow" is hasty; according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word is derived from the Old English, with comparative words in Latin, Germanic, and Indo-European language trees. So why the insistence of rooting it only in the ancient Indo-Aryan Sanskrit? Reading the attribution of the word within the framework of Daly's analysis of *suttee* in the chapter, the reader is already led to the thesis of the chapter: Indian women are "empty" as widows, even as Caine is linked by her status as widow to *suttees*. Widowhood, then, is the bond that unites women. Even though there is already present a cross-cultural difference and hierarchy, women are still a universal category. It is important to note, however, that this is where "maternal imperialism" first begins to seep through the language. Caine says she's "alive" and that Indian women are "empty." In so doing, she establishes a hierarchy of subject positions in which Indian women are robbed of their subjectivity and identity.

Iris Marion Young, in her essay "Humanism, Gynocentrism and Feminist Politics," contrasts humanist feminism to gynocentric feminism by making the observation that while humanist feminism "revolts" against femininity, gynocentric criticism "argues for the superiority of the values embodied in traditionally female experience, and rejects the values it finds in traditionally male dominated institutions."⁵³ In the interest of uncloaking gendered power imbalances, Daly turns to real material practices such as *suttee*, or widow-burning, in India, foot-binding in China, and female genital mutilation in Africa. What is important for our analysis here is that Daly codes these practices as barbarous and comprising what she calls the "Sado-ritual Syndrome." Moreover, she is quick to point out that "those who claim to see racism and/or imperialism in my indictment of these atrocities can do so only by blinding themselves to the fact that the oppression of women knows no ethnic, national, or religious bounds."⁵⁴ The truth of Daly's statement can only be realized as long as these "barbarous rituals" can be thematized: "There are variations on the theme of oppression, but the phenomenon is planetary."⁵⁵

It should come as no surprise then that she would be effusive about Mayo, who, according to Daly, was a "startling exception among women who have written about India."⁵⁶ Never mind that Mayo was, at best, a journalist who spent only three months in India! What is important about Daly's choice of words is that it completely occludes the geopolitical context that enabled Mayo to be invited to study India, per the discussion in the preceding section. Moreover, there is no mention of the ways in which *Mother India* is part of a national story, even as a symbol. Mayo's project was transparent in her attempts to address the question of nationalism in India through her blatant use of Hindu girls/women as helpless victims in the face of rituals and history, and yet, Daly sees no reason to explore these facets of Mayo's projects.

Mayo first shows up in Daly's book as part of a larger discussion of female sacrifice focused on *suttee*. Daly links *suttee* to the practice of child brides, saying, without any references, that "brahmans have what has been called a 'strange preference for children

of very tender years.’⁵⁷ In making the above, unsubstantiated claim, Daly conflates Brahmin—which is the high Hindu caste—with Indian. It is not surprising then that Mayo would become her “expert” on India, since Mayo herself deployed terms like “Indian,” “Hindu,” “Muslim” as political tools through which to garner support from her readers on the question of Indian independence. Moreover, the verbiage of “brahman” also holds significance since Brahmins are perceived to be the spiritual leaders and guides of Hindus (not Indians). As holding the highest rank in the Hindu caste system, they also exemplify the ultimate expression of patriarchy and, if they have the proclivities toward “children of very tender years,” their power is completely suspect.

The chapter begins with an introduction to *suttee*, which, according to Daly, “might at first appear totally alien to contemporary Western society, where widows *are* not ceremoniously burned alive on the funeral pyres of their husbands.”⁵⁸ Even though this opening sentence is meant as a way to usher in what Daly calls “connectedness” with our rituals, the chapter begins by reinforcing the Manicheism that underwrites so much of the relationship between the West and the rest. Moreover, the use of the present tense occludes the history of the outlawing of *suttee* by British officials in 1829, which was the source of contestation between the Hindu nationalists and British officials. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has summarized the legislating of *suttee* in India: It was the case of the “white man saving the brown women from brown men.”⁵⁹ But, in Daly’s opening of the chapter, the readers are not told about *suttee*’s illegality, but rather informed of its continued practice.

As Daly moves through the arguments she wishes to make, she falls into the same trap rhetorically as her predecessor, to whom she will then turn as her primary source on India: Katherine Mayo. Like Mayo, Daly recounts “facts” about Indian kinship structures: “Since it was common practice for men of fifty, sixty, or seventy years of age to marry child-brides, . . . we should also realize that in some cases—particularly if the widow was an extremely young child before her husband’s unfortunate (for her) death—there was the option of turning to a life of prostitution, which would entail premature death from venereal disease.”⁶⁰ Who is the source of this information? Mayo, whose anecdotal observations and, admittedly, second- and thirdhand information make up much of *Mother India*. However, where Mayo’s words were criticized as participating in a culture of sensationalist journalism through her reliance upon conversations and lack of scholarly sources, those same words later became part of academic feminism as scholarly citations in the undertaking that is *Gyn/Ecology*. Thus began Mayo’s rebirth as “feminist” and as “scholar.”

The remainder of Mayo’s presence in Daly’s book is centralized on *Mother India*, the title of which is “appropriately ironic” to Daly.⁶¹ Clearly, she draws upon Mayo’s text as a way to paint a patriarchal system in which multiple layers of victimization take place, so much so that any violation of the girl or woman is “natural.” For example, in her discussion about the rite of *jauhar*—mass ritualistic self-immolation—that Rajput women would undergo when faced with rape by their enemies, Daly’s punch line is that these women did it for their masters: “Their masters could not bear that they should be raped, tortured, and killed by foreign males adhering to ‘different’ religious beliefs, *rather than by themselves*”⁶² (emphasis mine). The inclusion of the last clause paints Indian

women—and in Daly's case, the conflation of Hindu (Rajput) with Indian is notable—as already having been victimized, in this case, by Hindu men. *Jauhar*, then, is already framed within a Hindu masculinist notion of honor in which there are no individual women, but instead collective victims. Ultimately, in her analysis, *jauhar* is a battle fought between men and their honor, with women as the vehicles through which the violence of patriarchy is spectacularized. This reading of Indian women also reinforces the inability of non-Western women to fit into a model of the self and moral individualism arising from the Enlightenment. Thus, they cannot be "recognized" as human beings invested with agency and power; instead, they are bereft of the ability to make moral and reasoned choices. It is all too easy to see the replication of Mayo's work in Daly's.

In the next few pages, Daly continues to rely upon the anecdotal evidence that Mayo had presented in *Mother India*. The ensuing discussion is replete with images of girls who have been internally fouled with maggots and other creatures as a result of being raped by their elderly Hindu husbands, even though they may be from "well-to-do families."⁶³ By addressing the high class position of these families, both Mayo and Daly underscore the "backwardness" of Indian culture itself, particularly if the liberal, higher-class, and cosmopolitan Indians, who would be expected to take on the mantle of governmental control once independence was achieved, continued to fall prey to their "traditions."

What is most interesting in regard to my project is Daly's use of passages from Mayo's text and a complete absence of quoting any Indian historian or feminist scholar. Instead, Mayo once again gets the final word. Daly quotes Mayo at length, from the narrative to the index. One of the most highly criticized elements of Mayo's book was its anecdotal narrativization of girls' and women's lives. Everyone from Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to feminist independence fighter and renowned poet Sarojini Naidu, to several authors who wrote books in response to *Mother India*, all agreed that while the topics Mayo discussed were important issues for India, she nevertheless had no substantiations for the claims she made. Mayo herself said that some of her information had been acquired second- or third-hand. And, yet, Mayo's presence in *Gyn/Ecology* ignores these previous critiques and, instead, Daly, as a renowned feminist scholar, can then give us Mayo's words which we unquestioningly translate into facts about the Indian women "over there." Thus, Mayo, whose knowledge of India was limited by the amount of time she spent there and whose work had been established as part of both British and American imperial projects in the early twentieth century, is reincarnated as a legitimate feminist historian of India. However, this does not stop Daly from asserting that Mayo belongs to the "few women in 'advanced' countries who have some idea of the facts of sexism and some knowledge of 'women's history,' [and that] far fewer glimpse the continued massacre that is masked by the rituals of research which repeatedly re-cover the interconnected crimes of planetary patriarchy."⁶⁴

Notes toward transnational futures

Perhaps it was the recognition of double colonization of third-world women in Daly's book as well as a desire to use that as a space to begin a progressive dialogue that

inspired Audre Lorde to write to Mary Daly. Written as a reflection not only upon the book but also upon a racist trajectory of women's history in the West, Lorde appeals to the indices of religiosity that the two share: the goddess figure and the turn to a gynocriticism that places women in the center of history. Lorde points out that, even with these commonalities, the book has a continued lack of dialogue between white women and black women, and this is "discouraging . . . and painful."⁶⁵ Lorde notes the glaring absence of women of color in the text, other than as objects for Daly's case studies. To disregard the common histories shared by white women and black women is tantamount, according to Lorde, to "deny[ing] the fountain of non-European female strength and power that nurtures each of our visions. It is to make a point by choice."⁶⁶ As an example, she cites the absence of African goddess Afrekete as striking in the model of gyn/ecology that Daly presents. Among the very astute observations that Lorde makes to Daly about *Gyn/Ecology* and its use of black and brown women is her description of them as "victims and preyers—upon each other,"⁶⁷ whereas, for Daly, white women "celebrate [their] differences as a creative force toward change."⁶⁸ These comparisons invoke the colonialist trope of the "barbarism" of non-Western cultures.

Moreover, Lorde asks why it is, when nonwhite women are topics of study, that they are never the cited scholars? Why do they go by unrecognized, particularly when racism is such a reality in the daily lives of women of color? She chastises Daly for remaining silent on these topics and, indeed, being unaware of these realities. She concludes her letter by stating that "the oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those differences . . . To deal with one without even alluding to the other is to distort our commonality as well as our difference. For then beyond sisterhood is still racism."⁶⁹ These are chilling words that come from the voice that had decided to break a self-imposed silence about talking to white women about race. To break from that and respond to Daly was an act of courage and stemmed from a deep desire to connect and to forge bonds with white women. This makes Daly's brusque, and late, reply all the more bizarre.

Daly wrote a brief letter in which she elided the real questions at the heart of Lorde's letter and, instead, said that there was "no simple response" to Lorde's letter and that she had used only the "commonly available sources" when writing about myth. The use of the word "commonly" is particularly telling in that it functions to reinforce the cultural and historical borders that Lorde wants to break down. If women's history is to turn to beginning with women, those people who are "uncommon" when it comes to androcentric history, would it not make sense to find "uncommon" sources that would highlight the bonds women have forged with each other across time and space? Instead, Daly's response reflects the very dismissiveness that Lorde accuses white women of doing.

In many ways, Daly's curt and brief response parallels Mayo's lack of awareness of her own position in relation to Indian women. In her article, "Who is Authorized to Speak? Katherine Mayo and the Politics of Imperial Feminism in British India," Liz Wilson focuses on the racially charged controversy surrounding Mayo's book and on the value of doing cross-cultural feminist research. She argues:

[T]he feminist rhetoric used by Mayo and by many of Mayo's supporters has an opportunistic quality typical of much nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

imperial discourse on the status of women among "the subject races" (those groups who are ostensibly in dire need of the West's civilizing mission). The argument over Mayo's book quickly turned into a referendum on Indian Home Rule that left the issue of women very much on the sidelines.⁷⁰

The omission of "the woman's question" in the widespread discussions about Indian national agency and also the failure to address the opportunism of Western women's sovereignty require a counterhistory that takes into account that "gender is not a monolithic category, deployed universally; rather, it changes according to class/caste, nation, and sexuality."⁷¹ Women are, in this sense, positioned by these very categories. Examining this within the "wider set of social relations," we see that inasmuch as middle-class Western women were positioned by a very specific patriarchal structure, they also positioned themselves in their relationship to their downtrodden sisters in the East in order to obtain agency for themselves. For example, "feminist sentiments were used in British India to justify maintaining social distance between the ruling class and the subject races."⁷² At the same time, "English women saw the 'oriental' woman as an example of submission that symbolized what they were fighting against . . . the immobile women, in seclusion at home, without any rights that brought them to the public arena."⁷³ The benevolent racism couched in an earlier iteration of global sisterhood structured Euro-American feminists and women's groups' responses to Mayo's book. They charged in to fight against the social injustices foisted upon Indian women by their male counterparts. Most of these groups focused on marriage reform legislation in India. Even the conservative Daughters of the American Revolution started collecting funds for the "helpless child-brides of India" in a benevolent gesture which was intended to signal a politics of global sisterhood.⁷⁴ Ultimately, when marriage reform laws were enacted in India in 1928, the work done by all-India feminists and other local women's groups, who had been working since 1924 to implement these laws, was erased as Mayo's supposedly "brave exposé . . . had shamed Indians into supporting legislative reforms for women."⁷⁵ Therefore, by offering a mythic view of India and particularly one which *Mother India* represents, Mayo's text obscures the real work of actual Indian women, a topic completely disregarded by Daly decades later. Postcolonial and transnational feminists have critiqued how, within radical feminism, the histories of non-Western women have been uncovered only as they were subsumed within the larger framework that Western academics espoused; there was very little wriggle room for difference.

Urvashi Butalia has brilliantly traced the divergences and silences of history in her article "Domestic Murder and the Golden Sea," in which she notes that the *Vintage Book of Historical Feminism* points to "Seneca Falls—New York, in 1848 [as the birth place of the] first organized movement for freedom for women."⁷⁶ Butalia, like Kumari Jayawardena before her in *Nationalism and Feminism in the Third World*, points out that there is no monolithic women's history and that women's histories have many, differing, trajectories. "Uncommon" sources could have been Daly's starting place for unraveling the historical binds that tie up women's national and international solidarities. This is a topic that could have been developed to write a more inclusive history of women around the world. Women in non-Western worlds were just as

involved in making real change in their communities and had parallel histories to those of Western women. The result of this exclusion would lead to the self-imposed silencing by women of color, as Lorde had done, in response to the continued disregard for making space for women of color and non-Western women.

Uma Narayan develops this idea further in her stunning reading of Daly. She argues that a "colonialist stance" keeps being replicated by white women when attempting to explain or represent "Third-World traditions."⁷⁷ Like Lorde and other women of color, Narayan challenges the notion of feminism as something rooted in Western cultures, and that feminism in non-Western cultures is derivative of mainstream Western feminism. The scope of her research in her chapter, in *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*, complements the work of my chapter while its aims differ from mine. In it, she is highlighting how "third-world traditions" and their representations in Western feminist texts need to go beyond cultural essentialist notions of what constitutes "tradition" and calls for analyses that see tradition more as "historical and political."⁷⁸ Her analyses of both *sati* (*suttee* in Daly's book) and of Daly's representations of it reinforce Lorde's critique of the power and privilege that underwrite Daly's work. Narayan's method of analysis is clearly inspired by anthropologist Clifford Geertz's notion of a "thick description," in which behaviors and practices are analyzed through various contexts. She painstakingly traces the conflicted history of *sati* both for nationalists and for British officials. She discusses the place of *sati* within larger discourses of honor and tradition in Hindu families and as a practice that is more nuanced than Daly would have us believe.

The claims of orientalism that saturate both Lorde's letter to Daly and Wilson's article noted above are expanded upon by Joanna Liddle and Shirin Rai in their essay, "Feminism, Imperialism and Orientalism: The Challenge of the 'Indian Woman.'" In the article, they take the orientalist image of the Indian woman and consequently Indian culture as "uniformly uncivilised and barbarous, and of Indian women as backward and lost in darkness," and they apply the power relations set into place by this production to second wave feminist inquiry. They use Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* to trace a trajectory between Mayo and Daly. They argue that Daly

repeats the errors of the past by presenting a universal picture of the Indian woman as victim, failing to reveal the resistance that women offered to the horrifying ritual of *suttee*, child marriage, or any of the other patriarchal abuses visited on women in the name of Hindu religion.⁷⁹

Because Daly defends Mayo in *Gyn/Ecology* and "regards her as a true feminist researcher and presents Mayo's work uncritically,"⁸⁰ Liddle and Rai see as dangerous Daly's plea that feminists "search out and claim such sisters as Katherine Mayo."⁸¹ The kind of sisterhood that Daly envisions has some serious and negative consequences for feminism's call for global justice. In her refusal to recognize "how gender is used to mediate imperialism,"⁸² Daly reinforces uneven structures of power that, ultimately, offer a zero-sum game for women of color and non-Western women. In fact, Daly addresses this in counterargument:

I have chosen to name these practices for what they are: barbaric rituals/atrocities. Critics from western countries are constantly being intimidated by accusations of "racism," to the point of misnaming, non-naming, and not seeing these sado-rituals. The accusations of "racism" may come from ignorance, but they serve only the interests of males, not of women.⁸³

By naming these practices as part of a universal (read Western) discourse on what constitutes the civilized and the barbaric, Daly herself projects a "maternal imperialism" in the name of a true feminist approach. In choosing not to read these "rituals/atrocities" in their historical and cultural specificities, she short-circuits any chance of agency on the part of the third-world woman and of transnational collaborations based upon an inclusive women's history. Instead, she goes as far as to accuse these women of fueling a patriarchal agenda if they point to the racism inherent in her work. Liddle and Rai see this as a move to both "draw from and feed into the hierarchical global positioning of these countries, but in a relocated context of radical political opposition, the impact of which is to erase the history of the women's movement in the non-Western world and to elevate American women as the leaders of global feminism."⁸⁴

Upon a closer examination of the two feminist texts as well as the historical contexts in which they were written, we see how historical agency is denied Indian women and to developing multiple and parallel histories of women. Ramusack's idea of "maternal imperialism," imposed upon the non-Western all-India feminist movements and Indian women, both in the past (through Mayo and some of her contemporaries) and through Daly's work, comes to question the notion of second wave feminism. To refuse to essentialize women and to reject readings of third-world "traditions" as timeless, and thus, historical, is to embrace an authentic politics of transformation that feminism espouses. This kind of politics acknowledges what Yuval-Davis characterizes as transversal feminism which, much like the second wave feminist standpoint theory, "aims to be an alternative to the universalism/relativism dichotomy which is at the heart of the modernist/postmodernist feminist debate. It aims at providing answers ... to questions of how and with whom we should work if/when we accept that we are all different."⁸⁵ Transversal politics can be used as a way to unthink ideas of global sisterhood espoused by second wave feminists such as Robin Morgan, Mary Daly, and others because it structures work within nodes of difference and the membership that women hold in many cultures and collectivities simultaneously. The promise of knowledge as historically and culturally situated exposes and interrupts how women of color and third-world women internalize oppression, domination, and dehumanization, thus, changing the way we *do* feminism.

Notes

- 1 Audre Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," in *Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 66–71.
- 2 Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

- 3 Ross S. Kraemer, "Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism," *Signs* 5, 2 (1979): 354–6.
- 4 Josephine Payne-O'Connor, "Comment on Kraemer's Review of 'Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism,'" *Signs* 6, 2 (1980): 340–2.
- 5 Margo Moore, "Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism," *Australian Left Review* 76 (1981): 42–4.
- 6 Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 13, 3 (1988): 406.
- 7 Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1927).
- 8 Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 45.
- 9 Barbara Ramusack, "Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865–1945," *Women's Studies International Forum* 13, 4 (1990): 309–21.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 319.
- 11 Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Gender, Empire, and Cultures of Travel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 78.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 76.
- 13 Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, "Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Feminist Practices," *Jouvert* 5, 1 (2000): 1.
- 14 Amrita Chhachhi, "Forced Identities: The State, Communalism, Fundamentalism and Women in India," in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Basingstoke and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 144–75.
- 15 Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 117.
- 16 C. F. Andrews, *The True India, a Plea for Understanding* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1939); Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); William Emilsen, "Gandhi and Mayo's 'Mother India,'" *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 10, 1 (1987): 69–81; Manoranjan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1971); Rai Lajpat, *Unhappy India, Second Edition* (New York: AMS Press, 1972).
- 17 See Mrinalini Sinha, "Reading Mother India: Empire, Nation, and the Female Voice," *Journal of Women's History* 6, 2 (1994): 6–44. Also, see Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
- 18 Elisabeth Bumiller, *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey Among the Women of India* (New York: Random House, 1990).
- 19 Grewal, *Home and Harem*; Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia during British Rule* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- 20 Manoranjan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India*, 4.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
- 26 Manoranjan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India*, 32.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 32.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 20.

- 30 The British were not the only group to endorse Mayo's project. It held mass appeal to American groups as well. There is evidence that links the Rockefeller Foundation to Mayo's project. Additionally, the Standard Oil Company was equally interested in the results of Mayo's work. See Sinha, *Specters*; and Manoranjan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India*.
- 31 Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, 13.
- 32 The book came about as a result of a murder involving a foreman on the country estate she shared with her companion, Moyca Newell. Apparently, "although he identified two of his assailants before he died, the local police and county sheriffs were incapable of prosecuting the offenders." For more details on these earlier works by Mayo, see Emilsen, "Gandhi and Mayo's 'Mother India,'" 71.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 34 See Joanna Liddle and Shirin Rai, "Feminism, Imperialism and Orientalism: The Challenge of the 'Indian Woman,'" *Women's History Review* 7, 4 (1998): 425–519.
- 35 Liddle and Rai, "Feminism, Imperialism and Orientalism," 502.
- 36 Mayo, *Mother India*, 15.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 38 Sinha, *Specters*, 15.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 41 The Immigration Act of 1924 severely restricted immigration to the United States for Eastern Europeans and Africans, tightened the policy of excluding immigration for East Asians, and extended some of those exclusions to South Asians.
- 42 *Mother India's* dedication is partly to "the field labourer, who, once by an act of humanity, saved my life." Manoranjan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India*, 19.
- 43 Liz Wilson, "Who is Authorized to Speak? Katherine Mayo and the Politics of Imperial Feminism in India," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 25, 2 (1997): 145.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 This book, according to Sinha, by the 1950s, had a sales figure of 395,678. It eventually was reprinted several times, including a separate Indian edition. More recently, there were reprints in 1970 in Britain, one in 1984 in the United States, and one in 1986 in India. See Mrinalini Sinha, *Mother India: Selections from the Controversial 1927 Text* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000).
- 46 According to Sinha, "the book became somewhat of a cause célèbre in the United States, Britain and India. It was hotly debated on public platforms and journal and newspaper columns in all three countries. It was protested on the streets of New York, San Francisco, London and Calcutta and was burned outside the Town Hall in New York City." See Sinha, *Mother India*, 2.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 49 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 116.
- 50 Manoranjan Jha provides us with a useful background for what may have led to Mayo's eventual alignment with Muslims. He states that during the last days of the First World War, "the Department of State [in the United States], noted that the Muslims in India too were agitated against the British owing to the dismemberment of the Turkish empire at the end of the war and, therefore, they were cooperating with the Hindus in the nationalist movement." Manoranjan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India*, 7.
- 51 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 4.

- 52 Ibid., 15.
- 53 Iris Marion Young, "Humanism, Gynocentrism and Feminist Politics," *Women's Studies International Forum* 8, 4 (1985): 173.
- 54 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 74.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ibid., 84.
- 57 Ibid., 80.
- 58 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 2.
- 59 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 93.
- 60 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 2.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 3.
- 63 Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 5.
- 64 Ibid., 81.
- 65 Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly."
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid., 3.
- 70 Wilson, "Who is Authorized to Speak?" 139.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 66; Wilson, "Who is Authorized to Speak?" 144.
- 73 Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 76.
- 74 Mrinalini Sinha, "Gender in the Critiques of Colonialism and Nationalism: Locating the 'Indian Woman,'" in *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 492.
- 75 Ibid., 497.
- 76 Urvashi Butalia, "Domestic murder and the golden sea," *New Internationalist* 309 (1999), 19.
- 77 Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures*, 43.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Liddle and Rai, "Feminism, Imperialism and Orientalism," 507.
- 80 Ibid., 509.
- 81 Ibid., 509.
- 82 Ibid., 511.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 125.

Shared History and the Responsibility for Justice: The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan

Seung-kyung Kim and Na-Young Lee

Introduction

Contemporary South Korean women's movements developed within the context of large social movements that dealt with the broad social and political issues confronting the nation. Because they formed part of these larger movements, however, women's political activities were often regarded as auxiliary, and less important, than the activism led by men. The progressive coalition that brought down the military dictatorship in the 1980s (discussed below), for example, included women's organizations, but they were nearly invisible among the male-centered antigovernment, pro-labor, and pro-democracy forces. Korea's progressive movement was firmly rooted in androcentric nationalism and left-wing historical materialist perspectives, and issues related to class struggle/labor struggle/political struggle provided the movement's core agenda. Issues related to gender received little attention from members of the progressive coalition beyond the women's movement activists.

In the 1990s, a more democratic political order took hold, and, with the end of the dictatorship, the urgency and unity of the progressive coalition faded. In this new context, women's movements focused more on women's experiences as women, and issues related to sex, sexuality, and sexual violence against women became important items on their agenda. This agenda led to the establishment of women-only organizations; increased interest in women's studies on college campuses; and produced a plethora of legislation regarding gender equality and sexuality.

The more open political climate of the 1990s also facilitated renewed interest in achieving justice for Korean comfort women¹ who had been forced into sexual slavery during the Second World War. In 1990 a coalition of thirty-seven women's groups organized the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (Han'guk chöngshindae munje taech'aek hyöbühoe; The Korean Council, hereafter). The Korean Council members interviewed survivors and presented a case against the Japanese government to international human rights NGOs (International



FIGURE 9.1. The first Wednesday demonstration, January 1992.

Source: Credit: The Korean Council.

Labor Organization; Amnesty International) and to the UN Human Rights Committee. Obtaining justice for the comfort women became one of the most visible feminist issues for Korean women's movements on the international stage over the next two decades.

This chapter focuses on the genealogies and trajectories of the Korean Council and maps the transnational activism of the comfort women movement. The comfort women movement stands as an important example of postcolonial feminist practice and presents a clear case of how "the personal is political." As part of this movement, the surviving comfort women became empowered to speak for and about themselves, and in so doing they transformed themselves from invisible victims/ghosts to important spokespeople for transnational peace movements. Thus, this chapter contributes to the ongoing discussion of the possibility and meaning of transnational women's movements within the context of the postcolonial nation.

Women's movements in the 1980s: Sociopolitical context

The decade of the 1980s, centering on Chun Doo Hwan's 5th Republic (1981–87), was characterized by a fierce struggle between the military dictatorship and the rising forces of civil society. The decade opened with student demonstrations calling for increased democratic rights, and these demonstrations were met with harsh political repression. Chun Doo Hwan began his crackdown on political opponents even before he took over the presidency, when he ordered troops into Kwangju City in May 1980 to suppress pro-democracy demonstrations, leading to hundreds of civilian deaths in the Kwangju

massacre.² Although the facts about what happened in Kwangju were initially suppressed, knowledge of the massacre eventually became widespread and prevented Chun from ever gaining the level of legitimacy that was accorded to the previous dictator, Park Chung Hee, who ruled over South Korea from 1961 to 1979. After he became president, Chun was unable to curtail the people's appetite for democracy, despite his use of a broad array of repressive measures, including imprisonment, torture, and executions. Opposition to Chun's presidency increased until June 1987 when street demonstrations composed of students, workers, and middle-class citizens, in what has been called the Great June Uprising, called for an end to military dictatorship.

The parallel development and expansion of the democratization movement and the women's movement during the 1980s requires a closer examination in order for us to understand the complex topography of the women's movements of twenty-first century Korea. In the midst of this dramatic era, during which time citizens' yearning for democracy was the defining agenda, the contemporary women's movement organizations began to form. These organizations differed from their predecessors in being more overtly political than earlier women's organizations had been, and especially in their engagement with issues concerning class.³ The Association for Women's Equality and Friendship (Yösöng P'yöng'uhoe)—a progressive group of women intellectuals including women professors, women college students and graduates, and women workers—founded in 1983 illustrates how the women's movement aligned itself with the social transformation movement. The Association opened up a new agenda for women's movements, describing itself as the first organization to have a clear program for women's liberation since the division of Korea.⁴ Their membership agreed that women's liberation required the total restructuring of society, but they disagreed among themselves about how this should be achieved. Although this group drew their membership mostly from female academics, they were constrained by their position that the women's movement should be led by working-class women,⁵ and the Association fell apart in 1986 because of disputes around class issues.

Despite its short-lived status, the Association had a significant impact as former members went on to establish several key women's organizations, including the Korean Women's Associations United (Han'guk Yösöng Tanchë Yönhaphoe), the Korean Women's Association for Democracy and Friendship (Han'guk Yösöng Minuhoe), and the Korean Women Workers' Association (Han'guk Yösöng Nodongjahoe). Their two feminist agendas—promoting democracy and centering marginalized women within the women's movement—continued to be important objectives of these women's organizations.⁶

While the core of the women's movement defined itself as politically progressive during the early 1980s, women were also forming other less explicitly political organizations. The Korea Women's Hotline (Han'guk Yösöng'üi Chönhwa) was established in 1983 in order to protect women from domestic violence. This group sought to

protect women from all forms of violence; improve women's welfare; establish gender equality within the family, the work place and the society; and encourage women to actively participate in politics, economy, society, and culture so that they can contribute to the peace and democracy of Korea.⁷

Another group that shied away from political confrontation, Alternative Culture (Tto Hanaüi Munhwa), was founded as a feminist cultural organization in order to foster feminist consciousness through publications and the organization of cultural activities and lectures. It was dedicated to creating "an equal and open society where women and men have true companionship, and children grow up with freedom, through planting a seed of an alternative culture" in Korean society.⁸

As opposition to the dictatorship of Chun Doo Hwan was reaching its peak in 1987, progressive women formed two important new organizations. The first, the Korean Women's Associations United (KWAU), was established as an umbrella organization for progressive women's groups, encompassing twenty-one existing member organizations. As part of progressive women's movements, KWAU supported democratization and declared that the women's movement could not be separated from a democratization movement.⁹ The second, which immediately joined KWAU, was the Korean Women Workers' Association, which was established to advocate for the rights of women workers. The founding members of this organization were women workers who had been active in the democratic labor movement in the 1970s and activists from the Association for Women's Equality and Friendship. It was the first national women's organization for and by women workers, promoting the rights of women workers and condemning gender discrimination in recruitment and employment.

During this period, women's groups also worked to eliminate prostitution and provide alternative survival strategies for prostitutes, or, at the very least, to protect women who were prostitutes from the sex trade's worst abuses. A highly visible location for prostitution was in the "camptowns" (*kijichön*) that formed around American military bases. Prostitutes serving foreign soldiers in camptowns were resented and highly stigmatized with labels such as "UN madam," "Western princess," or "Western whore." Both the South Korean and US governments tolerated this camptown prostitution as a necessary evil and formulated policies aimed at control rather than suppression.¹⁰ As anti-American sentiments increased during the Chun administration, the attitude toward US bases became more hostile and nationalistic, especially after 1992, following the gruesome murder of a camptown prostitute by an American soldier. Her murder led to mass protests against camptown prostitution and other "US crimes against Koreans." The groups that were important in organizing against camptown prostitution included Korean Church Women United (Han'guk kyohöe yösöng yönhap, founded in 1967), My Sister's Place (Durebang, founded in 1986), and The United Voice for the Eradication of Prostitution (Hansorihoe, founded in 1987). In the 1990s, feminist views that regarded prostitution as a form of violence against women which should not be tolerated by society increasingly dominated the discussion of the issue.¹¹

Emergence of the comfort women movement

During the 1970s and 1980s, progressive Christian women's groups worked to address a variety of social issues, such as promoting workers' rights, reunification, and peace, and opposing prostitution.¹² Korean Church Women United (hereafter

KCWU) was particularly important in challenging the practice of what was called “Kisaeng tourism,”¹³ the use of Korean women to provide sexual services for visiting Japanese men. During a seminar held by KCWU on “International Kisaeng Tourism” in April 1987, amid an atmosphere of nationalistic outrage at the sexual exploitation of Korean women by foreigners, the issue of Japanese military comfort women was raised.

At that time, Professor Yun Chung-ok of the Department of English at Ewha Woman’s University and a member of KCWU was the only scholar investigating the comfort women issue, and she was invited to speak at the seminar. Professor Yun had narrowly escaped forced draft into the *Chōngsindae* (“Volunteer Corps”; *teishintai* in Japanese)¹⁴ when she was a first year student at Ewha Womans University, and felt a sense of responsibility toward those women of her generation who could not return to their hometowns after “their service.” Motivated by her experience, she located relevant documents and survivors.¹⁵ Shocked by Yun’s talk about the “hidden story” within colonial history, the KCWU established a Research Committee on the *Chōngsindae* Issue under the Committee on Church and Society to support Yun’s research.¹⁶ In 1988, KCWU organized an international symposium on Jeju Island titled “Women and Sex Tourism Culture,” and during the symposium Yun presented a talk about the issue of “Japanese military sexual slavery.” A strong sense of awakening rapidly spread among the Korean women’s movement and organizations facilitated by the increasing openness of Korean society.¹⁷

Another important figure in bringing the issue of the comfort women before the public was feminist sociologist Lee Hyo-chae. Lee pointed out the need to understand both *Kisaeng* tourism and the abuse of the comfort women in the context of a national history that included colonial occupation and the division of the country. In November 1990, Lee Hyo-chae and Yun Chung-ok led a coalition of thirty-seven women’s organizations to found the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. Relying on the testimonies of surviving comfort women,¹⁸ the Council built up a case against Japan and presented it to the UN Human Rights Committee. As a result, a transnational alliance on comfort women issues was formed in 1992. The Council has led the surviving comfort women and their supporters in demonstrations in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul every Wednesday since 1992 in an effort to force the Japanese government to accept full responsibility for its actions during the war and to compensate survivors. (See also Chapter 12 by Vera Mackie in this volume.)

As the Korean women’s movement emerged as an increasingly visible force during the 1990s, many women activists began to argue for gender justice as the basis for true democracy and increased their focus on issues such as sex, sexuality, and sexual violence.¹⁹ As the women’s movement directed its attention to systematic sexual violence in society, it became possible to understand comfort women as being the victims of systematic sexual violence, and thus to see their quest for justice as part of a continuing struggle against patriarchy and continuing gender inequality that facilitate violence against women.

Many factors contributed to the more than forty years of silence on the issue of comfort women that preceded the emergence of their quest for justice as an

international issue. First, international power dynamics in East Asia following the end of the Second World War meant that "less was demanded of Japan than Germany in terms of criminal and economic accountability."²⁰ In its quest to maintain control of events in East Asia, the United States helped rebuild "its former enemy into an economic powerhouse and competitor."²¹ The US government also wanted to use the rebuilt Japan as an anticommunist bastion against the emerging communist forces in East Asia—including the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea.²² As a result, Japan and its colonial regime in Korea received a less thorough vetting than did Germany following the conclusion of the war, and many of the injustices committed by the militaristic Japanese government were left unaddressed. And when the United States liberated Korea in 1945, it divided the country into American and Soviet sectors, imposing an unwanted national division that inevitably led to the Korean War and that has persisted to this day. Furthermore, within the part of Korea under its control, rather than completely dismantling the colonial state, the United States left many of its elements in place. The US-occupied Korea thus retained imperial, colonial, and military attributes. In the aftermath of the Korean War, US domination persisted through intensive militarization and a neocolonial relationship. Thus, the United States also shares some responsibility for perpetuating the colonial legacy and for the silence regarding comfort women.

Second, the South Korean government was in no position to raise the issue of comfort women because it was so powerless due to persistent national poverty and its own neocolonial subordination. The overriding necessities of security and economic growth led to negotiations to normalize relations with its former colonial oppressor, and in 1965, Park Chung-Hee's military regime signed the Treaty on Basic Relations between Korea and Japan. Under this treaty, "Korea gave up the right of its citizens to sue the Japanese government for civil damages" in exchange for reconstruction funding of \$500 million in "economic development grants and loans."²³

Korean patriarchal attitudes toward sex also acted to prevent the issue from being raised publically. The deeply entrenched Confucian cultural norms labeled women who had been sexually abused by foreigners as "defiled."²⁴ The defiled daughter or wife brought shame to her family. Accordingly, former comfort women had to hide their experiences even from their families, or, in many cases, were simply unable to return to their former homes. Additionally, for Korean people as a nation, comfort women symbolized the helplessness and impotence of Korean men who had not protected their own women, families, and nation from their foreign enemy. Lost sovereignty was symbolized by young Korean virgins collectively raped by Japan, the colonizer. This traumatic memory haunted Korean society and contributed to the survivors' lifelong suffering.

Third, domestic factors in postwar Japan hindered the comfort women issue from being exposed. As many scholars have pointed out, "a defensive posture of nationalism and a long militaristic history made Japan 'an extraordinary example of forgetting, suppression, or denial by significant and influential groups in the population.'"²⁵ The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been used to foster an attitude of victimhood that erased Japan's sense of responsibility or guilt about its wartime

aggression. Consequently, postwar Japan has tried to reconstruct its national identity by emphasizing the wartime suffering of the Japanese, while ignoring victims from other nations.²⁶ The pervasive ethos of victimhood has made it difficult for the victims of the Japanese empire to achieve a “new beginning” in the post-Cold War environment, and it has limited Japanese acceptance of responsibility for the plight of the comfort women.²⁷

The comfort women movement that arose in the 1990s had to overcome all these forces that had kept the victims silenced for forty years. Its leaders were politically inspired female activists, churchwomen, and students who had played a pivotal role in the Korean democratization movement, and even many of those who did not identify themselves as feminists found themselves questioning the pervasive hegemonic gender ideology and androcentrism of male activists and movement organizations. Ironically, the same patriarchal ideology that had played a part in suppressing the voices of the comfort women reinterpreted the newly emerging issue in nationalist terms and threatened to drown out the voices of the survivors. Male Korean nationalists from the progressive movement appropriated the newly revived issue of comfort women by framing the issue in terms of dichotomous divisions of “us vs. them,” “comrade vs. enemy,” “victim vs. offender,” and “good vs. bad.” “To disclose the truth,” “thorough apology,” “compensation,” “national pride/shame,” “our chaste girls forcibly drafted into sexual slavery,” and “innocent victims” were the most commonly employed phrases in South Korean media editorials and activist articles. The Japanese government’s response in denying its responsibility and refusing to issue an official apology or compensate the survivors, as well as its characterization of the comfort women as “voluntary prostitutes,” further fueled Korean nationalistic sentiments.

Shared histories

Korean women in the generation that came of age during the last phase of Japanese colonial rule endured a time of hardship and danger in their teenage years. In this section, we present the stories of two women who lived through these dark times. One was forced to become a Japanese military comfort woman and eventually became active in the survivors’ movement. The other one was able to avoid becoming a comfort woman, but always felt sense of a responsibility toward those who had been less privileged than her, and went on to become the founder of the comfort women’s movement.

Kim Bok-dong was born in 1926 into the family of a small farmer in Yangsan, Kyōngnam province. Her father passed away early due to stress from a loan that he had guaranteed. Her mother was left with six children to take care of and worked transporting dung. Kim left school after fourth grade because her mom was worried about her safety. Her older sisters had all married early to avoid conscription by the Japanese, but she was too young, so she was still living with her mother. However, when a family had no son, Japan sought out daughters to contribute to its “patriotic war effort.” She became a comfort woman when she was fifteen years old, and came back home in 1945 when she was twenty.

One day, my village head came to our house accompanied by a Japanese man who was wearing a brown jacket without military insignia. We were wearing light Korean skirts and blouses, so it must have been in either spring or fall. The village head then had more power than the present day provincial governors. The Japanese man who came spoke Korean very well, and he told my mother: "You have to give us your daughter, so we can send her to the *Teishintai* (*Chöngsindae* in Korean). You don't have any sons, but even daughters need to work for the country. If you refuse to send her, you will be considered a traitor and will not be able to stay in this village." My mother asked, "What is *Teishintai*?" They told her, "She will be working in a factory that makes military uniforms. She only has to work for three years. She will be sent home even before the three years are up if you let us know that she is about to get married, so you have nothing to worry about. If she wants to earn more money, however, she can continue to work for longer than the three years." Although I don't remember very clearly, they also wanted my mother to sign some kind of form but my mother refused to do it because she remembered how my father went through a horrendous time because he signed something by mistake. So, I could not refuse to go, and that was how I was conscripted.²⁸

Kim recalls her first traumatic day at the "comfort station":

The women who had been raped by the soldiers were washing their bloody clothing. Two other women and I discussed committing suicide as we were putting our laundry out on the veranda. The three of us used gestures to ask a Chinese cleaning man to get poison for us. I had one *won* that my mother had given me. That was a lot of money at that time. I gave that to the Chinese cleaning man. The Chinese man brought us a bottle of something and a big bucket of water. It was not poison; it was *ppaegal*. One of the women said that it was liquor, and you can die from drinking too much liquor, so let's drink, so we shared *ppaegal*. It felt like my throat was on fire; we drank some water to calm our throat and then drank again. Afterwards, we just blacked out.²⁹

Kim describes the difficulty she had in returning home after the war ended³⁰:

We were told that there was a ship to take us back home. I walked half a day to get to the ship, but there was no ship there. Eventually, a ship actually showed up. It was really big; big enough to hold 300 people. I was told that this was the last ship going back to Korea. It took several months to get to Pusan and it made many stops to board more people, but only Koreans. When we got to Pusan, we were quarantined for 15 days in the ship ... When I was discharged, I was given 100 *won* and a train ticket to Mulgüm. When I arrived, my mother told me to eat tofu. Both of us had changed so much that it was hard to recognize each other, and we cried and cried. It had been five years since I left home; I was fifteen when I left and twenty when I came back. My brother-in-law seemed to know that I had been a "comfort woman," but he did not tell my mother. He just told her that I had worked as a nurse.³¹

Yun Chung-ok was born in 1925 into a wealthy family in Kangwŏn province. She studied in Seoul during the war, but had to withdraw from college to avoid being conscripted into *Chōngsindae*.

I think it was in November, 1943. I was 17 years old, and a first-year student. Even during high school, teachers urged us to volunteer to become nurses, and we were told to go to the *Chōngsindae*. It became worse after I went to the college. Ordinary men were just picked up and forced to go to the labor corps. Men were urged to volunteer to be student soldiers while women were told to volunteer as *Chōngsindae*. One day, all of us first year students were gathered together in the basement of the main building. Two people, one of whom was wearing a uniform, distributed printed forms. We were not given any time to read the content, but we were told to sign the form with our thumbprint. And then they collected the forms and left. I did not even know what was there. After that incident, I withdrew from college.³²

After she withdrew from college, Yun's parents tried to arrange a marriage for her, but she refused to get married, so her father took his family and went into Kūmgang Mountain. Yun recalls, "Any man would do. A man could be much older, a widower with three or four children, even a man with TB was okay. One of my Kyunggi high school friends married a man with TB and soon became widowed. So, any man was okay—it was that urgent."³³

Yun remembers, "There was fear and I was afraid. Even now, when I remember that time, there is no light, no day; it is all dark night, and cold. From the time when I quit school until independence, we lived in *Kūmgangsan* to avoid the war, and I felt like I have been forced into a long tunnel where everything is damp with cold wind and rain."³⁴

She continues, explaining how she began to understand what some women had been forced to do and the terrible fate that her parents helped her avoid:

I did not even know about what "comfort woman" meant. I heard from an uncle who had been forced into the labor corps that many young women did not go into *Chōngsindae*, but instead became comfort women, and how miserable their lives were . . . I must have been around twenty when I first asked about comfort women and began to learn more about the women who had been comfort women. After I learned about them, my question changed from "what are comfort women?" to "how could anyone do this to another human?"³⁵

Kim Bok-dong was sent to a US-run internees' camp after the defeat of Japan, but she was eventually able to return to Korea. She could not even tell her mother about her horrible experiences, and she kept them deep inside her heart, but they surfaced without warning and the memory hurt her deeply. After liberation, Yun Chung-ok returned to Seoul, but she could not free herself from the tragic stories that she had heard. These stories made Yun angry at those who committed these crimes against young women, and about the loss of human dignity that could never be replaced.

During the Japanese colonial period, these two women, Kim Bok-dong and Yun Chung-ok, led very different lives, but they both suffered from living in a colonized country, and they endured feelings of fear and anxiety. These two women's overlapping experiences embody aspects of the dark period of colonial rule. Yun lived in continual fear, although she was able to escape Kim's fate, and Kim tried to buy poison to kill herself after being raped by soldiers.

Who is ultimately to blame for the wrongdoing during this period? Japan's colonial policies and its expansionist war; Korea's poverty and its patriarchal system that were the basis of the structure that sacrificed young Korean women; the Korean men who lied to young women about the work they would do (as in the case of Kim Bok-dong); the Japanese soldiers who kidnapped young women (as in the case of Kim Hak-soon described below); the Japanese soldiers who routinely raped these young women (in most cases); the Japanese soldiers who managed the "comfort stations" and Korean men who actively conscripted young women (Yun Chung-ok); and afterward the Koreans who maintained silence, ignored their misery, and looked down upon them (in most cases). Many parties have some responsibility for this injustice.

The genealogies: Sharing political responsibility

What made it possible for these women's long suppressed stories to finally emerge? The end of the dictatorship and the country's growing openness provided the essential preconditions for the discussion about comfort women to begin, but it was the work of a few dedicated individuals who got the comfort women movement started in the late 1980s.

In many ways Yun Chung-ok was the catalyst for the comfort women movement. "Guilt" and "anger" were the terms that Yun used to describe her emotions about the issue of comfort women. Her sense of guilt was generated by her awareness that she had been exceptionally privileged in her own life. She was born into a wealthy family, was able to escape the Korean War (1950–53) by studying abroad in the United States, became a professor of English at Ewha Womans University, and thus lived a very different life from those in her generation who had been forced to become comfort women. She explained, "Although I was born into a family that was better off than many others, we were all born in an unlucky country." She felt haunted by the stories about Japanese military comfort women, and that haunting drove her to learn as much as she could about comfort women.

Although they were not spoken about much, the wartime stories about comfort women never completely disappeared. Yun remembered listening to a 1960s radio drama, *Hyönhaet'anün algoitta* (The Sea Knows),³⁶ running from August 1960 through January 1961, about a student soldier during the Second World War, and especially his experience at a "comfort station." In the 1970s, she remembers reading a collection of narratives about life under colonial rule, *Punmoüi Kyejöl* (The Wrath of the Season), published in 1977, that included patriotic fighters of the independence movement, student soldiers, conscripted laborers, and comfort women.³⁷ The photos of comfort

women in the collection haunted her. And she read a book about military comfort women (*Jugun Ianfu*) published in 1973 by Senda Kakō, a Japanese reporter who had investigated their situation. She later traveled to Japan to meet Senda. Senda was an editor at the *Mainichi News* who had become interested in the issue of the comfort women after seeing wartime photographs of young women and wondering who they were. Yun also began to seek out former comfort women in order to get their testimony about what had taken place. The first woman she was able to meet with was Pae Pong-gi, who had been pressed into wartime service in Thailand, and was living in Okinawa after the end of the war. Yun visited her in 1980.

Despite Yun's commitment to the cause of the comfort women, she describes herself as "not feminist activist material," and credits Lee Hyo-chaе, her friend and colleague at Ewha, with being the movement's founder. Lee and Yun knew each other from their time as students at Ewha. Both women studied in the United States, and both returned to become professors at Ewha. As a sociology professor, Lee was deeply involved in the democratization movement and organized women's groups. Lee's research group, *Saeöl* (*Saeroun öl*, New Spirit), trained many young women leaders who later became leaders of the women's movement. As Yun describes it:

Even though I was not an advisor [of *Saeöl*], I got involved. We protected students who were hiding from police ... I have never thought that I would become involved in a social movement, but Lee was always an activist.³⁸

Chi Eun-hee, who went on to become Minister of Gender Equality, studied at Ewha as a student of Lee Hyo-chaе. She recalls:

Saeöl was the first organized group. Its first cohort included Shin Heisoo and Lee Ok-kyung. The group was organized by Professor Lee. I was interested in issues related to Korean society's class and stratification system, but I did not have a feminist liberation perspective. Professor Lee came to Ewha when I was a senior and she made us do research in a poor neighborhood. That research and readings related to women's liberation helped to develop my ideas.³⁹

Shin Heisoo also credits Lee with inspiring her to become an activist: "Professor Lee was the advisor of *Saeöl*. Through participating in *Saeöl*, I realized that I needed to understand sociology in order to change the society. So, I changed my major when I began my graduate studies."⁴⁰ Shin went on to serve as an expert on the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women from 2001 to 2008, where she was instrumental in bringing the issues of comfort women and other women's human rights to the world's attention.

Chung Chin Sung, another important figure in the research on Japanese military comfort women, met Lee through the Korean National Christian Coalition (Han'guk Kyohoe Yōnhap), and through her she joined the Korean Council movement. As a historical sociologist, she went on to research and publish extensive historical accounts based on the survivors' testimonies and is considered to be the leading authority on comfort women.

Yoon Young-ae, who became the secretary of the Korean Church Women United, was introduced to Yun Chung-ok by Lee Hyo-chaе. At that time, Lee was serving as the President of the Korean Women's Association United and was a member of the Peace Unification Board of the Korean Church Women United. As a devout Christian, she considers her work to be a calling from God. She worked on the staff of the Korean Council during its first ten years and was instrumental in bringing comfort woman survivor Kim Hak-soon to the public's attention.

All of these women were brought into the Korean Council through their relationship with Lee Hyo-chaе. They spent their college years under the Yusin dictatorship of Park Chung Hee,⁴¹ and, because of Lee, learned to be socially conscious about women's lives and to understand the necessity of organizing. They united as members of the Korean Council and also became key figures in other women's movement organizations. As political theorist Iris Young writes, "If we see injustices or crimes being committed by the institutions of which we are a part, or believe that such crimes are being committed, then we have the responsibility to try to speak out against them with the intention of mobilizing others to oppose them, and to act together to transform the institutions to promote better ends."⁴² The members of the Korean Council met their responsibility by speaking out and mobilizing for the cause of obtaining justice for the comfort women.

The growth of the movement: (Re)structuring of trauma

An important aspect of the movement was that activists met with victims and learned to understand their deep-seated trauma. This was not only intellectually important for informing people about the facts of what had occurred, but also a deeply moving emotional experience for both the activists and the survivors. In April 1991, Yoon Young-ae began her search for comfort women, and she remembers her first meeting with one brave survivor:

I was introduced to Kim Hak Soon *halmöni*⁴³ in July 1991, by a survivor of the atomic bomb. As I listened to her story, I was overwhelmed with emotion. She told me: "I no longer have a husband and I don't have any children. I have no one to worry about, so I can talk now. Now I attend church, and I believe that God wants me to fight for this issue, and that is why he has let me live until now. I am ready to talk, and I will talk if you give me an opportunity." Even then, I was worried because I didn't think I could let her talk about her experiences when I knew how hard it must be. However, she called me again. So, I contacted the Korean Council, and we arranged to have Kim Hak Soon to do a press conference on August 14 since the 15th is Independence Day.⁴⁴

Kim's press interview shook Korean society, and the Korean Church Women United established the *Chöngsindae* hotline on September 18, 1991. The vivid testimony from survivors dramatically transformed the Korean Council's movement, and made it possible for others to come forward, including Kim Bok-dong in January 1992.

Yun Chung-ok asserts that it isn't that she has helped the survivors, but that the survivors have helped her by opening her eyes so that she can understand society. Yoon Mi-hyang, current director of the Korean Council, also reflects on the effect that the survivors had on her: "meeting with *halmönis* crushed my arrogance and conceit. I truly appreciate the opportunity of meeting them. Before I met them, I was full of myself telling college students to think about our nation's humiliating history, and that I was furious and outraged. How could you be silent about this history? I am embarrassed about my arrogance."⁴⁵

Yoon Mi-hyang's reflections on her own arrogance, and how she became much more humble after meeting the survivors, demonstrate the impact that the survivors have on the movement. The way the survivors and researchers/activists work together is the most important factor in the Korean Council's movement. It has made it possible for the movement to raise issues related to structural injustice and to address the continued suffering of the survivors.

Shin Heisoo, one of the initial members of Saeöl, attended the UN's Human Rights Committee meeting in August 1992. This was during the Bosnian war when the news about the mass rape and massacre shook the world. The news from Bosnia brought the world's attention to sexual violence against women in the context of war and made it into an issue of universal human rights. Shin recalls:



FIGURE 9.2. The 1,000th Wednesday demonstration and Peace Monument (Statue of Young Girl, *sonyösang*) with two survivors, Gil Won-ok and Kim Bok-dong.
Source: Credit: The Korean Council.

Professors Lee Hyo-chaе and Chung Chin Sung held a press conference, followed by the testimony of a survivor, Hwang Geum-joo. That we brought the survivor and she presented her own testimony was the most important factor in generating so much attention. Also, because of the Bosnian war where "ethnic cleansing" was being carried out, the attention was there.⁴⁶

The researchers and activists who were not alive during the Second World War felt anger, pain, fear, and frustration about the suffering of the comfort women not only through their compassion for the survivors and their individual experiences, but also because the movement reinterpreted those experiences as an archetypal evil. Jeffrey Alexander's discussion of cultural trauma⁴⁷ provides a useful way of understanding this process. Just as the West's interpretation of the Nazis' murder of the Jews came to be understood in more absolute terms, as Holocaust rather than as simple military atrocity, in the years after the Second World War, the abuse of the comfort women came to be viewed in the context of colonialism, war crimes, rape, and systematic violence against women. And, since these issues continue to trouble the world, the comfort women movement still has a great deal of relevance.

Responsibility for justice

"[C]ultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that has left an indelible mark on their group consciousness, and changed their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways."⁴⁸ It is up to what Alexander terms "carrier groups" to make meaning out of the legacy of a cultural trauma. The Korean Council activists did this by supporting survivors and collecting their testimony, holding the Wednesday demonstrations, demanding the truth and political responsibility, and forming international alliances and coordinating activities with international organizations. Through these activities, they informed the world about the comfort women, revealed their suffering, and mobilized new supporters who empathize with their cause.

Iris Young argues that by virtue of living in the same historical period, we are responsible for addressing "structural injustices" in which we are implicated but for which we are not to blame.⁴⁹ Since everybody who lives in Korea is implicated in creating and reproducing the mass trauma of the victims and survivors, everyone is responsible and obligated to work to change the structure. Being responsible requires both remembering the origins of the movement and continuing the movement. In order to express remembrance, the Korean Council dedicated a statue of a young girl (*sonyōsang*) at the Japanese embassy and opened The War and Women's Human Rights Museum in Seoul. The Korean Council also looks to the future through education for future generations, working toward justice for the surviving comfort women, and initiating the "Butterfly Fund" to assist women who have been the victims of systematic military atrocities around the world.

On International Women's Day in March 2012, two "comfort station" survivors, Gil Won-ok and Kim Bok-dong, established the fund to support victims of sexual violence in other countries.



FIGURE 9.3. The first beneficiaries of the “Butterfly Fund”: Victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Source: Credit: The Korean Council.

We have established the “Butterfly Fund,” which financially aids victims of sexual violence from the Congo and Vietnam wars and their families. The dream of the “Butterfly Fund” is to change war to peace and give hope to the victims of wartime sexual violence through support and solidarity. The fluttering butterfly stirs its wings with all its power to fly high free from discrimination, subjugation, and violence. Our dream is that *halmönis*, “Comfort Women,” and all other women will spread their wings wide and fly freely like the butterfly. Through this fund’s activities, the Korean Council wants to stop violence against women in armed conflicts, promote a firm solidarity among us and our friends, set history right, heal the wounds of the victims, and uphold truth and justice.⁵⁰

This groundbreaking idea would not have been possible had the identities of comfort women not changed through participation in the movement. Through engagement in activism that has reached beyond nationality, race, gender, and language, comfort women—once invisible “ghosts,” helpless victims, and sexual slaves—have raised the world’s consciousness.

Coda

On December 28, 2015, the governments of South Korea and Japan announced that they had agreed to a “final and irrevocable resolution” about the issue of comfort women. At the press conference held in Seoul, the foreign ministers of the two countries presented

the agreement that included an apology from the Japanese government and a payment of \$8.3 million to provide care for the surviving women. The Japanese government's public apology and their willingness to make a payment from the government's funds was an unexpected compromise for Japan's Prime Minister, Abe Shinzō, who has generally been unwilling to express contrition for Japan's behavior during the Second World War.

According to the agreement, the Japanese government will pay the money to a foundation to be established by the South Korean government to provide medical, nursing, and other services to the surviving women. In return, Japan demanded that Korea stop criticizing Japan over the issue and requested that a statue commemorating the comfort women be removed from its place in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul (see also Chapter 12 by Vera Mackie in this volume). The statue, which was erected in 2011 by the Korean Council, depicts a young girl (*sonyōsang*) "barefoot, her hands clenched in her lap, she sits in a chair and stares impassively, a symbol of thousands of Korean women who were used as sex slaves by Japan's army from the early 1930s until 1945."⁵¹ The Korean Council said in a statement: "it is unacceptable for the government to talk about taking down or moving the statue."⁵²

Of the total 238 women who have come forward, only 45 were alive at the time of the agreement, and the survivors expressed dissatisfaction with it. When the first vice foreign minister, Lim Sung-nam, came to explain the deal to the survivors at their shelter in Seoul, Lee Yong-su, one of the surviving women, shouted at him: "Which country do you belong to? ... You could have at least let us know what kind of deal you were striking with Japan." And she told the press, "The agreement does not reflect the views of former comfort women, and I will ignore it completely."⁵³ She added that the accord fell far short of the women's long-standing demand that Japan admit legal responsibility and offer formal reparations. She also said that she opposed the removal of the statue in front of the Japanese Embassy.

The Korean Council also vehemently opposed the deal, which it described as "humiliating diplomacy," and said that "The agreement is nothing but a diplomatic collusion that thoroughly betrayed the wishes of comfort women and the South Korean people."⁵⁴ The Korean Council said, "Although the Japanese government announced that it 'feels (its) responsibilities,' the statement lacks the acknowledgment of the fact that the colonial government and its military had committed a systematic crime."⁵⁵ The group took issue with the fact that the agreement did not address the issue of Japanese history textbooks glossing over the scope of Japan's war crimes.⁵⁶ And, although the survivors were not particularly interested in financial compensation, the amount that was offered, "roughly \$180,000 per survivor," was so low that it was felt to be insulting.⁵⁷

Despite the announcement by the two governments that the issue has been resolved, neither the survivors, the Korean Council, nor the Korean public accepted the agreement.⁵⁸ The survivors no longer remain silent; they have been voicing their thoughts loud and clear.

Notes

- 1 "Comfort women" was the label that Japan used to designate those women who were exploited as sex slaves for their soldiers. The "comfort women" were part of

- the “Chöngsindae,” the Volunteer Labor Corps (who were actually conscripted, and not volunteers). The term is often enclosed in quotation marks to indicate its untruthfulness, but it has become the general term used by many scholars to refer to the women who were sex slaves to the Japanese military. The United Nations uses “Japanese Military Sexual Slave” as its formal term.
- 2 Many Koreans expected that the United States would be sympathetic to demonstrations calling for greater democracy in South Korea, and were bitterly disappointed when the US military command allowed South Korean troops to be deployed to Kwangju where they killed hundreds of antigovernment protesters. The resulting Kwangju massacre ignited the anti-American sentiments in South Korea. Gi-Wook Shin, “South Korean Anti-Americanism: A Comparative Perspective,” *Asian Survey* 36, 8 (1996): 787–803.
 - 3 Seung-kyung Kim and Kyoung-Hee Kim, “Mapping a Hundred Years of Activism: Women’s Movements in Korea,” in *Women’s Movements in Asia: Feminisms and Transnational Activism*, ed. Mina Roces and Louise Edwards (London: Routledge, 2010), 197.
 - 4 Süng-Hüi Yi, *Yösöng Undonggwa Chöngch’I Iron [Women’s Movement and Political Theory]* (Seoul: Noktu, 1994), 341.
 - 5 Cho Joo-Hyun, “Yösöng chöngch’esöng’üi chöngch’ihak: 80-90nyöndae han’gugüi yösöng undong’ül chungsimüro” [“Gender Identity Politics: The Case of the Women’s Liberation Movement in Korea in the 1980s and 1990s”], *Han’guk Yösönghak [Journal of Korean Women’s Studies]* 12, 1 (1996): 138–79, 9.
 - 6 Kang Nam-Sik, “Han’guk yösöng undong’üi chaengjömgwa panghyang” [“Issues and Goals of the Korean Women’s Movement”], Paper presented at the Korean Women’s Studies Annual Conference, Seoul, November 20, 2004, 15.
 - 7 Han’guk Yösöng’üi Chönhwa [Korea Women’s Hotline]. www.hotline.co.kr
 - 8 Tto Hanaii Munhwa [Alternative Culture]. www.tommon.co
 - 9 Cho Joo-Hyun, “Gender Identity Politics,” 8.
 - 10 Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Cynthia Enloe’s pathbreaking work on how military prostitution is constructed and maintained at the nexus of international politics and national security reveals the interlocking relationship among militarism, sexuality, nationalism, and military policy; how “private” sexual relations are intimately related to international politics. Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women’s Lives* (London: Pandora Press, 1988); *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); *Maneuvers: International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).
 - 11 Katharine H. S. Moon, “Resurrecting Prostitutes and Overturning Treaties: Gender Politics in the ‘Anti-American’ Movement in South Korea,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66, 1 (2007): 129–57.
 - 12 Christian women were relatively well educated and were very active in the Independence Movement during the colonial period. They were also interested in the issues of equality and human rights during the military dictatorship. Chung Hee-Jin, “Chugöya sanün yösöngdürüi in’gwön” [“Women’s Human Rights, Who Can Be Alive When Dead”], in *Han’guk Yösöng In’gwön Undongsa [History of Korean Women’s Human Rights Movements]*, 301–58 (Seoul: Hanul Academy, 1999), 314.
 - 13 *Kisaeng* were female traditional entertainers under the Yi dynasty (1392–1910), but *Kisaeng* houses persisted into the colonial period (1910–45) and later as brothels with a cultural veneer.

- 14 *Chöngsindae* ("Volunteer Corps") were nonvoluntary drafts of women instituted by Japan in the final days of the Second World War to get workers for military industries. Although this was primarily for factories, some of these women ended up as comfort women (*Wianbu*, Japanese military sexual slavery).
- 15 Yun Chung-Ok, interview by Na-Young Lee, December, 2012.
- 16 Yoon Young-Ae, interview by Na-Young Lee, July, 2012.
- 17 C. Sarah Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 372–3.
- 18 Kim Hak-Soon became the first woman to testify publicly about her experience as a comfort woman in August 1991. She and two other women later filed a lawsuit in Tokyo against the Japanese government.
- 19 Nicola A. Johns, "Mainstreaming Gender: South Korean Women's Civic Alliances and Institutional Strategies," PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2003, 110.
- 20 Tammy E. Kim, "Performing Social Reparation: 'Comfort Women' and the Path to Political Forgiveness," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 16, 2 (2006): 225.
- 21 Kim, "Performing Social Reparation," 226.
- 22 Chung Chin-Sung, "Chönhu chöriwa chöngsindae munje" ["Post-war Readjustment and Comfort Women Issue"], *Hyöndaesa Yöngü* [*Studies on Modern History*] 7 (1995): 179–91, 180.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Yeong-Ae Yamashita, "Revisiting the 'Comfort Women': Moving beyond Nationalism," in *Transforming Japan: How Feminism and Diversity are Making a Difference*, ed. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow (New York: Feminist Press, 2010), 213–27, 215.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Chung Chin-Sung, "Chönhu chöriwa chöngsindae munje" ["Post-war Readjustment and Comfort Women Issue"], *Hyöndaesa Yöngü* [*Studies on Modern History*] 7 (1995): 181.
- 27 Mariko Izumi, "Asian-Japanese: State Apology, National Ethos, and the 'Comfort Women' Reparation Debate in Japan," *Communication Studies* 62, 5 (2011): 473–90, 486.
- 28 Han'guk Chöngsindae Munje Taech'aek Wiwönhoe and Han'guk Chöngsindae Yeonguho [The Korean Council and the Research Center], *Korean Military Comfort Women Who Were Forcefully Conscripted 2* (Seoul: Hanul Academy, 1997), 84.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 87.
- 30 Kim Bok-Dong was first taken to Guangdong, China, and then to various places where the Japanese army was stationed, including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 90–1.
- 32 Yoon Mi-Hyang, *Twenty Years of Wednesdays* (Seoul: Woongjin Junior, 2010), 110.
- 33 Yun Chung-Ok, interview by Na-Young Lee, 2013.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Hyönhaetan* is the name of the sea between Korea and Japan.
- 37 Han'guk Chöngsindae Munje Taech'aek Wiwönhoe 20nyonsa P'yönch'an Wiwönhoe [Book Editing Team of the 20th Anniversary of the Korean Council], *Han'guk Chöngsindae Munje Taech'aek Wiwönhoe 20nyonsa* [The 20th Anniversary of the Korean Council] (Seoul: Hanul, 2014), 30.
- 38 Yun Chung-Ok, interview by Na-Young Lee, 2013.

- 39 Chi Eun-Hee, interview by Na-Young Lee, 2015.
- 40 Shin Hei-Soo, interview by Na-Young Lee, 2015.
- 41 The *Yusin* period began when President Park Chung Hee declared a State of Emergency in 1972 and gave himself expanded powers. It lasted until his assassination by Kim Jae-kyu, the head of the Korean CIA, in 1979.
- 42 Iris M. Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 43 *Halmöni* (grandmother) is used to respectfully refer to an older woman.
- 44 Yun Chung-Ok, interview by Na-Young Lee, 2013.
- 45 When Yoon was asked about what makes her work rewarding, she responded: “In 2004, several survivors and I were invited by a university in the US, and a student asked, ‘*Halmöni*, how were you able to come out to the public after going through such a nightmarish experience?’ And the *halmöni* pointed me out saying, ‘that young woman taught me that I did not do anything shameful.’ That was my reward” (Yoon Mi-Hyang, interview by Na-Young Lee, 2013).
- 46 Shin Hei-Soo, interview by Na-Young Lee, 2015.
- 47 Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012).
- 48 Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 1–3.
- 49 Young, *Responsibility for Justice*.
- 50 Han'guk Chöngsindae Munje Taech'aek Wiwönhoe [The Korean Council], “Butterfly Fund” (2010), https://www.womenandwar.net/contents/board/normal/normalView.nx?page_str_menu=0406&action_flag=&search_field=&search_word=&page_no=1&bbs_seq=8381&passwd=&board_type=&board_title=&grade=&title=&secret=&user_nm=&attach_nm=®_dt=&thumbnail=&content=
- 51 Carol Giacomo, “Statue Honoring ‘Comfort Women’ Faces Uncertain Fates,” *New York Times*, January 7, 2016.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Sang-Hun Choe, “Japan and South Korea Settle Dispute Over Wartime ‘Comfort Women,’” *New York Times*, December 29, 2015.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Holly Yan, K. J. Kwon, Junko Ogura, and A. P. Tiffany, “South Korea, Japan Reach Agreement on ‘Comfort Women,’” CNN, December 29, 2015.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Jonathan Soble and Sang-Hun Choe, “South Korea and Japanese Leaders Feel Backlash from Comfort Women Deal,” *New York Times*, December 29, 2015.
- 58 The *Wall Street Journal* reported: “50.7% of the South Korean public felt the deal was unsatisfactory” (Alastair Gale, “Japan-South Korea ‘Comfort Women’ Deal Faces Backlash in Seoul,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 3, 2016.)

Part Three

Transnational Feminist Linkages

Visions for the Suburban City in the Age of Decolonization: Chicana Activism in the Silicon Valley, 1965–75

Jeannette Alden Estruth

In the 1960s and 1970s, Chicana women organized to powerfully shape the future of what would become California's Silicon Valley. In the age of global decolonization, women of the Valley actively articulated their visions for the suburban city. They were both relentlessly local in their goals and, at the same time, powerfully inspired by and identified with Third World decolonization movements. This chapter will chronicle the visions of Silicon Valley's Chicana activists in the 1960s and the 1970s and examine the actions that organizers took in these rich years of political foment. It will then argue that these women's visions for the city embraced both the global political stage of Third World decolonization movements as well as California's suburban landscape as crucial sites of activism.¹

Foundational bodies of literature have established that Mexican Americans have been central to the life of the Silicon Valley for over three hundred years, that feminist spaces were central to the making of the Women's Liberation movement, that spatial concentration of people of color galvanized ethnic nationalist movements in the Bay Area in the 1960s and 1970s, and that social justice is deeply entwined with the urban environment for Chicanos in California.² This article will contribute to these studies by examining how Chicanas in the South Bay Area created spaces that were both antiracist and feminist by calling for increased community control of local suburban geographies, and how claims to these local spaces were made by mobilizing transnational and nationalist concepts of Chicano liberation and self-determination.

Chicanismo was an inherently transnational ethos, but its politics were enacted largely in place. Chicanos in the South Bay Area fused local spatial strategies with a transnational conception of liberation. Within these two interlocking, nested contexts, the smaller local scale became a proving ground for a larger, international scale that demonstrated that parallel sets of politics were possible in both contexts. As such, international ideological convictions animated a politics of pragmatism and feasibility on a local level. An urgency in the neighborhoods of the Eastside of San José interlocked with a sense of identity across the greater US Southwest, which interlocked

with solidarity with colonized women as far away as Vietnam and Cuba. In turn, that sense of transnational justice and power circled back to energize local organizing. The belief that things could change, and the imperative that they should, became part and parcel of the moment. A spatial conception of disenfranchisement, combined with a spatial concentration of power, animated Chicana activism in the California suburbs.

Transnational decolonization and local activism

California's Santa Clara Valley was in the midst of enormous economic, spatial, and demographic shifts in the 1960s and 1970s. The technology firms that would come to dominate the area's industry and reputation were beginning to grow and acquire property, workers, and power. At the same time, most residents of the region were still deeply linked to the Valley's agricultural economy and considered the area to be the environs of San José and the agricultural basin of the Santa Clara Valley. The future of the place as Silicon Valley was not yet a forgone conclusion.³

Chicana women's activism in the Santa Clara Valley at that time was highly localized in its tactics and demands. Injustices experienced in space were challenged spatially as well. Despite the highly localized and land-based nature of South Bay community activism, however, Chicana activists did not see their local struggles as geographically isolated. Rather, their local activism was transnational in nature by virtue of the United States' and Mexico's long shared history and territory, and by patterns of migration, labor relocation, language, and cultural practice. Like other radical movements in the United States at the time—such as the Black Power movement, Puerto Rican nationalism, and the more militant circles of the anti-Vietnam war movement—Chicana nationalists saw white racism and imperialist capitalism as global systems that created local problems.⁴ Thus, Chicana activists turned toward the local—the city, the schools, and the *barrio*—as both physical sites of struggle and sources of liberatory political power.

In the wake of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Mexican American baby boomers were both inheriting and reimagining the Civil Rights legacy of the 1950s and the early 1960s. As the 60s wore on, young people began to identify with and support larger transnational ideologies of Chicano nationalism and the Black Power movement. Across the Southwest, the Chicano movement advocated for Mexican American political sovereignty, cultural recognition, and economic self-determination. The means of achieving this autonomy took many forms—political, social, and artistic. At its core, Chicano nationalism held that the shared history of the Mexican people bonded them to one another in experience, religion, and ancestry, and from their position as indigenous inheritors of the Americas, they strongly critiqued the United States' colonization of Mexico and the subjugation and exploitation of Mexicans. This, too, was tied to an understanding that American empire in general was a force to be fought against and condemned.

While a global claim to worldwide economic justice had been a liability for activists during the McCarthyism of the 1950s, when they had been targeted as communists, for a brief moment in the late 1960s the successes of decolonization movements around

the globe inspired a transnational claim to and belief in worldwide economic justice through various forms of nationalism. Many Chicana activists in the Santa Clara Valley identified as communists and supported the Soviet Union and socialist decolonization movements.⁵ Even activists who desired more moderate, liberal changes to US political structures still closely empathized with the Cuban revolution and dedicatedly followed news from Cuba and other revolutionary struggles in Central and South America. *Chicanismo* aligned the ideology and tactics of anti-imperial struggles in Cuba and other countries in South and Central America with the ideology and tactics of anti-oppression movements in the United States. It was an inherently transnational ideology: people of the Chicano movement self-identified as “Third World people,” colonized within the United States.

Central to the Chicano movement’s political formation was a conceptual map of North America that transcended the contemporary territorial boundaries between Mexico and the United States, underscoring a spatial understanding of colonizing power. Indeed, adopted at the 1969 National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in Denver, Colorado, and widely circulated and rhetorically mobilized thereafter, the concept of *Aztlán* spatialized the geographic boundaries of the Chicano Nation. The transnational imaginary of *Aztlán* drew on local contexts of the Mexico-US border, while also creating a “third space” for Chicanos to occupy, conceptually and physically. *Aztlán* not only served as a reminder of the United States’ vast divestment of Mexican people’s land, but also reclaimed for Chicanos living in the greater US Southwest a physical core to their independent power and nationalist claims. This new geographic standard for thinking about territories and belonging heightened the movement’s spatial understanding of colonizing power.

In the Santa Clara Valley, many Chicanas placed their political struggles within this larger transnational colonial geography. In a San José speech attributed to Esther Perez and Rudy Coronado, most likely delivered in 1969, Perez declared “*Mexicanismo* knows no *fronteras*, civic, economic, or social. We are Mexicans first, there are no lines that divide us, and if our brothers suffer, we united can help those who know not how to defend themselves.”⁶ Such statements appeared frequently in Chicana pamphlets, newspapers, and speeches, and reveal the inherent transnationality of Chicano identity, an identity that both transcended borders and created new ones.

Indeed, these years saw the emergence of a defined Chicana political identity itself and the rise of explicitly “Chicana” activism in the Santa Clara Valley. In the early 1970s, the San José Chicana Caucus of *Mujeres de Aztlán* released a statement defining that “[t]here exists a triple exploitation, a triple degradation. Chicanas are exploited as women, as poor people, and as RAZA. Because of the nature of this oppression of *mujeres*, there lies within us a tremendous potential for commitment to serious struggle. Our participation, if all obstacles are eliminated, will accelerate and strengthen our struggle to the highest degree.”⁷ Chicana identity thus came to encompass an awareness of gendered, economic, and racist marginalization, but also a conception of power borne of that marginalization itself. By the late 1960s San José Chicana pamphlets declared with pride that “the Chicano revolution has brought about great changes in the Mexican American community and family structure. Women have stepped out of the kitchen and into the spotlight as spokesmen at

the various public meetings.”⁸ Within local branches of the Black Berets and La Raza Unida Party, Chicanas occupied positions of strategic and tactical power and respect, at times constituting fully 50 percent of leadership positions, and even greater numbers among the general membership. The issues taken on by these newly formed Chicano political associations reflected the conception that many of the instantiations of this injustice took place within the context of the physical urban environment. By entering public spaces and claiming political authority within them, Chicana activists implicitly made feminist claims by “stepping out of the kitchen” and into public life, and made anticolonial claims by fighting for public space for Chicano people.⁹

In the Santa Clara Valley, Chicana women mobilized the spatial rhetoric and philosophy of this transnational political movement to address their local concerns within physical urban space. Mexican American women's efforts demanded equality in housing and transportation, shaped urban and environmental policy, and sought community control of schools. In the South Bay Area, hundreds of powerful women like Sofía Mendoza and Ernestina García, and organizations like the Confederación de la Raza Unida, United People Arriba, the Chicana Coalition, the Mexican American Political Association, the Mujeres de Aztlán, and various neighborhood associations emerged to connect labor advocacy, Women's Liberation ideology, transnational Brown Power, and Catholic calls for social justice through activism that reshaped the very landscape of the city.¹⁰

Claiming rights to space

Chicanas of the South Bay Area saw rights to fair and affordable local housing as a struggle aligned with anti-oppression movements all over the globe. In 1973, the Tenants' Association of Story Apartments, a federal housing project that sat at the main intersection of San José's historically Mexican-American Eastside, went on a rent strike. The location of the apartments on the city's Eastside was highly symbolic. The Eastside's neighborhoods were christened with Spanish language nicknames, like *Sal Si Puedes*, or “Get out if you can.” The famed intersection of King and Story Roads, where the Story Apartments sat, was known for having housed César Chavez' family in the 1930s, and it had long been the heart of impromptu street parties and gatherings during Mexican holidays and Catholic holy days. The neighborhood's grocery stores were the first in the country to adopt the terms of the Delano Grape Strike, begun by Filipino agricultural workers but soon joined and led by Chavez' National Farm Workers Association (later the United Farm Workers) in 1965. Working within the context of this widely understood historical meaning, the Tenants' Association struck against rent increases and against the firing of the complex's well-loved superintendent. When announcing the strike, the Association placed printed bulletins around the complex that read: “Our struggle at Story Apartments (a federal housing project) is connected to all other struggles of poor and working people for justice in this country, especially Black and Chicano people. It is connected to the struggles of oppressed people all over

the world against the United States Government. And, no matter what the government says, most of these people (like the Vietnamese) are winning.”¹¹

Indeed, the Tenants at the Story Apartments did win, and on September 10, 1973, after two months of rent striking, they settled their strike. The Tenants’ Association made agreements for no increase in rents at all, for the termination of the management firm, and the rehiring of their super, a Mr. Lopez. In addition, they reached a settlement for \$65,000 from the owners of the complex and from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for improvements to the apartments. The Tenants’ Association also received a three-acre plot of land next to the complex to develop into a park.¹² Their determined strike, and the bulletin’s statement, clearly aligned the territorial struggles of Eastsiders, and their right to determine their living conditions, with the rights of Third World people “oppressed all over the world.”

Like those three acres of the Story Apartments, neighborhood associations also fought for physical changes to the city around them. In 1968, the Tropicana-Hillview Organization (THOU) successfully picketed San José City Hall to make demands for more traffic control infrastructure in their neighborhood.¹³ THOU’s work echoed earlier mobilizations of Mexican American Civil Rights groups, like the Community Service Organization (CSO), for physical resources in underserved neighborhoods. A decade before, the papers of the groundbreaking Latino civil rights group, the CSO, had documented that official neglect on the Eastside of San José was “everywhere in evidence . . . in the curbless, lightless roads and dirt sidewalks, and the absence of adequate facilities for medical care, housing and recreation.”¹⁴ In the last years of the 1950s, the CSO successfully pushed city officials to install streetlights throughout some underserved neighborhoods and constantly petitioned for paved roads, improved drainage, and the furnishing of sidewalks to the Eastside.¹⁵

The Tropicana-Hillview neighborhood was a relatively new housing tract where a small African American population lived alongside a Mexican American and Anglo community. Up to 30 percent of residents of this neighborhood were African American and Hispanic.¹⁶ It was a largely lower-income tract, in which about 15 percent of the families received Dependent Aid assistance (AFDC). The neighborhood’s largest intersections were unsafe for pedestrians, so THOU joined forces with Black Parents United, a South Bay family advocacy group, and Jack Ybarra, a longtime Mexican American community organizer. THOU demanded an audience with city officials, and soon after picketed city buildings. In response, the city installed a stop sign, a stop light, crosswalks, and traffic islands. This made streets safer for public transit, students, the elderly, and other pedestrians. By wresting greater control over cars, and thereby securing more safety for people who could not afford them, this infrastructural step physically expressed the neighborhood’s united vision for a more community-controlled, egalitarian, and accessible suburban city.

For neighborhood leader, school organizer, and United People Arriba founder Sofia Mendoza, urging Chicanas to take steps to shape their own local urban spaces was crucial to learning about their own potential political power. In this way, the self-determination of a people over territory—a foundational tenet of nationalism—became applied to localized urban space, and the political lessons learned in space lent

credibility and credence to the wider promise and efficacy of Chicano nationalism. Mendoza recalled later:

We took people down to City Hall and we would say that these are the people that you know, are responsible for what's going on that corner. These are the people who represent you, and [Chicanas] didn't know who their representatives were . . . And we said that these people are responsible for all the holes in the street and the lack of lights and bad garbage services and the people were really angry about all that stuff and the bad services. So boy [the people] were happy, they were anxious to go to the City Council meeting, and so we got our stop light there and after we got our stop light, see, we started talking to people and kept saying see how powerful you really are you know. If you really organize, you have a voice, and they can hear. And that's how you bring about all those changes.¹⁷

National power in a colonial city

Rights to space were seen not only as affordable rents, self-controlled housing, and safer streets, but also read within the spatial logic of the colonized suburb. In 1968, an independent newspaper described "East San Jose [as] a chaotic mosaic of prewar homes and recently built cheap housing tracts, decorated with drive-in movies and hot dog stands. This 'slurb'—suburban slum—began to develop after the war, when new people and industries moved into a formerly stable Mexican-American barrio."¹⁸ In this formulation, "industries," meaning the technology industry, referenced the several recently constructed computer hardware factories in South San José, like Fairchild Camera and Instrument Group, later Intel, and International Business Machines (IBM).¹⁹ As young Chicanos saw it, the technology industry had displaced and disrupted a formerly calm, peaceful barrio as a spatial location of concentrated Third World power and stability.²⁰

This description of a "suburban slum" also points to a particular vision of the city held by "East San Jose's increasingly alienated young Mexicans."²¹ The word "slurb" described an impoverished community ensconced within suburban physical architecture. Taking a spatial form—the suburb—that was typically associated with upward economic mobility, a high level of material consumption, and exclusion of nonwhite residents, youth of the era renamed the suburb a "slurb" in order to more accurately reflect the neighborhood's poverty and collective experience with systemic racism. In doing so, they both rejected a pat and marginalizing definition that only served to obscure their lived reality and highlighted the ways in which urban space was organized to instantiate racial inequality in the city. The "slurb," here in rhetorical contrast to the *barrio*, was a geographic logic meant to separate community members from each other and to isolate Chicanos from resources like good schools, good roads, and good jobs, while at the same time placing them closer to polluting blights like heavy industry. Indeed, in their case, they blamed the technology industry itself for creating the "slurb." The Chicano movement saw the segregated city as a colonial product, while at the same time the

movement had a vision of a better suburban city—the stable, just, unified Mexican American *barrio*.

For Chicanas, the burgeoning high-technology electronics industry in the South Bay area in the late 1960s and early 1970s effected profound shifts in the city and in their lives. For all the wealth being produced by new technology companies, Chicanos were excluded from this growth and restricted to the lowest-paying assembly and service jobs. The explosion of the technology sector combined with the rapid suburbanization of the Santa Clara Valley created a city in which large electronics and housing development firms rapidly purchased land for white-collar business parks and industrial and residential purposes. This influx of wealth quite literally undermined the abilities of Chicano people to pay rising rents and disrupted a long-standing and hard-earned social fabric. In turn, Chicanas resisted the emerging power of the tech industry through a particular spatial oppositional advocacy politics.

At this time, the technology industry was inflicting two major changes on the historically Mexican American Eastside. First, it was accumulating property in the foothills surrounding the Eastside to develop into corporate parks and industrial plants. The jobs that the technology industry created on the Eastside were replacing sporadically unionized jobs in the fruit packing and railroad industries with low-paying, nonunionized, dangerous electronics jobs. These corporations often hired only women for the extremely detail-oriented work, making “the East Side a ‘female ghetto’ in the eyes of some observers.”²² On both the local and transnational level, the Chicano rights movement shared the explicitly anticapitalist conviction of many global decolonization movements. Jorge T. Acevedo, former executive director of the Economic Opportunity Commission of Santa Clara County, was quoted as saying that “The waste of resources in the Mexican-American community is due, in great part, to industry. In some cases the corporate leaders simply neglect the Mexican-American community; in other cases we are victims of deliberate serfdom. In any case, we are taken as a matter of course; we are thought of as part of the scenery in the southwest, like the cactus plant.”²³

The *Midpeninsula Observer* took this to mean that Acevedo understood “industry” as the military and scientific companies based out of Stanford University, north of San Jose.²⁴ Known for not hiring minority workers, Stanford and its resident technology sector was implicated in the “deliberate serfdom,” “neglect,” and “waste” of the local Mexican American community. The invocation of “the scenery in the Southwest” further aligned Bay Area Chicanos with Chicanos all over Aztlán. And indeed, Stanford’s supply of engineering and weapons expertise to the US military during the Vietnam War further animated the critique that the university was a transnational colonizing force. South Bay Chicanas and other students up and down the Valley supported the mass movement for Stanford University’s divestment from war industries on the grounds of supporting self-determination for the people of Southeast Asia, while at the same time condemning Stanford for not hiring minority workers local to the Bay Area.²⁵ Thus, the critique that institutions like Stanford were racist and colonial both at home and abroad strengthened transnational critiques of the war, as well as local activism opposed to such colonization.

Chicana activists imagined several direct correctives to this internal colonization of the city's Eastside neighborhoods. As early as 1969, Chicano activists had identified San José city government's urban policies as disadvantageous to the Mexican American community. That year, activist Sal Alvarez told an audience at a symposium at West Valley College, located in the ethnically white suburbs on the other side of the Valley, that "Mexicans in San Jose got cheated out of land under urban renewal."²⁶ Around 1971, La Confederación de la Raza Unida, headed by president and Chicana activist Ernestina García, formally proposed policy steps to halt or reverse some of the damage done under the urban renewal of the 1950s and the 1960s. The women of La Raza Unida opposed a study "conducted by the Association of Bay Area Governments and the Metropolitan Transportation Committee because . . . the study proposed accelerated and increased urbanization of the south county without taking into consideration the displacement of the poor and minority people living there, as well as assessing the economic and environmental need for preserving prime agricultural land and open space."²⁷ Instead, the women of La Raza Unida suggested a great number of equalizing urban policies. These included land-banking for affordable housing, running express buses twenty-four hours a day on major traffic corridors, creating an extensive bikeway system, furnishing dial-a-ride service for senior citizens and the physically handicapped, upgrading and extending commuter rail service, prioritizing a local light rail system, increasing gasoline taxes, and halting expansion of freeways or major arterial highways other than for conversion into public transit or bikeway use.²⁸ These land use proposals embraced the suburban landscape as a place in which historic disinvestment and environmental racism could be ameliorated by advocating for more racially and socioeconomically equal systems of housing and transit.

Liberation in education

In addition to fights for housing and access to space, local activists also made serious demands for educational representation and equality in the suburban city. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Chicano nationalists all around the US Southwest demanded the hiring of Chicano teachers and administrators, Spanish language instruction, equal access to education, campus cultural centers, Chicano history instruction, cessation of discrimination against Chicano students in class placement, an end to physical punishment, and financial assistance with college. In large part, their demands were about creating cultural space and visibility for Chicano students through linguistic appreciation and institutional resources and leadership. This focus on history, culture, and language grew out of the understanding that Anglo American nationalism had been based in the domination of Mexican American and Chicano people and land. Moreover, US state education reflected the purposeful erasure of Chicano history and language and violence toward Chicano culture and territory. In restitution, Chicano nationalism advocated for respect, rights, and representation.

In California, the most widely used tactic for succeeding in these demands was the walkout. The tactic of collectively walking out of school classrooms *en masse* at an

agreed-upon time was employed by a Chicana mother of San José junior high school students who saw her children being denied a quality education.²⁹ Sofía Mendoza was raised in Campbell, California, at the time a small farming town bordering San José. She grew up under the tutelage of her father, a union organizer, and continued to draw inspiration from Cuba and the Cuban Revolution throughout her life, making annual trips there with her family well into her sixties. She would go on to head the United People Arriba and the influential anti-police brutality organization, the Community Alert Patrol.³⁰

In 1967 the mother of four began a string of walkouts that would reverberate across the Bay Area and eventually throughout California. Mendoza confronted racist violence in her children's San José public schools with a spatial tactic that would become a hallmark of the Chicano movement.³¹ One of her mentees, activist Karl Sotero, fondly remembered that she "became involved in the events at Roosevelt Junior High School, where the kids were being called names and were being disciplined with paddles. They were being harassed and made to feel like they weren't/shouldn't be in school. Being called 'retards' and things of that nature." In response to these outrages, Mendoza "lead [*sic*] the first student walk-outs out of Roosevelt Junior High School. Out of that process, the very first two Chicano teachers in East San José were hired."³² In July 1968 the Tropicana-Hillview Organization United, a neighborhood group representing primarily Mexican American residents, also organized a large walkout of a local high school that ultimately resulted in the appointment of a Chicano principal.³³ This spatial tactic, which used the evacuation of a physical, suburban landscape to assert political power, proved widely effective. Through mass refusal to share a space in which their needs were not being respected nor met, Chicana spatial tactics in the South Bay Area showed that physical spaces and self-determination over them were central to the movement.

Inspired by Mendoza in San José and a wave of school walkouts in Los Angeles, the year 1968 saw walkouts at the university level as well. In June of that year, the Mexican American Student Confederation (MASC) of San José State University, backed by the official support of the United Farmworkers, staged a "stalk-out" of the University's Commencement ceremonies to demand a mandatory, school-wide Chicano Studies Curriculum. Earlier, MASC had presented several demands to the administration of San José State, threatening a walkout during the commencement ceremonies if those failed to be met. They demanded that undergraduates be required to take a Liberation Workshop on Chicano Culture in order to graduate, that prominent local Chicano experts be hired to conduct workshops, that the San José State President and all department heads attend Chicano history workshops, and that a Chicano Cultural Center be established on campus by fall of that year.³⁴ MASC and other critics took particular issue with the fact that the university had not sufficiently prepared people who worked with students most often—"teachers, social workers, policemen [*sic*], counselors, journalists, [and] social scientists"—in Chicano cultural fluency. These "experts" had a great deal of control over the lives of Mexican American students, they argued, but the US higher education system only "perpetuate[d] the myths and misinformation which insure[d] a second-class citizenship status for Chicanos."³⁵ In this way, Chicano students saw themselves as butting up against a hostile colonial state,

one in which all authority was constructed not only to exclude people of color, but constituted *by* excluding people of color.

The "stalk-out" garnered wide support from across the South Bay community. It was "actively supported by Cesar Chavez and by the Black Student Union of San Jose State and its advisor Harry Edwards."³⁶ Another supporter of the walkout was Luis Valdez, a graduate of San José State and the director of the groundbreaking Chicano traveling theater troupe *El Teatro Campesino*. Valdez accused San José State and other educational institutions of perpetuating cultural genocide.³⁷ The Associated Students of San José State, the student body's government and a largely Anglo organization, also endorsed all of the stalk-out's demands except for the cancellation of commencement ceremonies.³⁸ In their demands, Chicano students had made a critique of structural, racist inequality within the higher education system and understood the local suburban university as a site for resistance to globally experienced cultural and physical erasure.

To a large extent the university "stalk-out" worked. To this day San José State maintains the tradition of a Chicano graduation ceremony. The University founded a Chicano Cultural Center on campus, albeit in the 1980s. San José State would later have the first graduate program in Chicano Studies in the nation. Most importantly, at the time, the students' conviction proved contagious: on December 13, 1969 the Third World Liberation Front held a rally with similar demands at the College of San Mateo, a community college about 35 miles north of San José.³⁹ In this moment, students upheld the importance of an education that represented them, that taught them curricula that valued the transnational history of Chicano people, and that made physical, designated space for students of color. The goals and momentum of school walkouts continued when, in March of 1968, the Black Berets and other high school students boycotted the busing system of the Eastside Union High School District.

Buses were stark representations of the spatial inequities of the South Bay's education systems and the geographies of suburban racial segregation. The city used busing as a stop-gap solution for integrating Anglo and Mexican American schools and for relieving overcrowded classrooms at underfunded, predominantly Chicano high schools. This approach to school integration depended on busing students over long distances at early hours, cutting into teenagers' sleep, and daily removing them from their residential neighborhoods. In this instance, many students of color had to rise around dawn to be bused from their homes to their schools because those same buses made their "regular" runs to pick up the mostly Anglo students, who lived closer to school, after the Eastside students had already been dropped off on campus.

One morning in March 1968, thirty-two students in the Alum Rock neighborhood of San José's Eastside, who were usually bused to a more affluent high school, purposefully missed their bus. Instead, they walked the long way to school together, and when they arrived, their principal suspended them and called the police. Nonetheless, when their neighborhood mounted fierce opposition, the school board's lawyers were forced to sit down with the students' parents, who successfully pressured the district into purchasing a new seventy-passenger school bus. The brave students were eventually readmitted to school without penalty.⁴⁰ Chicano students had not only boycotted a system that instantiated their inequality in space, but they also highlighted that system as a meager, insufficient, and racist attempt to simply move children between schools

instead of restructuring the systems that segregated the schools to begin with. And they had won. Their tactics had revealed that suburbia presented an unequal landscape, but also that Chicano nationalism could present resistance to that reality by engaging with that landscape itself.

In addition to curricular representation and equal access across suburban space, Chicana students struck for just treatment inside school walls. Just a month after the Alum Rock walkout, the students of the Tropicana-Hillview neighborhood's Overfelt High School marched to protest conditions in their school. Over 400 students staged a walkout of school over the foods served in the vending machines, which had maggots, ants, and hair in the food. The vending machines were students' only option for buying lunch because the school entirely lacked a cafeteria, illustrating the shabby conditions of the school at large and the inattention paid even to students' most basic physical needs.⁴¹ When the students made a near-universal turnout for better food access, the high school administration retaliated by immediately suspending all 400 students.⁴² Though the walkout for food justice ultimately did not win students' demands, their numbers reveal a striking level of politicization of Chicano students at this time, and a notable commitment to community control and bodily self-determination.

Gender through generations

By focusing on women's actions within the Chicano movement, family and community emerge as critical vectors for consolidating identities and fostering successful intergenerational organizing within the movement. From knowledge of union tactics passed down through generations, to THOU's alliance with Black Parents United, to the mothers of the Eastside supporting their children's bus boycott against the San José School District's lawyers, parents repeatedly inspired and supported their children's protests in these instances of organizing around neighborhoods and schools. Filmmaker Karl Sotero highlights the centrality of the inherited wisdom, increased economic opportunity, and the transmission of institutional knowledge between the baby boomers and their parents.

The groundwork was laid by the activists in the 50s, that was the blueprint, the template. Activists in the 60s took it from there and expanded into areas such as hiring in San José, and in Santa Clara County, in terms of getting a bigger student population at San José State. For example, I know in the early 50s, there was perhaps 10, 20 students of Mexican descent or Latino descent on campus at San José State, by the late 60s, early 70s, there was approximately 1,000 or 1,200 Chicano or Latino students on campus because of the EOP [Educational Opportunity] program. This was part of the outcome of the efforts these people made in the 50s who laid down the ground work ... So the 60s and the 70s were even more dynamic than the 50s because at the same time, people had to work in the 50s, and also had their family lives, and also doing these community activities, so you can imagine, by the late 50s early 60s, there was burnout. So the next generation comes up in the mid, late,

60s, the children of these people, who were able to take advantage of the fact that for example, they didn't have to live the migrant lifestyle and follow the crops. They were able to settle down with their families, get middle-class jobs, and go to school. And so the lessons that that next generation learned, they were able to apply and to refine these skills and tactics to make sure that their civil rights were protected.⁴³

Other observations support the conjecture that one of the keys to the movement's success on a local level was the strong intergenerational ties fostered between parents, children, and families. In the late 1960s, seasoned Mexican-American activist Jorge T. Acevedo stated that "support for the Chicano student movement is unequivocal: 'The student movement is the apex of the Mexican-American community; it is a sign that the community has come of age.'⁴⁴ Indeed, the newspaper said that the younger generation returned the admiration: "The respect is mutual; Acevedo is highly regarded by members of the Mexican-American Student Confederation at San Jose State."⁴⁵ This intergenerational strategizing, admiration, and mutual support must necessarily enrich how historians have chronicled the Chicana Baby Boomers' opinions of their parents' politics and successes.

Conclusion

In closing, South Bay Area Chicana politics encompassed a holistic vision of social justice that combined a critique of racism, sexism, and poverty with spatial prescriptions for change. From neighborhood infrastructure drives, to demands for community control of education, to struggles for equal access to dignified homes and transportation through the spaces of the city, from Northern California to Northern Mexico, Chicana activism in the South Bay Area continuously and simultaneously addressed local issues animated by the transnational discourse of Chicano nationalism. Chicana activists mobilized this global rhetoric to bring political pressure to bear locally, calling for worldwide racial and economic equality expressed in specific suburban issues. Their actions point to the importance of maintaining holistic goals and drawing strength from global imaginaries in order to produce a more socially just future on a local level. In doing so, they add to our understanding of the 1960s and 1970s not just as a moment in which identity struggles came to the political fore, but in which those identities were put in service in the anticolonial fight for economic and social justice. Out of local Chicanas' contributions to transnational discourse, the region that would become the Silicon Valley would publicly adopt larger visions of global community, an emphasis on self-determination, and a deep valuation of human freedom and liberation. Through their greater sense of worldwide purpose, Chicana political actors shaped not only the history of California cities, but their own fates as well.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Ian Baldwin, Elizabeth Banks, Thomas Bender, Maria Cotera, Joshua Fattal, Johanna Fernandez, Andrew Friedman, Joan Flores, Linda Gordon,

Dylan Gottlieb, Barbara Molony, Alaina Morgan, Andrew Needham, Jennifer Nelson, Guy Ortolano, Lana Povitz, Stuart Schrader, and Matthew Shutzer for early suggestions for this article.

- 2 Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Laura Pulido, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest*, (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1996).
- 3 The South Bay, the Santa Clara Valley, the Silicon Valley, and the county of Santa Clara all describe a similar geographical space, but each can denote a very different political, temporal, or imagined space. All, however, refer to the land and population that sit at the southern end of the San Francisco Bay, cradled between the foothills of the Santa Cruz and Diablo Mountain Ranges in Northern California. This article uses all terms relatively interchangeably.
- 4 The terms “Chicano” and “Chicana” are political identifiers most often used by people of Mexican descent in the United States. As the historical actors discussed here most often described themselves as Chicanos and Chicanas, I follow them in their use of that terminology. According to Ramon Macias’ article, “Evolution of the Mind and a Plan for Political Action,” a Chicana consciousness is often anchored in a “self-determination, priority of personal commitment to La Raza, seeking of basic institutional change, and a sense of urgency and immediacy in bringing about this change.” Alma García, *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 65.
- 5 Indeed, prominent San José activist Sofía Mendoza pushed for reforms to the US education system and literacy rate on the Cuban model, and began visiting Cuba in the late 1960s, continuing annual visits with her family until she reached old age. The oral history of Sofía Mendoza. Box 5, Folder 25, p. 24, 1988–90; Chicano Oral History Collection (hereafter COHC), Archives and Special Collections, San José State University, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, and Sofía Mendoza, Memorial Service Speeches, Sunday, May 17, 2015, Mexican Heritage Plaza, San José, California.
- 6 Speech by Rudy Coronado and Esther Perez, estimated 1971, Box 4, Folder 12, COHC. The original text read, “El Mexicanismo nó conoce fronteras, estatales, cívicas económicas or sociáles, somos Mexicanos primero no hay líneas que nos divider, y si nuestros hermanos sufren nostros unidos podremos ayudar a los que nó saben defenderse.” (Spelling errors occur in the original text.)
- 7 Chicana Caucus of Mujeres de Aztlán to la Confederación de la Raza Unida, date estimated 1970 or 1971, Box 4, Folder 11, COHC. Language very similar to this appeared in the Party Platform on Chicanas of the La Raza Unida Party of Northern California in 1971. It is possible that this language was written by the San José Mujeres de Aztlán and made its way into the Party Platform, or that this language was adopted from the general Northern California Party Platform into the Caucus’ memo. The Party Platform on Chicanas was found in *El Grito del Norte* 4, 4/5 (1971); J-K in García, *Chicana Feminist Thought*.
- 8 Linda Peralta Aguilar, “Unequal Opportunity and the Chicana,” date estimated 1970 or 1971, Box 4, COHC.
- 9 As of August 1975, Chicanas comprised “close to 50% of La Raza Unida Party leadership. At the National Convention of the eighteen states participating, six were

- led by women." Quoted from *La Comunidad* (August 1975), 5–6, as it appeared in García, *Chicana Feminist Thought*, 180.
- 10 Mendoza estimated that membership in these organizations each numbered in the "hundreds." Oral history of Sofía Mendoza. Box 5, Folder 25, p. 30, 1988–90, COHC.
 - 11 "Tenants Win at Story Apartments," *Sedition*, September 19, 1973, Volume 2, Number 1/2–7/8, Roll 143–5, Library of Congress Underground Newspaper Collection, Washington, DC.
 - 12 Ibid. Annelise Orleck, *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964–1980* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press), 2011.
 - 13 "New S. J. Militant Group Faces Struggles," *Midpeninsula Observer*, June 3–17, 1968, Roll 12–12, Library of Congress Underground Newspaper Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
 - 14 Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley*, 163. One estimate in 1968 placed the number of Mexican Americans at 12 percent of the county's population.
 - 15 "We're All In This Together," *San Jose Mercury News*, June 5, 1957.
 - 16 A Census Tract Map from the 1970 census listed this neighborhood as having between an 11.6 and 30 percent minority population. Census of Population and Housing, "Map 18: Minority Population," 1970 Census Tracts, Report PHC(1)-190. San Jose, California. SMSA, Tables P-1, P-2; Second Count Summary Tape, From "Profile '70: A Socio-Economic Data Book for Santa Clara County," Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Geography and Maps Division.
 - 17 Mendoza places this event as having happened after the Roosevelt School Walkout. She estimates that United People Arriba had around 130 members. Oral history of Sofía Mendoza. Box 5, Folder 25, p. 66, 1988–90, COHC.
 - 18 "Deep Unrest at S. J. Schools," *Midpeninsula Observer*, April 22–May 6, 1968, Volume 1, Number 17–21, Roll 12–12, Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
 - 19 Later, Fairchild Camera and Instrument would be renamed Fairchild Semiconductor.
 - 20 Here I am referencing the arguments of Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).
 - 21 "Deep Unrest at S. J. Schools," *Midpeninsula Observer*, April 22–May 6, 1968, Volume 1, Number 17–21, Roll 12–12, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
 - 22 Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley*, 177.
 - 23 Bob Coats, "Chicanos on the Move," *Midpeninsula Observer*, February 26–March 5, 1969, 7, Volume 2, Number 15–29, Roll 23–4, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
 - 24 Ibid.
 - 25 "No Minority Hiring Scandal at SRI Building," *Midpeninsula Observer*, July 1–July 15, 1968, Volume 2, Number 1–3, Roll 12–12, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
 - 26 David Naguib and Lisa Sun-Hee Park, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams: Environmental Injustice, Immigrant Workers, and the High-Tech Global Economy* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2002), 63.
 - 27 La Confederación de la Raza Unida Newsletter, estimated 1971, Box 4, Folder 9, COHC.
 - 28 Ibid. These suggestions—for urban plans like better light rail and extensive bike path—were not implemented by local governments when they were initially

suggested here in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Rather, the City of San José and other municipalities in the area would implement them about twenty or twenty-five years later under pressure from environmentalists.

- 29 Here I refer to the walkout as a school reform tactic, not as a tactic used by labor unions and workers to slow production or protest wages and working conditions, which has a long-standing history.
- 30 Oral history of Sofia Mendoza, Box 5, Folder 25, p. 30, 1988–90, COHC.
- 31 Oral history of Sofia Mendoza, Box 5, Folder 25, 1988–90, COHC.
- 32 Karl Sotero, “Story Corps Interview,” 12:00–13:05, Library of Congress American Folklife Center, CD.
- 33 Arturo Villareal, “Black Berets for Justice,” Master’s thesis, San José State University, 1991, 2. High school actions were often organized by militant youth organizations like the Black Berets, and also tended to bring in intergenerational family support and neighborhood support. The Black Berets modeled themselves in structure and style on the Black Panthers, but identified themselves as a cultural, political, and social club as opposed to a political party. San José’s chapter of the Black Berets was the first of its kind in the nation, and as a social network, built broad coalitions with other South Bay Chicano groups like Sofia Mendoza’s United People Arriba to do wider work in schools and in the community. Other Chicano nationalist groups of the era, many of whom similarly donned dark-colored berets in the style of Che Guevara, were also known as Brown Berets in other parts of California and around the country. I use the term Black Berets to refer to the groups that were most active in the Santa Clara Valley during this period, because scholar and specialist Arturo Villareal does so in his seminal ethnography and collections of interviews with these South Bay activists, all of whom refer to themselves as such.
- 34 The “Chicano experts” that the students suggested to conduct these workshops included Sofia Mendoza, head of United People Arriba of East San José, Dave Santos of the Brown Berets, Corky Gonzales of the Crusades for Justice in Denver, and César Chavez.
- 35 “Chicanos Plan ‘Stalk-Out,’” *Midpeninsula Observer*, June 3–17, 1968, Roll 12–12, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 “Hoover Interviewed,” *Midpeninsula Observer*, January 6–13, 1969, Volume 2, Number 15–29, Roll 23–4, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC; and Arturo Villareal, “Black Berets for Justice,” Master’s thesis, San José State University, 1991, Paper 174, 2.
- 40 “Deep Unrest at S. J. Schools,” *Midpeninsula Observer*, April 22–May 6, 1968, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Karl Sotero, “Story Corps Interview,” 16:35, Library of Congress American Folklife Center, CD.
- 44 “Chicanos on the Move,” *Peninsula Observer*, February 26–March 5, 1969, Volume 2, Number 15–29, Roll 23–4, Library of Congress Underground Newspaper Collection, Washington, DC.
- 45 Ibid.

Dalit Feminism at Home and in the World: The Conceptual Work of “Difference” and “Similarity” in National and Transnational Activism

Purvi Mehta

Over the last thirty years, Indian feminism, already composite, richly diverse as well as ideologically complex, has seen an even greater profusion of perspectives, critiques, and orientations. Among the groups increasingly visible and vocal in Indian feminist politics are Dalit women. Despite the constitutional abolition of untouchability and caste-based discrimination, Dalits—the groups officially identified as the “Scheduled Castes” in the Indian Constitution and often glossed internationally as “ex-untouchables”—remain among the poorest and most marginalized in India. Dalit women, positioned at the lowest ranks of caste and gender-based hierarchies, are often subject to systemic discrimination, violence, and exploitation, both within their communities and in society at large. Despite their vulnerability to multiple forms of inequality and violence, the predominant feminist and anti-caste movements in India have not sufficiently addressed the issues most directly impacting Dalit women. Over the last few decades, however, activism by and on behalf of Dalit women has countered this neglect and systematically challenged identity-based and other leftist social movements in India. They have done this by calling attention to sexism in the historically male-dominated Dalit movement and caste inequality in the mainstream Indian women’s movement, and by asserting the *difference*—the unique subject position—of Dalit women from both other Indian women and Dalit men.

The use of a politics of *difference* within the nation, however, has been accompanied by an articulation of *similarity* with communities of women outside India. In a sense, the assertion of difference has provided Dalit feminists a basis for both imagined and actualized alliances across state borders. Activists have argued that Dalit women’s difference in structural position and epistemological standpoint is a phenomenon experienced by other women. The attendant exclusion and marginalization—in both society at large and in social justice movements—that accompany this difference have also been deemed similar to that experienced by women outside India. In this essay, I analyze the interplay and function of assertions of difference and similarity in the activism of Dalit feminists and, in particular, in that of the National Federation of

Dalit Women (NFDW). The NFDW was founded in 1995, on the eve of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, by Ruth Manorama, a Dalit activist from Tamil Nadu, to represent Dalit women nationally and internationally. The intellectual engagements and transnational alliances forged by the NFDW and other Dalit feminists demonstrate both a critique of feminist and anti-caste movements in India while also revealing new possibilities for transnational feminism. I explore these tensions and possibilities by first discussing the establishment of the NFDW; I then turn to the use of "difference" in the intellectual project of Dalit feminism and its critiques of Indian social justice; finally, I analyze how a claim of "difference" at home enables the discernment of similarity across borders and the projection of new forms of transnational solidarity. I suggest that the strategic use of an identitarian politics—of a politics of difference within the nation-state and of similarity across borders—points to a new relationship between the national and global in feminist activism in India.

Establishing the NFDW, and Dalit women

In 1985, Ruth Manorama participated in what she described as a "cultural exchange program" between African Americans and Dalits.¹ In an interview I had with her in 2009, Manorama explained that she had been perplexed by black women's relationship to the women's movement in the United States and had been interested in learning why, as she said, "they are called black feminists" instead of just "feminists." During the program, Manorama studied the issues affecting black women and their precarious relationship with the mainstream feminist movement in the United States. She also researched the situation of black women in South Africa and their participation in the movement against apartheid. She recalled that what she learned helped her discern a similarity in the condition and struggle with black women in the United States and South Africa: their lives, she claimed, are "so similar to the life of the Dalits." The program, she explained, helped her to recognize that the predicaments facing Dalit women—predicaments that were different from both other Indian women and Dalit men—were shared by communities of women across the world and that a global perspective, a turn outward and abroad for alliances, could aid and support Dalit women's struggles for social justice. Manorama recounted that it was after she realized this similarity in experiences with women outside of India that she first recognized the importance of asserting Dalit women's difference and of creating, as she put it, "a Dalit woman's separate platform, a separate organization" in India.²

After returning from the cultural exchange program, Manorama joined Women's Voice, a Bangalore-based NGO that worked with the urban poor. While at Women's Voice, Manorama collaborated on a circular which invited Dalit women from across India to attend a meeting in Bangalore on International Women's Day, March 8, 1987. Manorama told me that she also invited "a Black woman from America" who was "working in Geneva on a program on racism," indicating that as early as 1987, she was working to mobilize international support for Dalit women.³ The choice of date for the meeting—International Women's Day—also registered the global orientation of the movement to create solidarity among Dalit women in India. The meeting in Bangalore

was sponsored by Women's Voice and the Christian Dalit Liberation Movement, a national organization based in Tamil Nadu. The invitation to the meeting had argued that Dalit women were "triple-alienated" on account of caste, class, and gender inequality and that their experiences and concerns had not been represented in India's feminist movement. Thus, the meeting was designed to offer Dalit women a space to discuss issues particular to their situations and in the process create solidarity among Dalit women from various regional, subcaste, linguistic, and religious backgrounds.

In her discussion of the meeting, Manorama recalled that the attendees commiserated about their loss of faith in the institutions and ideologies that they had believed would deliver justice and a better quality of life. The state, they lamented, had failed to fulfill its Constitutional obligations. The Indian women's movement had neglected issues affecting Dalit women and had not given Dalits leadership roles. Anti-caste, Dalit, and Marxist movements exhibited a clear masculinist bias and had not properly addressed issues affecting women. From this recognition of the failure of the state and social justice movements to properly advocate for Dalit women, participants at the conference, according to NFDW's official account, resolved that Dalit women constituted a distinct social constituency, one that could not be assimilated into either the categories of "Indian women" or "Dalits." Participants then committed to "organize themselves in order to address their special needs and problems."⁴ Following this preliminary meeting in 1987, a national taskforce of seventeen women from different regions was created and Dalit women's groups began convening at both the state and regional levels.

The NFDW was founded to continue the work of the national taskforce and the process of concretizing the category of "Dalit women," with one significant addition: the NFDW was also to represent Dalit women internationally. The organization was founded not only to connect Dalit women from across India, but also to represent them at international venues. By the early 1990s, Manorama and other activists viewed the upcoming Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, as a "golden opportunity to mobilize, educate and disseminate information" to the global feminist community about caste and Dalit women in India. In preparation for the conference, Women's Voice and the Asian Women's Human Rights Council held a public hearing in Bangalore on crimes against Dalits, and soon after officially established the NFDW as a "secular, autonomous and democratic" organization to represent Dalit women in Beijing. In this way, the NFDW, from its very inception, has been an advocacy organization that worked simultaneously at the national and international levels.⁵

The very creation of the NFDW suggested a challenge to the representative capacity of other Indian feminist organizations at both the national and international levels. The NFDW announced itself as the organization that would represent, as both portrait and proxy, Dalit women. Early goals of the organization included the development of a national human rights commission to monitor crimes against Dalits, the establishment of state-level committees, and the creation of resources, including scholarships for Dalit women's education. From its founding, the NFDW listed "building international solidarity and linkages with other oppressed groups" as one of its central goals, and, according to Manorama, it also recognized transnational engagements as indispensable to solving the problems facing Dalit women in India.⁶

In international arenas, such as at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and six years later at the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, Manorama and the NFDW translated and discussed caste discrimination in a manner that seemed to amplify its global resonance. They constructed equivalences and analogies with more globally recognized forms of discrimination, most notably, racism. For example, Manorama's presentation in Beijing argued that "racial discrimination on the basis of the caste system is probably the longest surviving hierarchal system in existence in the world today."⁷ Here, caste is explicitly rendered a form of racism; it loses any sense of being culturally specific to India and can thus be universally denounced as counter to notions of human rights. The NFDW evoked the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and provided examples of how Dalit women's rights to "life, liberty and security of person and property rights" were consistently denied or violently violated, often with state complicity. By framing "life, struggles, and aspirations" of Dalit women in terms of the struggle for human rights and against racial discrimination, Manorama placed the eradication of caste discrimination within the scope of global social justice movements.

Within India, the NFDW held conventions, conferences, and workshops. These events gathered Dalit women from across the country, fostered alliances across states and regions, and enabled the discernment and discussion of shared issues and concerns. The NFDW explicitly challenged the received models of organizing, censuring the "the male dominated Dalit movement and varied organizations of the oppressed castes" for "adopting the ways of functioning of the upper-caste dominated mainstream political organizations" and sought to generate new forms of leadership and coordination.⁸

In 2006, the NFDW and National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) joined efforts to convene the first national conference on violence against Dalit women. Held in New Delhi, the conference provided a forum for survivors, activists, politicians, and scholars to come together, exchange knowledge, and strategize on ways to protect and support Dalit women. The conference statement ("Delhi Declaration") was symbolically passed on International Women's Day, March 8, 2006. It detailed disparities in the prevalence of violence, poverty, and sickness between Dalit women and other populations and cited the "'worldview' of the dominant caste" as largely responsible for these disparities.⁹ By marking them as "inferior, impure, low character, easily available and accessible," this view, the NFDW argued, exposed Dalit women to a greater vulnerability to violence. This opinion of Dalit women, it added, was prevalent among "dominant caste women" who "have in some instances been found to support and encourage their men to commit crimes against Dalit women." Here, the statement reiterated one of the central arguments of the Dalit feminist critique: "Indian women" do not constitute one coherent category; some women have more access to power than others and hold power over other women. The statement maintained that because of the power relations among women of difference castes, Dalit women, as the group positioned at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, must be deemed a distinct and separate social category.

The Delhi Declaration also described and analyzed violence inflicted upon Dalit women. It identified two primary forms of violence: violence within the family and

violence that was embedded in the functioning of the larger society. Violence in the home was related to the prevalence of “patriarchal values” in Dalit communities and resulted in violence toward mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters. Alternatively, violence that was “rooted in the caste ethos” served to enforce social hierarchy; it was particularly “gruesome” and it became a “weapon for the continued caste-class-gender subjugation and exploitation of Dalit women and the community as a whole.” This was violence designed to reinforce traditional obligations and duties and was often retribution for the exercise of legitimate, state-endowed powers and rights. It was violence that not only assaulted the body, but also shamed and humiliated; it functioned to strip an individual and community of dignity and was “often a tool to perpetuate a culture of silence and crush the spirit.” In this rendering, caste creates the conditions for violence against Dalit women. A feminist response to violence against Dalit women in India could thus not neglect caste and had to address the caste-specific forms of patriarchy and sexism.¹⁰

Although staged as a national event, the Delhi Conference had an explicitly international message. The Delhi Declaration concluded with a plea to the international human rights community, in particular to women’s rights and development organizations, to recognize caste-based discrimination as a human rights violation and to “extend solidarity to Dalit women’s causes and concerns.” This was further pursued eight months after the conference when the NFDW and NCDHR joined with the Feminist Dalit Organisation of Nepal, the International Dalit Solidarity Network, Dalit Network Netherlands, and Justicia et Pax Netherlands to hold the first International Conference on the Human Rights of Dalit Women in The Hague, Netherlands. Thematically, the conference continued the focus of the New Delhi conference, namely, on how “caste, class and gender discrimination prevents Dalit women from enjoying their basic human rights” and how violence sustains “systemic discrimination.”¹¹ Like the Delhi Conference, the Hague Conference categorized violence against Dalit women in terms of violence within the family and violence committed by more dominant castes. This conference, however, took place on a global stage and was sponsored by the NFDW and several other NGOs.

Although the Hague Declaration was consistent with the NFDW’s platform, materials circulated at the conference diverge from some of its previous assessments. For example, a portfolio distributed by the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, entitled *3,000 Years . . . How Much Longer*, put forth an analysis of violence that deviated from, and at times contradicted, that of the NFDW. The title of the portfolio itself assumed a timeless, unchanging oppression and fit easily into orientalist renderings of India. Whereas the NFDW’s previous international engagements at Beijing and Durban had cited specific historical processes underlying the contemporary predicament of Dalit women, such as the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and the global predominance of neoliberal economics, the conference at The Hague departed from the historical specificity of earlier conceptualizations and replaced it with ahistorical, and at points, sensationalistic, generalizations.

A factsheet in the portfolio stated that “the Dalit woman faces violence at home from Dalit men, who compensate for their humiliation and lack of power by venting

their frustration on their wives, daughters and mothers.”¹² While the Delhi Conference argued that “patriarchal values” motivated family violence, the factsheet from The Hague made no reference to internal patriarchy, only to the oppression of caste experienced by men, suggesting that the disempowered condition of Dalit men was the root cause of family violence. According to this logic, it was not the dismantling of patriarchy that would reduce violence against women, but rather, the empowerment of men. A similar privileging of the male Dalit experience pervaded the analysis of upper caste violence against Dalit women. The same factsheet in the portfolio stated that the Dalit woman is

routinely molested, offensively groped and gangraped by upper caste men to teach her community a lesson. To remind them of their position in society. Cases have been recorded of feudal landlords bursting into a dalit marriage to claim “the first night privilege with the bride.”

Here, “community” stands in for “men.” Whereas literature from the NFDW explained that the prevalence of “patriarchal notions of community honour residing in women” created a context in which “dominant caste violence against Dalit women . . . punish[ed] the entire Dalit community,” The Hague’s factsheet assumed the perspective of an emasculated man and failed to explain the context in which violating a Dalit woman would teach “her community” a lesson.

3000 Years . . . How Much Longer also used representations of Dalit women’s suffering that subtly, yet significantly, diverged from those of the NFDW. While depictions of suffering and humiliation provided activists a way to translate untouchability and make its experiences legible to a global audience, certain representations were so replete with lurid and gruesome detail that they bordered on the sensationalistic. For example, the back cover of the conference portfolio listed terms that provided a sketch of the experiences endured by Dalit women. Printed in a light gray ink against a dark gray background, the terms—“molestation, sexual abuse, discrimination, oppression, exclusion, outcaste, untouchable, spat upon, rape, murder, beaten, humiliated, stripped, disrobed, paraded naked, forced to eat shit and urine, kicked, tortured, burnt to death, blinded, scalded, hot oil poured”—are listed in English in a vertical column and followed by five columns of translations into Dutch, French, German, Spanish, and Italian. The cover enumerated many of the spectacular dimensions of violence against Dalit women, but in the absence of an analysis of everyday structural conditions or connection to an individual’s account, it seemed to work against the political project of Dalit feminism. Instead of portraying the “strength,” “resistance,” and “contributions” of Dalit women—as the Delhi Declaration had done—descriptions like the ones used at The Hague Conference objectified the survivor/victim of caste and gender-based crimes and exploited tropes of Third-World women’s passivity and victimhood, tropes common in transnational feminist activism. The portfolio also described the experience of Dalit women in the superlative. For example, a factsheet stated that “Women the world over suffer discrimination. But never in the history of the universe has any group faced over 4,000 years of persistent and continued oppression.”¹³ By casting Dalit women as the group that suffered the worst forms of oppression—as passive victims

oppressed by a backwards culture—this characterization placed Dalit women at the top of an economy of suffering that seemed to inform the international market in women's issues, and thereby also rendered them the most in need of international assistance. Thus, while The Hague Conference increased the visibility of Dalit women's issues and concerns, this visibility was at points contradictory to the NFDW's statement about Dalit women and their activist mission.

While an international first for Dalit feminist activism, the conference at The Hague revealed the shortcomings of global activism. Preestablished tropes of Third-World women's victimhood and suffering at the hands of culture—tropes with deep historical and political histories—seemed to interfere with both the NFDW's narrative about Dalit women and their political project. In my reading, the conference at The Hague highlights the need for a new framework and paradigm for transnational feminist activism. In the next two sections, I discuss how I see the NFDW and other Dalit feminist organizations developing the conceptual framework for an alternative mode of transnational feminist activism. This conceptual framework emerges from Dalit feminist evaluations of social justice movements within India and abroad. I first discuss this domestic context before turning to how it provides a framework for transnational activism.

Dalit feminism at home: Difference as critique

In an article that came out shortly after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, Gopal Guru discussed the formation of autonomous Dalit women's organizations, such as the NFDW, and the rise of identity politics by Dalit women.¹⁴ He argued that Dalit women "need to talk differently" because of factors internal and external to the Dalit community: that is, they experienced political and cultural marginalization within the Dalit community and mainstream feminists were resistant to integrating caste into their analysis of gender inequality. Dalit men and non-Dalit women, he noted, thus could not represent Dalit women; only Dalit women could represent themselves. Guru celebrated this emergence of a politics of difference and suggested that it avoided many of the problems of identity-based politics. As he concluded, "Dalit women's perception while critical of the homogenization of a dominant discourse does not make a fetish of its own reality, and therefore prevents the ghettoisation of dalithood."¹⁵ Guru failed to consider, however, that the problem with identity politics extends beyond the possibility of ghettoization; it risks also exclusion and the fixing and privileging of particular identities as authentic.

Sharmila Rege contested Guru's suggestion that experience yields more authentic knowledge, an implication of his celebration of a politics of difference, and argued that his notion of difference could actually dilute the emancipatory potential of Dalit women's activism and critiques. Such a concept of difference, she cautioned, "could render Dalit women's independent assertion an exclusive politics of identity."¹⁶ Rege argued that the concept of difference had "limited political and analytical use" if not put into dialogue with other ideological positions. The mere assertion of difference, and difference in epistemological standpoint, would simply lead to a plurality of

standpoints, without interrogating upper-caste/class assumptions. She noted that an analysis of patriarchy that captured how caste hierarchy was part and parcel of gender subordination had been glaringly absent in the major feminist campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s. For the leftist women's organizations of that time, the notion of sisterhood and an undifferentiated feminist standpoint superseded caste differences; in addition, caste as a category of analysis was subsumed by class and rendered redundant.¹⁷ The establishment of autonomous Dalit women's organizations, such as the NFDW, thus heralded more than a mere assertion of difference. As Rege concluded, "It is apparent that the issues underlined by the new Dalit women's movement go beyond the naming of 'difference' of Dalit women and calls for a revolutionary epistemological shift to a Dalit feminist standpoint."¹⁸ This shift not only interrogates the biases of recent Indian feminist movements, but also offers a more critical and inclusive orientation to feminist theorizing and action.

I draw from both Guru and Rege's insights in my discussion of the function of a politics of difference in Dalit feminist organizing. I focus on the NFDW's theoretical intervention into Indian feminism and show that while "difference" points to a critique of the predominant national social justice movements, it also, as I demonstrate in the next section, conceptually enables new forms of transnational solidarity. The intellectual and political project of Dalit feminism, as conceived by the NFDW, was premised on two principles: one, that "women" or "Indian women" do not constitute a unitary social category; and two, that gender inequality cannot be assessed in isolation, but, rather, must be analyzed alongside other social variables such as class and caste status. As Manorama explained, "today, in an Indian context, when you look at women as a whole, you don't have the same or homogenous issues to relate to. We have different issues ... because we are at the lowest in the hierarchy of society." Dalit women, in Manorama's words, "share very specific discrimination" and accordingly, are different in position, perspective, and experience from other communities of women in India. "Therefore," Manorama argued, "we need to look at ourselves as a very specific category of women." Manorama claimed that this assertion of Dalit women's difference was "a scholarly intervention into feminism."¹⁹ "Difference" was a corrective to the ideology of the mainstream Indian women's movement; the claim of difference then also worked to dislodge the upper-caste and middle-class women's movement as the sole voice of "Indian feminism" in international forums.

While the term "Indian women's movement" encapsulates a diverse set of organizations, ideologies, and activism with a varied and complex history, from the perspective of the Dalit activists, the consistent neglect of the issues and concerns of Dalit women seemed to warrant collapsing the immense differences in the movement. Indian feminism that did not explicitly address caste or take on the standpoint of Dalit women was characterized as "mainstream." For example, Seema, a Dalit rights activist, explained the mainstream women's movement in India was run by "middle class and upper caste women," who "[were] only talking about the problems of women of their castes."²⁰ She added that the organizations of the mainstream movement had not addressed practices such as manual scavenging or the devadasi system as *feminist* issues and had ignored the *caste* dimensions of the violence and poverty that afflicted Dalit women.²¹ Moreover, the predominant theoretical orientation guiding

the mainstream movement seemed to dismiss the relevance of caste to the analysis of patriarchy and to feminist activism. As Seema pointed out, while gender and class were analyzed as variables affecting power and opportunity in society, “the caste perspective is not there [among feminists] ... [T]hey will think that a Dalit woman suffers inequality because she is a woman and is poor ... Mainstream feminism will say that its class, not caste.”²²

According to Manorama, for Dalit feminists, caste was “the central thing,” without which patriarchy, constructions of gender, and class inequality could not be understood. Without examining the primacy of caste in practices of privilege and discrimination, Manorama argued, even upper caste women’s “liberation is not full; their liberation is not possible.” “I think the general feminist movement did not understand this,” she added, “because they are not in a position to understand it.”²³ According to Manorama and other activists, feminists who inhabited a position of caste privilege had failed to create an ideological platform wide enough to advocate for and represent those who were, as Seema said, “at the bottom of the bottom.”²⁴

This description of the Indian women’s movement is supported by Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah’s *Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women’s Movement in India*, a text published in 1991 that documents and analyzes the Indian feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁵ The authors, two prominent activists, visited over a score of women’s organizations across the country and framed the book as both an account of their own experiences as feminists and as an archive of the “experiences, ideas and issues” of the contemporary Indian women’s movement.²⁶

Gandhi and Shah’s account celebrated the achievements of the Indian women’s movement, claiming that it had “put forward a hope and future which *every woman* can claim and gain strength from” [emphasis mine].²⁷ Their analysis employed an undifferentiated category of “the oppressed”; rather than teasing out the work of caste, class, religion, language, and region in creating different lifeworlds, they relied mostly on a gender-based notion of oppression. In Gandhi and Shah’s narrative, “Indian women” emerged as a largely undifferentiated and natural category. Here, Indian women were fundamentally the same; this sameness then functioned to obscure key points of divergence in the experiences and interests of Indian women. The only reference to power relations among women was found in the explanation of the role of mothers-in-law in dowry-related violence; family structure, not a broader social structure, provided the context for women acting as “agents” of patriarchy. This approach consequently ignored the work of caste in differentiating among women and the particularities of Dalit women’s experiences and concerns. Gandhi and Shah’s assumption of a shared oppression and unity among women thus not only undervalued differences among women, but also proved exclusionary.

For example, in their recounting of their train travels across India, they described their confrontations with “two types of chauvinism: the ‘shall I fill up your water bottle’ type of patronage and the cruder ‘*ye hai aaj ki ladkiyan*’ (these are the women of today) ridicule.” The authors did not recognize that the constructions of gender underlying both types of chauvinism were specific to their caste and class position. A Dalit woman would not have received the “patronage” afforded to the middle-class and upper-caste authors because she deviated from the ideal of respectable femininity by virtue of her

caste identity; the chauvinism of male protection and help was specific to women who conformed to this ideal. Similarly, while the authors highlighted the "ridicule" they received for traveling without a male companion, there was no mention of lower-caste and class women who were most likely present, working, and mobile in the public spaces they travelled. Another glaring example of Gandhi and Shah's neglect of an intersectional approach to the analysis of gender relations was their discussion of sexual violence. While many of the victim/survivors of rape they discussed were from Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe communities, Gandhi and Shah did not address how caste status rendered some women more vulnerable to sexual violence than others.²⁸ Moreover, the authors conceded that the "leadership of the women's movement ha[d] remained predominantly middle-class," but maintained that the movement had been "multiclass." They made no mention, however, of the caste backgrounds of either the leadership or participants in the movement. In their discussion of the "discriminatory practices" and "social taboos" that restricted "choice in livelihood," Gandhi and Shah credited only the sexual division of labor—which theoretically would have affected all Indian women—and made no mention of caste, despite its continued impact on occupations. Manual scavenging or other work traditionally performed by Dalit women was overlooked and caste did not appear as a force that structured life options and opportunities.²⁹

Gandhi and Shah's account of the Indian feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s substantiates the feelings of exclusion and marginalization communicated to me by Dalit women in their discussions of the "mainstream" Indian women's movement. As Manorama stated, the NFDW was created as a corrective to the mainstream movement. The organization provided the theoretical and ideological groundwork for the articulation of Dalit difference and for the construction of "Dalit women" as a separate social category. Manorama argued that the assertion of Dalit women's difference was "a scholarly intervention into feminism."³⁰ She explained that the NFDW "did not start because we wanted to be an NGO. We wanted to do something ... It's a movement for the Dalit women." The NFDW's primary goal was to create a foundation for the identity of Dalit women and for advocacy on their behalf; exposing and publicizing the "specific issues" and "specific human rights violations" affecting Dalit women was a central part of this work. The NFDW not only challenged the dominant analysis guiding the Indian women's movement, but also worked to dislodge the upper-caste and women's movement as the sole voice of "Indian feminism" in international forums.

The NFDW conceptualized Dalit women's difference not only in terms of a difference in social position and the differential burdens of gender, class, and caste, but also as a cultural difference. For example, the claim that Dalits were the "indigenous people" of India anchors the idea of difference in a past that is imagined as historically distinct from that of other groups in India. As the original inhabitants of India, the NFDW contended, the "Brahmanic caste system is alien to our history"; Dalits therefore refused to be "co-opted ... by any other history or culture."³¹ The NFDW argued the "Dalit cultural heritage" is "egalitarian" and provides a worldview not offered by traditional leftist or progressive movements. While Gandhian, Nehruvian, and Marxist ideologies were unable to analyze the effects of Hindu nationalism and liberalization on "traditional oppressive structures," the heritage of Dalit reasoning,

the NFDW claims, could. The organization suggested that revering “the traditions of Jotirao Phule, Ayyankali, Periyar and Babasaheb Ambedkar” and revitalizing their worldviews could counter the impact of Hindutva, or right-wing Hindu nationalism, and neoliberalism on both preexisting and relatively new structures of inequality.³²

The assertion of difference and the specificity of Dalit women’s interests were initially criticized by prominent feminists. Manorama recalled being accused of “dividing the women’s movement” when she started working to establish the NFDW in the late 1980s. She strongly rejected such characterizations, stating:

I said we are not dividing. In fact, we live in divided *cherries* [slums] in India. We live in divided slums ... Why [do] we live in *cherries*? *Cherries* are full of filth, full of dirt. Why are we living in this, living in divided *cherries*, *busthies* [slums]. In India, the woman’s movement did not talk about this, did not raise these issues. Now, when we want to organize ... [they] are saying that you are dividing the women. We live in a divided world. In our country, the Dalits are the fourth world.³³

At a time when “Third-World feminists” were arguing against the dominance of Western feminism and its claims of representing all women, Manorama employed a similar critique to counter the assumptions of prominent Indian feminists. Caste, she insisted, divided women and altered the effects of patriarchy, resulting in women’s divergent experiences of gender subordination. According to the NFDW, Dalit feminism emerged from the particularities of Dalit women’s experiences of subordination. It put the experiences of Dalit women at the center of analysis and developed its critiques and prescriptions based on these experiences. Manorama explained to me that disparities in class, gender, and caste engendered a difference in “consciousness.” She regarded this “consciousness” as a “subaltern consciousness,” one that was not only nonelite, but also radically different and independent. The assertion of this distinction in consciousness also announced that Dalit women contested ideologies of caste inequality and that their worldviews and aspirations diverged from those in more dominant social positions. As many Dalit feminists insisted, Dalit women’s worldviews and aspirations embodied a universalist and humanist spirit which enabled them to be more promising visionaries of social change. As one activist said to me:

I am from a Dalit community and I am a woman. Dalit among Dalits. I am at a place where I can see the society ... No one can see from the upper top ... I have faced all these hurdles ... only a Dalit woman can see society from caste, class, and patriarchy perspective ... Feminism is equality, equity, justice and peace for all. Dalit women are the ones who ... have the ability to analyze [how society works].³⁴

The idea that those who are the most oppressed, those who have experienced life at the “bottom of the bottom,” are endowed with a unique perspective on the whole was echoed by other Dalit activists. Manorama suggested that Dalit women’s position in society enabled a critique that allowed for the imagining of a fuller, more complete egalitarianism. “If feminism is non-hierarchical, if feminism is ecological, if feminism is non-patriarchal,” she said, “then Dalit women know much better than anybody

else.”³⁵ Dalit women’s experiences, she contended, roused a vision and desire for social justice that eluded those more privileged. Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s discussion of a feminist methodology for discerning relations of power and, consequently, producing emancipatory knowledge is helpful in thinking about Manorama’s comment.³⁶ Mohanty suggests that the analysis for this methodology should begin from the perspective of “the most marginalized communities of women.”³⁷ “If we pay attention to and think from the space of some of the most disenfranchised communities of women in the world,” she writes, “we are most likely to envision a just and democratic society capable of treating all its citizens fairly.” An inquiry that begins with the experiences of those most marginalized—like Dalit women in India—and places their concerns at the center of analysis discerns the work of power that is often obscured if the focus is on those more privileged. This kind of approach—that of “read[ing] up the ladder of privilege”—enables a more inclusive vision of social justice, for, as Mohanty cautions, “if we begin our analysis from, and limit it to, the space of privileged communities, our visions of justice are more likely to be exclusionary because privilege nurtures blindness to those without the same privileges.”³⁸ As Manorama suggested, “those who are very comfortable . . . they don’t want change. People who want change anywhere in the world go through oppression.”³⁹

Transnational Dalit feminism: From difference to similarity

The assertion of difference—difference in structural position and epistemological standpoint—from both other Indian women and Dalit men does more than critique domestic social justice movements; it also functions to discern cross-border similarity and build transnational connections. In Dalit feminist projects, difference has created the conditions for the discernment of similarity—in particular, of similarity in struggle—with communities of women outside of India, communities deemed comparably marginalized. Activists have found that Dalit women’s difference in structural position is a social phenomenon shared by other communities of women. The attendant exclusion and marginalization—in both society at large and in social justice movements—that accompany this difference have also been deemed similar to that experienced by women outside India. The claim of difference has thus enabled an assertion of similarity with communities of women across nation-state borders. This assertion of similarity does not point to an alternative identitarian politics; rather, it assumes a similarity in structural position and epistemological standpoint from which the affective and political bonds for transnational feminist activism are generated.

For example, Manorama spoke to me about the similarity in structural position between Dalit women in India and black women in the United States, and the exclusion of both groups from their home country’s women’s movements. “Black women are much poorer [than white women], living [in] the ghettos . . . [They have] similar lifestyles as the Dalits,” she said. “The white feminists don’t address racism. It is central, crucial to the issue.” She added, “It is the same [in India] . . . We [Dalit feminists] go very much along with Black feminism.” In a published interview, Manorama spoke more about similarities between Dalit feminists and black feminists:

I was influenced by the Black women's movement in America. I was looking at why these Black women were organizing themselves differently. Why were they separate? Then, I understood the racist notions of purity and pollution that operates there. Just like our situation, the Black women don't have leadership in the mainstream women's movement. The White women were not going to solve the problems of Black women . . . [Black women] not only wrote about the racist inequality, but they spoke about the class struggle, they outlined the economic oppression, the absence of land and resources. There are so many connections between the Dalits and the Blacks.⁴⁰

I suggest that the "connections" that Manorama identified constitute what Mohanty conceptualizes as "'imagined communities' of Third World oppositional struggles."⁴¹ Drawing from Benedict Anderson's discussion of the nation's creation of horizontal affective relations, Mohanty explains that her use of "imagined communities" does not suggest that these connections are not "real," but, rather, that they point to "potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries . . . in spite of internal hierarchies within Third World contexts."⁴² The alliances that Mohanty envisions are not based on essentialist notions of identity—biological or social—but, rather, are constructed through a shared politics. As she writes, "It is not color or sex that constructs the grounds for these struggles. Rather, it is the way we think about race, class and gender."⁴³ In my reading of the NFDW's activism, Dalit feminists and black feminists emerge, in Mohanty's terms, as "imagined communities of women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systemic."⁴⁴ While the particulars of the histories and relations that affect both groups diverged, Manorama and the NFDW discerned a similar configuration of structural inequality shaping the lives of black and Dalit women. She and other Dalit activists have also suggested that they share an understanding of social justice with black feminists. For Manorama and other Dalit feminists, cross-border solidarity with groups deemed similarly marginalized in their home societies served as a source of support and a resource with which to project a vision of social justice and rights, a vision that was distinct from other Indian women's movements.

This kind of transnationalism—one rooted in shared convictions and solidarity in struggle—can be found in earlier Dalit women's associations. For example, Mahila Samta Sainik Dal (MSSD) (League of Women Soldiers for Equality), a Dalit feminist group active in the 1970s, saw their struggle for equality and liberation as part of the same struggle pursued oceans away by the American activist and scholar Angela Davis.⁴⁵ The MSSD manifesto declared a "fight for equality" and announced that its members have "become soldiers in this fight" to "destroy [the caste system]" and liberate women "enslaved by the social structure."⁴⁶ The Manifesto suggested a cultural basis for both gender and caste oppression. It located gender subordination in constructions of male sexuality and desire, arguing that "men have kept women deprived of freedom and apart from knowledge and have made them slaves only for sexual pleasure."⁴⁷ In the MSSD analysis, religion, and its "ideology of natural inequality," legitimized exploitation based on both caste and gender. The Manifesto urged women to renounce the model

of "Rama, who made his pregnant wife leave the house," as an "ideal," and instead follow the models of the Buddha, Mahatma Phule, Savitribai Phule, and Babasaheb Ambedkar. Despite the specificity in constructs and ideologies subordinating women and the lower castes in India, the MSSD saw themselves in solidarity with Angela Davis and as part of the same historical struggle:

Those who rebel against slavery, the Dalits who aim for freedom, the adivasis [indigenous people] and toilers are our brothers. We are battling for equality along with men in the liberation war for human liberation called for by Dr. Ambedkar. This is history. And so we wish every success to the workers in the American women's liberation movement and to Angela Davis and to the women's liberation army.⁴⁸

In the MSSD manifesto, "history" advances toward social equality; it is marked by the dissolution of structures of oppression and the inclusion of an ever widening group of people into an egalitarian order that is free from structures of oppression. Dr. Ambedkar, the MSSD, and Angela Davis were visionaries and leaders in this historical struggle for radical and revolutionary change. Despite the differences in context, they were united by their shared goal of "human liberation." The MSSD projected a clear internationalist vision for the empowerment and emancipation of all marginalized communities. By imagining solidarity with Angela Davis and the "workers in the American women's liberation movement," the MSSD connected Dalit women in India to a larger, global community and incorporated their cause into a global and historical struggle.

The imagining of a struggle shared with women fighting from the margins of their home societies, namely, African American feminists, recurred in the recent history of Dalit feminist activism. In 2002, the Alisamma Women's Collective circulated a statement about Dalit women's difference from other Indian women that evoked the history of black women's struggle in the American feminist movement.⁴⁹ The statement was directed to the mainstream Indian women's movement and was delivered on International Women's Day at the University of Hyderabad and circulated electronically soon after. It singled out "Hindu women and non-dalit women" and demanded that they "recognize [that the] Indian female community is stratified by [a] castist patriarchal system." It argued that it was "not just male domination" but also a "castist patriarchy" that was at play in India and that the caste system made the unity of Indian women an impossibility. It stated:

We ask you to rethink. We want you to acknowledge the political importance of "difference," i.e., heterogeneity, that exists among Indian female community. *That you are made as we are mutilated. You are put on a pedestal, whereas we are thrown into fields to work day and night. You were Satis, we are made harlots.* [emphasis mine]⁵⁰

In my reading, the italicized section of the statement follows a pattern of constructing comparisons and relations found in the most publicized version of Sojourner Truth's famous speech, "Ain't I A Woman?" The section of Truth's speech that can be found

reverberating in the Collective's statement illustrates how the privileges that come with white womanhood are not extended to black women. Truth shows how racism and sexism position black and white women differently and preclude a singular agenda for social justice. For example, in her speech, she says:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

An intertextual reading of the Collective's statement—an intertextual reading that focuses on the structure of the argument—can reveal how the meanings attributed to a Dalit feminist subjectivity are derived through an analogy to Sojourner Truth's description of the predicaments of black womanhood. The Collective's statement echoes Sojourner Truth's critique of how racism stratifies women in society. Truth shows the complexities of a feminist politics in a situation where, on one hand, white women struggled against assumptions of frailty and fought for rights in the public sphere, and on the other, black women struggled against the exploitation of their labor, not receiving the comforts that come with being considered frail.

This provides a subtext to the Collective's assertion that caste inequality thwarts a singular Indian feminist perspective. While caste-Hindu women are made socially respectable, Dalit women are exploited, denied respectability, and rendered sexually available. This subtext also evokes the centrality of violence in the constitution of Dalit women's subjectivity. Through an analogy to the predicaments and structural position of black women in the United States, the Alisamma Women's Collective then exposes the entanglements of caste and patriarchy in the subordination of Dalit women and highlights how racism and castism produce disparities in privileges and different forms of subordination. This then aligns the Alisamma Women's Collective with a broader community of women—a community that shares a similar form of "difference" and marginalization—and also indicts the mainstream Indian women's movement for its failure to recognize difference and critically evaluate its emancipatory project.

Imagining new forms of feminist transnationalism

In this essay, I have tried to demonstrate the interplay of identities of difference and similarity in Dalit feminism. Within the domestic context, Dalit feminists stress an identity of difference, difference in social position and standpoint, to underscore the limitations of the major feminist campaigns of the last several decades. Difference at home—a sign of Dalit women's exclusion from these campaigns—is then

supplemented with a claim of similarity with women across nation-state borders. This strategic use of identities of difference and similarity nationally and transnationally not only exposes the social injustice that can recur in social justice movements but also suggests new modes of transnational feminist engagement.

Dalit feminism seems to be reimagining transnational feminism; instead of the historically more prevalent orientation toward saving the "Third World woman" from her culture, Dalit feminist transnationalism reaches out for partnership and solidarity with women deemed comparably marginalized in their home societies. Transnationalism in this context depends on the construction of analogies, on the discernment of similarity in both structural location and subjectivity, and on the imagining of a shared struggle and political vision. Transnational engagements by Dalit feminists recenter the traditional focus of global feminism. These engagements highlight global and local relations of power and inequality and call attention to the political, economic, and social processes that have marginalized some and privileged others. The transnational analogies at the center of the Dalit feminist engagements discussed in this essay also have pedagogical force: analogies to African American women not only make the injustice suffered by Dalit women legible to a global audience, but are also instructive for the imagining of empathy and new forms of feminist solidarity.

Notes

- 1 Ruth Manorama, interview by author, September 2009.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 NFDW, "National Federation of Dalit Women" (Bangalore, India: 1987).
- 5 "National Federation of Dalit Women" (Bangalore, India: 1987).
- 6 "National Federation of Dalit Women."
- 7 See Ruth Manorama, "Dalit Women in Struggle: Transforming Pain into Power," paper presented at the International Seminar on Dalit Women: Life, Struggles and Aspirations, held at the NGO Forum of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995, Beijing, China.
- 8 NFDW, "Declaration from Fifth National Convention" (Chennai, India: November 27, 2002).
- 9 NFDW and NCDHR, "Delhi Declaration: National Conference on Violence against Dalit Women" (New Delhi, India: March 8, 2006).
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 See "The Hague Declaration on the Human Rights and Dignity of Dalit Women" (The Hague, Netherlands: November 21, 2006).
- 12 NCDHR, "In Search of Justice," in *3,000 ... How Much Longer?* (Conference portfolio at The International Conference on the Human Rights of Dalit Women, The Hague, Netherlands, 2006).
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Gopal Guru, "Dalit Women Talk Differently," *Economic and Political Weekly* (October 14–21, 1995), 2548–50.
- 15 Guru, "Dalit Women Talk Differently," 2550.

- 16 See Sharmila Rege, "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position," *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, 44 (October 31–November 6, 1998): WS39–WS46; and Sharmila Rege, *Writing Caste/ Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006).
- 17 Among the leftist organizations Rege mentions are the National Federation of Indian Women and The All-India Women's Conference. See "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position," WS43.
- 18 Rege, "Dalit Women Talk Differently," 45.
- 19 Manorama, "Dalit Women in Struggle," 2009.
- 20 This name has been changed to protect the informant's privacy. Seema, Dalit activist, interview by author, August 2009.
- 21 Manual scavenging refers to the practice of manually removing human excreta from dry latrines and sewers. It is a caste-based occupational practice imposed mostly on the women of certain Dalit communities. Although legally abolished, the practice is still prevalent in many parts of India and women who work as manual scavengers continue face extreme poverty, social stigma, and discrimination. The devadasi system refers to a form of forced prostitution imposed on certain communities of Dalit women. The practice is found mostly in southern India.
- 22 Seema, Dalit activist, interview.
- 23 Manorama, "Dalit Women in Struggle," 2009.
- 24 Seema, Dalit activist, interview.
- 25 See Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, *The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1991).
- 26 Gandhi and Shah, *The Issues at Stake*, 5.
- 27 Ibid., 14.
- 28 "Scheduled Castes" and "Scheduled Tribes" are the official state designations for certain historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Scheduled Caste refers to Dalit communities, those groups included in the caste structure through their very exclusion. Scheduled Tribes is the official designation for "adivasi," which literally means indigenous people. The Scheduled Tribes are considered to have historically been outside of the Hindu caste structure.
- 29 Gandhi and Shah, *The Issues at Stake*, 22, 23.
- 30 Manorama, "Dalit Women in Struggle," 2009.
- 31 NFDW, "Fifth National Convention Declaration."
- 32 Ibid. Phule, Ayyankali, Ambedkar, and Periyar were anti-caste activists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
- 33 Manorama, "Dalit Women in Struggle," 2009.
- 34 Dalit activist, interview by author, September 2009.
- 35 Manorama, "Dalit Women in Struggle," 2009.
- 36 See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practice, and Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003)
- 37 Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*, 231.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Manorama, "Dalit Women in Struggle," 2009.
- 40 "Interview with Ruth Manorama," <http://youngfeminists.wordpress.com>
- 41 Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*, 46.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.

- 44 Ibid., 46–7.
- 45 See Gail Omvedt, *We Will Smash This Prison: Indian Women in Struggle* (London: Zed Press, 1980). Omvedt provides a translation from Marathi into English of the MSSD's manifesto in the appendix of *We Will Smash This Prison*.
- 46 MSSD, "Manifesto," 173, 174.
- 47 Ibid., 175.
- 48 Ibid., 176.
- 49 The Alisamma Women's Collective was named after a woman who was killed before she could testify to witnessing the murder of her son. Her testimony was critical in a trial prosecuting a Dalit massacre in which six Dalit men were killed and three Dalit women were raped. The name of the collective both honors her memory and also signals the importance of hearing Dalit women's voices.
- 50 Alisamma Women's Collective, "Statement of Dalit Women" (Hyderabad, India: March 8, 2008).

One Thousand Wednesdays: Transnational Activism from Seoul to Glendale

Vera Mackie

Introduction

Every Wednesday at lunchtime a group of demonstrators gathers in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.¹ For over twenty years they have protested against the Japanese military's wartime enforced military prostitution/military sexual slavery system.² To mark the 1,000th demonstration in 2011, a statue was erected on this site. (See also Chapter 9 by Seung-kyung Kim and Na-Young Lee in this volume.) The statue depicts a young woman in Korean ethnic dress seated on a chair, facing the Embassy. Beside her is an empty chair, inviting demonstrators to sit beside her in solidarity. Duplicates of the statue have been installed in the War and Women's Human Rights Museum in Seoul, in Glendale in suburban Los Angeles, and in Detroit—with others planned.³ Plaques commemorating the women who suffered under this system have also been erected in Manila, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia.⁴

The campaigns for redress have included demonstrations, litigation, a people's tribunal, petitions to the United Nations and the International Commission of Jurists, and petitions to national and local governments asking them to put pressure on the Japanese government for apology and reparations. The movement has also deployed cultural politics, bringing the issue into public discourse through research, collecting testimonies, producing documentaries, and through various forms of artistic representation, not least the recently created statues. The campaign has been a global one, bringing together activists from Europe, Asia, the Pacific, and North America, including diasporic communities.

This is a transnational issue by its very nature, involving the history of military conflict between nations and involving women who were transported across national borders and subjected to militarized sexual violence. It can only be understood through an intersectional analysis which considers gender, class, nationality, ethnicity, racialized positioning, the dynamics of militarism, imperialism and colonialism, and discourses of history and memory.⁵ There has also been a complex interplay of local, regional, transnational, and global concerns. In this essay, I survey activism around

this issue from the late twentieth century to the recent past. Before surveying these activist campaigns, though, I need to provide a brief historical overview.

The military management of sexuality

Japanese military forces were active on the Asian mainland from the late nineteenth century in order to protect Japanese trading interests after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95, the annexation of Taiwan in 1895, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, and the annexation of Korea in 1910. In the Manchurian Incident of 1931 some Japanese officers set off explosives on the Manchurian railroad as a pretext for attacking the Chinese. Over the following years the Japanese military gained control of more and more Chinese territory, including the creation of the puppet state of Manzhouguo (Manchukuo) in 1932, the Nanjing (Nanking) Massacre of 1937, and subsequent war with China. By 1945, the Japanese Army and Navy had captured territory in the Pacific, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Military brothels were set up wherever the military advanced.

From the 1870s, Japanese entrepreneurs had travelled overseas to set up brothels where they profited from the sexual labor of emigrant Japanese women known as “Karayuki-san” (literally, “women who go to China”).⁶ In addition, a system of licensed prostitution, similar to that of mainland Japan, was set up in the colonies of Korea and Taiwan. Soldiers, sailors, traders, and laborers had access to these forms of prostitution, as well as to brothels run by locals. Although each of these systems is distinct from the military brothels, many argue that the long decades of involvement in various aspects of the prostitution industry in Japan and neighboring countries facilitated the creation of the military facilities.⁷

There was a continuum of official involvement. Some brothels were directly managed by the military; some were managed by private entrepreneurs but regulated by the military; some were private but catered to soldiers. The first directly military-run brothels were set up in the 1930s.⁸ Military doctors conducted medical inspections and distributed condoms to soldiers, while the Army and Navy issued regulations on the use of the brothels. In colonial and military situations the practices of state-sanctioned licensed prostitution and enforced military prostitution reinforced racialized hierarchies and the conceptual divisions between “us” and “them” which made militarism and colonialism possible.⁹ As in other armed forces, military training fostered aggression with an intimate relationship between masculinity, violence, and sexuality.¹⁰

Perhaps 100,000 women were forced into sexual slavery—some put the figure at 200,000 or more. As far as we know, the majority were from Korea, a Japanese colony from 1910 to 1945, but Japanese women could also be found in the brothels.¹¹ Wherever the Japanese army and navy advanced, they captured and enslaved local women. The military also transported women from one battlefield to another. The question of coercion is a complex one. Some women were captured and enslaved, some were indentured, some were misled into thinking they were being recruited for some other kind of work. Some may have known what they were initially recruited for but were

then forcibly transported from one battlefield to another. Survivors were discovered by the Allied troops throughout Asia and the Pacific toward the end of the war.¹²

Post-Second World War military tribunals

After its surrender, Japan was occupied by the Allies from 1945 to 1952. The Far Eastern Commission set up the International Military Tribunal of the Far East in Tokyo from April 1946 to November 1948. As the Allied troops administered the surrender in different parts of Asia and the Pacific, they interrogated Japanese soldiers and sailors, their combatants, internees, prisoners of war, laborers, and members of local communities. Many of these interrogation records included reference to the Army and Navy setting up the military brothels, asking local leaders to provide women, the kidnapping of local women, or instances of sexual assault.¹³ Sexual enslavement and forced prostitution were barely mentioned during the Tokyo Tribunal, despite extensive knowledge and documentation. Charges were, however, brought against defendants for war crimes committed during the Nanjing invasion under the 1907 Hague Convention IV and the 1929 Geneva Convention. Although there were no prosecutions in Tokyo for the sexual enslavement of women, this issue was mentioned in some of the other regional tribunals.¹⁴ In February 1948, the managers of such facilities received sentences of five to twenty years in the Dutch War Crimes Tribunal in Batavia.¹⁵ They were indicted for forcing European and what were then known as “Eurasian” women into prostitution in the Javanese city of Semarang.¹⁶ Later critics have pointed out that the Dutch tribunals did not address the situation of the many Indonesian women who were enslaved. Although the Tokyo Tribunal did not prosecute the issue, the interrogation records have provided resources for later generations of scholars, activists, and lawyers who have read the documents from a new perspective.

After the end of the occupation in 1952, Japan paid reparations to some former combatant nations and provided development assistance to several neighboring countries. In these agreements, there was no further reflection on the question of what crimes had or had not been prosecuted in the various tribunals in the immediate post-Second World War years. The President of the Philippines pardoned Japanese war criminals and their Philippine collaborators in 1953.¹⁷ Relations with Indonesia were normalized in 1958, with war debts deemed to be settled at this time. In 1965, Japan and South Korea signed the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Under the normalization treaty the grants and loans provided at this time foreclosed any future claims against the Japanese government. When relations were normalized with the People’s Republic of China in 1972, the Chinese government also waived claims for reparations.¹⁸

Private trauma and public discourse

While commentators often refer to the decades of “silence,” there was in fact widespread knowledge of the wartime system in Japan and in the territories occupied by Japan. The encounters in the military “brothels” lived on in the memories of the

military personnel and the enslaved women, not to mention all of the officers, doctors, bureaucrats, and entrepreneurs who facilitated the system. Early postwar memoirs and literary works also mention the system and, as noted above, ample evidence appeared in interrogation reports prepared for various military tribunals. Several books on the issue appeared in the Japanese language in the 1970s.¹⁹

Nonetheless, a changed understanding of the issue of militarized sexual violence was necessary before this issue could become the subject of international human rights discourse. The feminist movements of the 1970s and beyond were vital to this changed understanding, as were coalitions between feminists in different countries in the Asian region. In the case of South Korea, the democratization movement of the 1980s also opened up spaces for discussion.²⁰ In the early post-Second World War years, the existence of military "brothels" was not really problematized and the question of coercion was rarely raised. By the late twentieth century, however, feminist commentators were talking about the issue in terms of a "war crime" and a "crime against humanity."²¹

From the 1970s, feminists from South Korea and Japan collaborated in protests against contemporary forms of prostitution, in particular the purchase of sexual services by Japanese tourists travelling to Korea. More recently, they have connected this issue with the provision of sexual services for the US military stationed in South Korea and Japan.²² In order to put these contemporary issues into historical perspective, they also explored the history of enforced military prostitution/sexual slavery.²³ In April 1988 at the International Conference on Women and Tourism at Jejudo in South Korea, Yun Chung-ok of Ewha University presented a paper on the wartime system. In January 1989, women staged a demonstration in Seoul, protesting plans to send a Korean representative to the funeral of Emperor Hirohito (1926–89), for they ultimately held the wartime Emperor responsible for the actions of the Japanese military. In May 1990, when President Roh Tae Woo was planning a state visit to Japan, women's organizations wrote to him demanding that he raise the issue with the Japanese government. At a state banquet in honor of Roh's visit, Emperor Akihito expressed regret for the suffering of Koreans under Japanese colonial rule. At this stage the official Japanese government position was that military brothels had been privately run. Korean women's organizations wrote to Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki prior to his visit to South Korea in October 1990, demanding an admission, an apology, and compensation.

The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery (Han'guk Chôngsindae munje taech'aek hyöbühoe) was founded in November 1990 as an umbrella group for several dozen feminist organizations in South Korea. It was also allied with feminist groups in Japan, Taiwan, Burma, the Philippines, and North Korea. The Council has been at the forefront of research on the issue and in campaigns for redress for Korean survivors. In Japan, the Asian Women's Association (Ajia no onnatachi no kai) and the Violence Against Women in War Network Japan (Sensô to josei e no bôryoku Nihon nettowâku/VAWW-Net-Japan) have been important.²⁴ In the early stages of campaigns on this issue, it tended to be framed as an issue between the Japanese state and its former colony of Korea. As more and more women from other countries came forward, though, it could no longer be framed as a bilateral issue between Korea and Japan. The issue was also complicated by the division of the Korean peninsula into North and South.

Until the 1990s, very few individual survivors had provided public testimony of their experiences. A Japanese woman, Mihara Yoshie (1921–93), published an autobiography under the pseudonym “Shirota Suzuko” in 1971, and she was interviewed on a radio program in Japan in 1986. In 1979, filmmaker Yamatani Tetsuo made a documentary and published a book about a Korean survivor, Pae Pae Pong-gi (1915–91), who lived out the post-Second World War years in Okinawa.²⁵ In August 1991, a Korean survivor, Kim Haksun (1924–97), held a press conference to tell of her wartime experiences. She was soon joined by other survivors from Korea. Jan Ruff O’Herne, a Dutch woman now residing in Australia, came forward in 1992 and published her autobiography in 1994. Maria Rosa Henson (1927–97) from the Philippines also came forward in 1992 and published her autobiography in 1996. By 1993 in South Korea, 103 women had identified themselves as survivors of the enforced military prostitution/military sexual slavery system, and it was reported that there were 123 survivors in North Korea too. In 1992, Taiwanese survivor Huang A-Tao told her story. In Taiwan a total of fifty-eight women came forward, with only three surviving in early 2016. In the Philippines there were an estimated seventy survivors in early 2016.²⁶

On March 4, 1992, the Korean Council submitted a petition to the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) requesting that it investigate atrocities committed against women during the Second World War and pressure the Japanese government to pay reparations. The UNHRC placed the issue on the agenda for its August 1992 meeting. The UNHRC’s Subcommission for the Protection of Minorities described the system as a “crime against humanity that violated the human rights of Asian women and the international agreement against forced labor that Japan signed in 1932.”²⁷ The movement also wanted the South Korean government to put pressure on the Japanese government for redress.

In the meantime, nongovernmental organizations conducted a fundraising campaign to support the survivors. The South Korean government of President Kim Young-sam (1927–2015) chose not to bring claims against the Japanese government, but passed a special bill in August 1993 to support the survivors. Each survivor was to be paid a one-off payment of five million *won* (about US\$6,250 at that time) and monthly support of 250,000 *won*.²⁸ In Taiwan, the government pays monthly social welfare payments and medical insurance for the survivors and provides financial support for the Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation.

The Japanese government’s response

The initial response of the Japanese government was to deny direct military involvement. In January 1992, however, historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki went public with documents he had found in official archives. The “Taiwan Army Telegram 602,” March 12, 1942, contains the following passage.

In regard to the Secret Telegram of Army No 63, we’ve been asked by the Southern Army General Command to dispatch as soon as possible 50 native comfort women to “Borneo.” On the basis of Secret Telegram of Army No 623, we request travel

permits for the 3 operators named below [names deleted by Japanese authorities], who have been investigated and selected by the military police.²⁹

In all, Yoshimi revealed six documents from the military archives which incriminated the Japanese government. After the release of these documents in 1992, the Japanese government initially issued a statement by then Chief Cabinet Secretary Kōno Yōhei, known as the "Kōno statement," which admitted government involvement. The government investigated the issue and released a report in 1993, which acknowledged that there had been military "comfort stations" in "Japan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, the then Malaya, Thailand, the then Burma, the then New Guinea, Hong Kong, Macao and the then French Indochina."³⁰

With respect to compensation, the Japanese government stuck to its position that all claims for reparation had been settled in the treaties signed from the 1950s to the 1970s. Rather than acknowledge responsibility by providing compensation or reparations, it facilitated the creation of a private organization generally known as the "Asian Women's Fund" (the full title is the Asian Women's Friendship and Peace People's Foundation/ Josei no tame no Ajia Heiwa Kokumin Kikin). The Fund sought donations from private individuals, and in July 1996 it announced it would pay US\$18,500 each to around 300 survivors in Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines.³¹ This has been a bone of contention among the survivors and their supporters in several countries, with many seeing the money as tainted. In Indonesia, for example, the funds were used by the government to set up nursing homes for the survivors rather than being disbursed to individuals.³²

In 1996, UN Special Rapporteur, Radhika Coomaraswamy, described the system as "military sexual slavery" and recommended that the Japanese government pay compensation. This prompted another wave of denials from members of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and other public figures on the political right.³³ Although there were fears that Prime Minister Abe Shinzō (the LDP incumbent in 2016) would retract the Kōno Statement, for the moment the Kōno Statement still stands. Abe's statement on the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 2015 stopped short of repudiating the Kōno Statement, although this statement has been criticized as historically inaccurate in other ways.³⁴

Litigation and international political pressure

In December 1991, Kim Haksun was part of a class action against the government of Japan sponsored by the Association of Pacific War Victims and Bereaved Families. A separate suit was filed by four women at the Shimonoseki branch of the Yamaguchi District Court. In the late 1990s, sixteen women from Yu County in China sued the Japanese state for compensation and an apology, supported by a team of Japanese and Chinese lawyers. Their claims were denied due to the statute of limitations and to the individuals' lack of standing to sue the state.³⁵ In August 1999, nine Taiwanese women brought a suit in the Tokyo District Court, which turned down the case. Appeals were subsequently lost in the Tokyo High Court in February 2004 and the Tokyo Supreme

Court in February 2005.³⁶ Another case was brought in the United States in September 2000 by eighteen survivors. The US court system allows litigation where human rights abuses have occurred, even if the events did not occur in the United States.³⁷ This case went as far the Supreme Court, but was unsuccessful.

Democratic Congressional Representative Mike Honda from California submitted a nonbinding resolution to the Congressional Committee on Foreign Relations on January 12, 2007. The resolution called on the government of Japan to formally apologize and accept historical responsibility “in a clear and unequivocal manner for ... the coercion of young women into military sexual slavery.” The House Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment held a public hearing where Korean survivors Yi Yong-su and Kim Kun-ja and Dutch-Australian Jan Ruff O’Herne testified. The US House of Representatives approved House Resolution 121 in July 2007. Similar resolutions have been passed in the Netherlands, Canada, and the European Parliament. There was a similar campaign in Australia, with a few local governments passing resolutions, but none at the national government level.³⁸ In each of these places, diasporic communities played an important role. In parallel with these transnational campaigns, local activities in support of the survivors continued in each country.

The House of Sharing

In South Korea, Buddhist organizations and other NGOs conducted fundraising campaigns to support the survivors. From 1992, a group of elderly survivors shared a rented house in Seoul, known as the “House of Sharing” (the Korean name “Nanum-ujip” literally means “our house”). The House of Sharing moved to the suburbs of Seoul in 1995. As well as housing the survivors, the complex also includes a museum, a gallery of paintings by the survivors, and memorial statues to those who have passed away.³⁹ The survivors and their supporters participate in the weekly Wednesday demonstration outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul (discussed below). Similar support activities are carried out for survivors in other countries, although there are no doubt countless others who have not come forward with their stories of wartime abuse.⁴⁰

The Wednesday demonstration

In January 1992, Japanese Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi visited South Korea. On Wednesday, January 8, 1992, Kim Haksun, other survivors, and their supporters gathered in front of the Japanese Embassy in downtown Seoul. They demanded that the Japanese government make an official apology and provide compensation, chanting “Apologize!” “Punish!” “Compensate!” There has been a “Wednesday demonstration” every week since then. Survivors and their supporters hold placards in Japanese, Korean, or English. The elderly survivors sit on portable stools, facing the Japanese Embassy, flanked by their younger supporters. When international supporters visit Seoul, they often join in the demonstrations.⁴¹ Demonstrations are

carried out in other places, too, such as demonstrations in front of the Japanese Embassy in Manila on the occasion of the Japanese Emperor's visit in 2016. Taiwanese survivors and their supporters have demonstrated outside the Japanese representative office, the "Interchange Association" in Taipei.⁴²

The demonstrations have a performative effect in the sense developed in Judith Butler's writings. Butler adapted the notion of performativity from Austin's linguistic speech act theory. Performative sentences are those that do something: make a promise, sentence someone, or perform a marriage, for example. Through the repeated iteration of performative acts, "sex," "gender," and other social categories are produced. Here I argue that the repeated iteration of the act of demonstrating in public space produces the citizenship of the elderly survivors.⁴³ Through their embodied presence in public space, the survivors are asserting their citizenship in the modern South Korean nation-state. Their first assertion of citizenship was in coming out publicly to tell their stories of wartime abuse and to charge both the South Korean government and the Japanese government to do something about their situation. The first actions—holding press conferences and contributing their testimonies to various publications—were about bringing their stories into public discourse. In their weekly attendance at the Wednesday demonstrations, they are making their demands visible in a literally public space on a Seoul street. Their placards in Korean, Japanese, and English show that they are addressing multiple audiences: the South Korean government and the South Korean public, the Japanese government and the Japanese public, and an international community which often communicates in the English language.

The Women's Tribunal

The movement for redress has also been supported by research. As noted above, the first books on the issue appeared in Japanese in the 1970s. A team in South Korea has been collecting survivor testimonies since 1993.⁴⁴ The Korean Council's collection of survivor testimonials from 1993 was translated into English in 1995.⁴⁵

At an Asian Women's Solidarity Conference in Seoul in 1998, members of VAWW-Net Japan proposed holding a People's Tribunal.⁴⁶ The South Korean team conducting research for the Tribunal was formed in April 1999, with similar teams based in other countries.⁴⁷ Preparations for the Tribunal took two-and-a-half years and involved preparatory meetings in Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, Manila, and Taipei, with a judges' meeting in The Hague. North and South Korean teams cooperated in preparing a joint indictment, which also included mention of ethnically Korean survivors living in China and Japan. Survivors from the newly independent nation of East Timor also participated.⁴⁸ The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery was held in Tokyo during December 8–12, 2000. This was a people's tribunal with no legal force, but which followed international legal protocols. The judges had experience in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, professional lawyers prosecuted the case, and *amici curiae* ("friends of the court") presented defenses on behalf of the Japanese government, which did not participate in the hearing. Sixty four survivors attended—from South Korea, North

Korea, the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, the Philippines, the Netherlands, Indonesia, East Timor, and Japan. Twenty survivors testified (some by video). Expert witnesses and former military personnel also testified.⁴⁹ The Tribunal indicted the Emperor of Japan, ten high military officials, and the Japanese government for crimes against humanity.

The Women's Tribunal drew on the papers of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (the Tokyo Tribunal, 1946–48) and other research carried out by historians, lawyers, and activists in several countries. The judgment was handed down one year later in December 2001. The findings were that the Japanese Emperor, the Japanese government, and the other accused individuals were liable for criminal responsibility for crimes against humanity committed through the system of sexual slavery.⁵⁰

The move for the Women's Tribunal was led by activists in Japan, but they worked in collaboration with teams from the countries whose nationals were represented at the Tribunal. Kim Puja, one of the organizers, has commented on this.

The efforts of all those involved serve, I believe, as a model of how the power of women and citizenry can create a tribunal for the investigation and prosecution of war crimes. Moreover, as the result of a cooperative alliance between women from both perpetrator and victimized countries, the realization of the Tribunal offers one model for a form of feminism that transcends national borders. By foregrounding the concepts of *gender* and *people's* justice, this historic event also contributed to the development of international law, which has traditionally been male dominant and Eurocentric in orientation (and had therefore neglected the crime of the "comfort women" system).⁵¹

In the absence of any official legal redress, the Wednesday demonstrations and other campaigns continued.

The Peace Monument in Seoul

To mark the 1,000th Wednesday demonstration on December 14, 2010, a commemorative statue was erected on the site of the demonstrations. The statue depicts a young woman in bobbed hair and Korean ethnic dress seated on a chair, facing the Embassy, with an empty chair beside her. On the platform beside the statue is a plaque with inscriptions in Korean, Japanese, and English. The English inscription reads:

December 14, 2011 marks the 1,000th Wednesday demonstration for the solution of Japanese military sexual slavery issue after its first rally on January 8, 1992 in front of the Japanese Embassy. This peace monument stands to commemorate the spirit and the deep history of the Wednesday demonstration.

The figure depicted in the bronze statue wears Korean ethnic dress (*hanbok*, or *ch'ima chōgori*); her hair is bobbed, suggesting that she is a young unmarried woman; her fists are clenched on her lap; and she has bare feet. She does not smile but stares



FIGURE 12.1. The Peace Memorial, Seoul, February 2013.

Source: Photograph by the author (Vera Mackie).

steadfastly ahead. A small bird is perched on one shoulder. Behind her, at pavement level, is a mosaic, suggesting the shadow of an old woman. The mosaic also includes a butterfly. The statue and its “shadow” suggest the different stages of life of the survivor—the young woman before her ordeal, and the old woman who refuses to forget. The bird is an icon of peace and of escape, while the butterfly has spiritual connotations. The empty seat suggests those who are missing, but also provides a site for a performative participation in the installation, as demonstrators or visitors have their photographs taken beside the seated young woman.

The statue does not simply commemorate the sufferings of the thousands and thousands of women who were subjected to militarized sexual violence. It also commemorates the determination of those demonstrators and supporters who keep the issue alive. Placed at the very site where these demonstrations have now occurred for over twenty years, the statue is a form of petition to the Japanese government and its diplomatic representatives. The face of the statue is composed, steadfastly staring at the Japanese Embassy, an avatar for the elderly demonstrators.

When I visited Seoul in February 2013, I spent a quiet Tuesday afternoon taking photographs of the statue *in situ*, and came back the next day to observe the Wednesday

demonstration. February is the coldest time of the year in Seoul. It had been snowing in the few days before and there was still some snow on the ground. Supporters had dressed the statue in a warm winter coat, woolen hat with ear muffs, a scarf, a long red, embroidered winter skirt and socks. On the seat next to the statue were cute stuffed toys—a teddy bear and a puppy. Behind her there was a row of cheerful yellow potted plants. By dressing the statue in protection against the cold, the supporters were symbolically expressing their concern for the *halmóni*, the “grandmothers” who have survived. Perhaps this also symbolizes care for the spirits of the countless women who did not survive.

The Japanese Embassy is like a red brick fortress, protected from the street by a fence. The small windows facing the street have blinds, so that there is no glimpse inside the building. In front of the Embassy are several police buses. By the time the demonstration started on this Wednesday, two busloads of police were in the street, the number of police roughly matching the number of demonstrators. Participants in the demonstration were a mix of young and old, male and female. Journalists, photographers, and other media representatives joined the crowd. After the lunchtime demonstration, another demonstration commenced, a march with placards commenting on other current political issues. Behind the site of the Wednesday demonstration there was a series of panels commenting on other contentious issues, such as the Dokdo/Takeshima islands which are under dispute between Japan and South Korea. The statue has been reproduced in other sites, such as the War and Women’s Human Rights Museum in another part of Seoul.

The War and Women’s Human Rights Museum

The War and Women’s Human Rights Museum was opened in May 2012, and was designed by Wise Architecture.⁵² It is hidden away in a cul-de-sac west of the city center, in a residential neighborhood surrounded by houses, schools, churches, and shops. The building is a house which has been renovated and extended, and is therefore in proportion to the surrounding houses. The building is clad in charcoal-colored bricks. Unobtrusive signs and plaques in Korean and English indicate that this is The War and Women’s Human Rights Museum. These plaques and signs use a butterfly as the logo of the museum.⁵³

One enters from a small door at street level. After purchasing tickets and picking up an audio guide, the tour starts downstairs. A small dark room recreates the feeling of the prison-like conditions the women were subjected to in the wartime brothels. Testimonies are replayed and visuals are projected onto the walls of the room. Visitors then walk upstairs to the next level. The walls of the staircase are lined with photographs and messages from the survivors. There is a balcony whose outside wall is made of the same charcoal bricks used in the construction of the external walls of the museum. The names and photographs of women who have passed away are affixed to the bricks. The open lattice of the brickwork allows visitors to look out at the surrounding residential area, reconnecting the museum with the city.

The next stage is a historical exhibit, where wall panels explain the history of the enforced military prostitution/military sexual slavery system. In this area, there is

a reproduction of the bronze statue that sits across from the Japanese Embassy in central Seoul. The statue is more or less the same as the one in central Seoul, but without the plaque or the mosaic of the shadowy older woman. This statue, too, has an empty seat beside it. The statue faces a video screen which runs footage of the Wednesday demonstrations, a virtual suggestion of the location and context of the original statue. The statue in central Seoul needs a plaque to provide basic information. Here, the museum as a whole provides historical context on the wartime enforced military prostitution/military sexual slavery system, the campaigns for redress, the Wednesday demonstrations, and the commemorative statue.

The museum can be seen as one element of the Korean Council's advocacy for redress. In Tokyo, the Women's Active Museum for War and Peace performs a similar function. The Women's Active Museum for War and Peace is in the buildings of the Waseda Hōshien, alongside several Christian civil society organizations. The Museum and the Asia-Japan Women's Resource Centre build on the work of the late feminist journalist and activist, Matsui Yayori (1934–2002), and the Asian Women's Association which she cofounded.

In Shanghai, two professors at Shanghai Normal University, Su Zhiliang and Chen Lifei, maintain the Chinese "Comfort Women" Research Center. In Shanghai there is an extant building which once housed a so-called comfort station. It is currently a residential building, but many, like Su Zhiliang, would like to see it transformed into a memorial.⁵⁴ In December 2015, a memorial was established in Nanjing, called the Nanjing Liji Lane Former Comfort Station Exhibition Hall.⁵⁵ A memorial has been dedicated in Taipei, and the museum opening is planned for December 2016, under the auspices of the Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation.⁵⁶ These parallel activities underline that the movement for redress is a transnational one, with ongoing campaigns wherever survivors and their supporters can be found. As we have seen, and will explore further below, diasporic communities have also been prompted to action, including Korean residents in Japan, Korean Australians, Korean Americans, and other Asian Americans.

Glendale, California

Another replica of the peace monument has been erected in Glendale, California. The statue, chair, and platform are identical to the original installation in Seoul, but the words on the plaque are slightly different. There is a caption, "I was a sex slave of the Japanese military," and an explanation of the iconography of the statue (the meanings of the shadow of the old woman, the bird, and the butterfly). The text of the plaque is in English only, and differs in significant ways from the plaque attached to the original statue in Seoul.

Peace Monument

In memory of more than 200,000 Asian and Dutch women who were removed from their homes to Korea, China, Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand,

Vietnam, Malaysia, East Timor and Indonesia to be coerced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Armed Forces of Japan between 1932 and 1945.

And in celebration of “Comfort Women Day” by the City of Glendale on July 30, 2012, and of passing the House Resolution 121 by the United States Congress on July 30, 2007, urging the Japanese government to accept historical responsibility for these crimes. It is our sincere hope that these unconscionable violations of human rights shall never recur.

July 30, 2013

While the plaque by the statue in Seoul has text in Japanese, Korean, and English, the Glendale plaque is only in English. The original Seoul statue commemorates the activism of those who participate in the Wednesday demonstration, while the plaque on the Glendale statue commemorates the “more than 200,000 Asian and Dutch women who were removed from their homes to Korea, China, Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, East Timor and Indonesia to be coerced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Armed Forces of Japan between 1932 and 1945.” The reference to “Asian and Dutch women” is curious. The Dutch women are identified by nationality, while “Asian” seems to refer to an ethnic category which transcends any one national identification. Nevertheless, this wording is an acknowledgment that it was not only Korean women who were abused under this system. Indeed, because of the shifting geopolitics in the region after the end of the Second World War and successive waves of decolonization, pinning down the nationality of any individual can be complex, depending on whether one is referring to colonial regimes before and after 1945, the period of Japanese occupation, or the postcolonial nation-states.⁵⁷

The plaque refers to the local situation in Glendale, where Asian American and Asian diasporic communities had led the campaign for an acknowledgment of the issue, and which led to the announcement of “Comfort Women Day” by the City of Glendale on July 30, 2012. The plaque also acknowledges House Resolution 121 passed by the US Congress on July 30, 2007.

The Glendale statue is in a park, in front of the local community center and public library. In other parts of the park are benches and tables, suitable for family picnics. When I visited there in May 2014, it was a sunny spring day. The bright sunlight cast the features of the statue into relief. As in Seoul, supporters had offered colorful potted plants. There was no need, however, for the affective touches of scarves and warm clothing seen on the Seoul statue on a cold winter day.

In Glendale, the addressee of the young woman’s petition is less clear. She is no longer clearly addressing the Japanese government through her accusatory gaze at the Japanese Embassy. Is she addressing the local Glendale community, the wider US public, or an international Anglophone community?

Other Asian American communities have installed commemorative plaques, often outside local community centers, as noted above. Another replica of the Seoul Peace Monument has been installed in Detroit, and a memorial is planned in San Francisco. Internationally, there is a commemorative plaque in Manila and one memorial in Chiba, outside Tokyo.⁵⁸



FIGURE 12.2. The Peace Memorial, Glendale, May 2014.

Source: Photograph by the author (Vera Mackie).

The Glendale statue has brought controversy, with Japanese denialists putting pressure on the local government for the removal of the statue. A similar controversy has been seen in Strathfield, in the western suburbs of Sydney. Members of the Korean-Australian community were initially successful in convincing Strathfield Council to approve a memorial to the so-called comfort women. After pressure from conservative denialists from Japan, however, Strathfield decided not to go ahead.⁵⁹ These controversies demonstrate that it is not only the survivors and their supporters who have forged transnational links. The conservative denialists also operate across national borders.

The geopolitics of protest and response

Another recent iteration of the Peace Memorial in Seoul is in a park some remove from the city center. In this version, the statue of a young woman in Korean ethnic dress is joined by the statue of a young woman in Chinese ethnic dress, sculpted by a Chinese artist, Pan Yiqun, and supported by a Chinese American filmmaker, Leo Shi Young.⁶⁰ There is another chair set aside for future visitors and the potential for future statues to be added. This perhaps suggests that the original statue was being read as referring specifically to the Korean women, rather than a more universal figure of a

young woman. This instability is apparent in the different descriptions attached to the different statues, as noted above.

The juxtaposition of the Chinese and Korean statues is in one sense a demonstration of transnational solidarity, staged at a strategic moment just before Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's official visit with South Korean President Park Geun-hye in October 2015. It could also be argued, however, that the two statues were "re-nationalized" as Korean and Chinese, united in opposition to Japan.

In December 2015, two months after Abe's meeting with Park, the South Korean and Japanese governments issued a joint communiqué. The Japanese Foreign Minister, Kishida Fumio, stated that the prime minister, Abe Shinzō, "expresses anew his most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women." Kishida stated that the Japanese government would provide the South Korean government with funds for the establishment of a fund for the care of the survivors and that "this issue is resolved finally and irreversibly." The statement was met with hostility by the South Korean survivors, who felt they should have been consulted before any government-to-government agreement was reached, a basic principle of restorative justice. The South Korean Foreign Minister, Yun Byōngse, confirmed that the issue is "resolved finally and irreversibly" and that the ROK and Japan would "refrain from accusing or criticizing each other regarding this issue in the international community." The statue was not mentioned in the Japanese statement, but the South Korean statement included an acknowledgment that "the Government of Japan is concerned about the statue built in front of the Embassy of Japan in Seoul" and that the South Korean government would "strive to solve this issue in an agreeable manner through taking measures such as consulting with related organizations about possible ways of addressing this issue."⁶¹ (See Chapter 9 by Kim and Lee in this volume.) The agreement also returned the issue to a bilateral one between Japan and South Korea. In August 2016, the Japanese government transferred the funds to the South Korean government's Reconciliation and Healing Foundation.⁶² Twelve South Korean survivors initiated a suit against their government, claiming compensation for the government's handling of the issue.⁶³ Survivors from other countries have demanded similar recognition. It was clear, however, that the Japan-ROK joint communiqué was a matter of geopolitics, an attempt to forge a closer alliance between the governments of the United States, Japan, and South Korea against China.

Conclusions

The issue of enforced military prostitution/sexual slavery has moved from a matter of private memory and trauma to a matter of international human rights discourse. The movement for redress for survivors of the system has become a transnational campaign involving activists from Europe, Asia, the Pacific, Australasia, and North America. The survivors and their supporters have used every conceivable form of activism, from localized support groups and targeted demonstrations at strategic sites to addressing the machinery of global governance.

There have been tensions between nationalist and feminist concerns, and tensions, at times, between those of former perpetrator and victim nations. Nevertheless, transnational solidarity has been achieved in such activities as the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery in 2000 and ongoing campaigns. Politics is carried out in an iterative interweaving of activities at the local, regional, transnational, and global levels.

These campaigns have also stretched the meaning of politics and activism, deploying the cultural politics of art, museums, and memorialization; the embodied politics of demonstrating, testifying, and witnessing; the affective politics of care for the survivors and symbolic care for the bronze statues; the more conventional politics of petitions to local and national governments and the machinery of the United Nations; and litigation in local and national courts. These conventional forms of petition and litigation were supplemented by the people's tribunal.

Research has been vital to these campaigns, carried out by academics, activists, and lawyers who have reread existing documents, sought hitherto unknown evidence, and interviewed survivors and perpetrators. Questions of culture and knowledge have been particularly important in these campaigns, for nothing less than an epistemological revolution was necessary in order to understand that the system which was unquestioned in wartime (even by many Allied soldiers who came in contact with the survivors) should now be seen as a gross violation of human rights.

In order to shed light on a system which involved hundreds of thousands of soldiers, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, doctors, civilians, and enslaved women across Asia and the Pacific, it has been necessary to forge a redress movement of similar (or even wider) geographical scope, involving activists, researchers, lawyers, and their supporters from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They have come from the former colonizing power and the former colonies and occupied territories, and have crossed the (former Cold War) divides of capitalism and communism.

The recent forms of memorialization discussed in this article do not simply document and memorialize suffering. Rather, they put on record the long decades of activism and affirm the dignity of the survivors.

Notes

- 1 This chapter draws on research conducted for Australian Research Council Future Fellowship Project FT0992328 "From Human Rights to Human Security: Changing Paradigms for Dealing with Inequality in the Asia-Pacific Region."
- 2 There is no one accepted term for this system. I prefer to avoid the euphemism "comfort station," except in quoted material. I refer to "enforced military prostitution" in order to emphasize the institutionalized nature of this system, but respect the choice of others to refer to "military sexual slavery." There is no one satisfactory way of describing the women who were subject to this form of sexual violence and exploitation. To refer to the women as "sex slaves" is sensational and dehumanizing. In many cases, I will refer to the women as "survivors," or use other phrases depending on the context. Korean and diasporic Korean activists often refer to the now elderly women as *halmöni* (grandmother). In Korea, as in

- many other societies, it is customary in some situations to refer to individuals with kinship terms appropriate to their age, rather than personal names. Thus, individuals may be referred to as brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandmother, grandfather, and so on, depending on their age. When the elderly Korean survivors are referred to as *halmöni*, this is a term of respect, which places the women in a familial relationship with their supporters. The term *halmöni* is used to refer to the women in the third person as well as a term of address, thus circumventing the use of terms such as “former comfort woman,” or “former sex slave,” which are offensive, and which circumscribe the identities of the women, as if their wartime experience were the only relevant part of their personal histories. Similar terminology (equivalent to “grandmother”) is used in Taiwan (*Ah Mah*) and the Philippines (*Lola*). The term *halmöni* is sometimes heard in the English language in this context, and the transliteration *harumoni* in Japanese. Chunghee Sarah Soh, “The Korean ‘Comfort Women’ Movement for Redress,” *Asian Survey* 36, 12 (1996): 1226–40; Chunghee Sarah Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Dai-Sil Kim-Gibson, “They Are Our Grandmas,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 5, 1 (1997): 255–74; Sheng-mei Ma, “Grandmothers’ Voices,” in *Silent Scars: History of Sexual Slavery by the Japanese Military*, ed. Graceia Lai, Wu Hui-ling, and Yu Ju-fen; trans. Sheng-mei Ma (Taipei: Shang Zhou Chuban, 2005), 12.
- 3 The Glendale monument was donated by the Korean American Forum of California. “Fullerton Council Approves ‘Comfort Women’ Resolution,” *Rafu Shimpo*, August 24, 2014. Available at <http://www.rafu.com/2014/08/fullerton-council-approves-comfort-women-resolution/>, accessed October 24, 2015. Recently, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors has announced plans for a memorial. “Korean-Chinese Coalition Plans SF Comfort Women Memorial,” *The Korea Times*, November 6, 2015. Available at <http://www.koreatimesus.com/korean-chinese-coalition-plans-sf-comfort-women-memorial/>, accessed November 8, 2015. Another memorial was planned in the western suburbs of Sydney, Australia, but plans were shelved after controversy. “Strathfield Council Knocks Back Plan to Build a Comfort Women Statue Proposed by Korean Community,” *Daily Telegraph*, August 14, 2015. Available at <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/inner-west/strathfield-council-knocks-back-plan-to-build-a-comfort-women-statue-proposed-by-korean-community/story-fngr8h4f-1227480838923>, accessed November 8, 2015.
 - 4 Antonio Olivo, “Memorial to WWII Comfort Women is Dedicated in Fairfax County,” *The Washington Post*, May 31, 2014. Available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/memorial-to-wwii-comfort-women-dedicated-in-fairfax-county/2014/05/30/730a1248-e684-11e3-a86b-362fd5443d19_story.html, accessed October 24, 2015; Choe Sang-Hun, “Statues Placed in South Korea Honor ‘Comfort Women’ Enslaved for Japan’s Troops,” *New York Times*, October 28, 2015. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/29/world/asia/south-korea-statues-honor-wartime-comfort-women-japan.html?_r=1, accessed November 12, 2015. See also “Comfort Women Monuments.” Available at http://peace.maripoc.com/p_comfort_women.htm, accessed November 12, 2015.
 - 5 On intersectionality, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, 6 (1991): 1241–99.
 - 6 Bill Mihalopoulos, *Sex in Japan’s Globalization, 1870–1930: Prostitutes, Emigration and Nation Building* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011).

- 7 Hyunah Yang, "Revisiting the Issue of Korean 'Military Comfort Women': The Question of Truth and Positionality," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 5, 1 (Spring 1997): 59.
- 8 Mark Driscoll, "Seeds and (Nest) Eggs of Empire: Sexology Manuals/Manual Sexology," in *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center, 2008), 191–225.
- 9 Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 111; Vera Mackie and Miyume Tanji, "Militarised Sexualities in East Asia," in *The Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, ed. Mark McLelland and Vera Mackie (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), 60–73.
- 10 Masahiro Suzuki, "Sensō ni okeru dansei sekushuariti" [Men's sexuality during wartime], in *Nihon no otoko wa doko kara kite doku e iku?* [Where have Japanese men come from? Where are they going?], ed. Haruo Asai, Satoru Itō, and Yukihiko Murase (Tokyo: Jūgatsusha, 2001): 98–111.
- 11 See, however, a recent book which mentions 400,000 women, "at least half of whom were Chinese." Peipei Qiu with Su Zhiliang and Chen Lifei, *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 6.
- 12 Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation* (Oxford: Routledge, 2002); Yoshiaki Yoshimi, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*, trans. Suzanne O'Brien (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Soh, *The Comfort Women*; Vera Mackie, "Gender, Geopolitics and Gaps in the Records: Women Glimpsed in the Military Archives," in *Sources and Methods in Histories of Colonialism: Approaching the Imperial Archive*, ed. Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley (Oxford: Routledge, in press).
- 13 United States Office of War Information, Japanese Prisoner of War Interrogation Report No 49, Psychological Warfare Team attached to US Army Forces India-Burma Theater, United States National Archives Collection, RG 208, Box 226, 1944; Summary of Examination of Jose Augusto Gomes, June 25, 1946. NAA, C10/7, 8392; Summary of Examination of Francisco Tilman de Ataide, June 29, 1946. NAA, C10/7, 8385. See also Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "You Don't Want to Know about the Girls? The 'Comfort Women,' the Japanese Military and Allied Forces in the Asia-Pacific War," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 13, 31 (2015). Available at http://www.japanfocus.org/-Tessa-Morris_Suzuki/4352/article.html, accessed November 8, 2015.
- 14 Nicola Henry, "Memory of an Injustice: The 'Comfort Women' and the Legacy of the Tokyo Trial," *Asian Studies Review* 37, 3 (2013): 362–80.
- 15 Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 76; William Bradley Horton, "Comfort Women," in *The Encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War*, ed. Peter Post (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 184–96.
- 16 As Robert Cribb points out, the attribution of ethnicity and nationality was complex in the Dutch East Indies: "The term 'Dutch' in this context is ambiguous. The Netherlands Indies used a legal system of racial classification which divided the population into 'Europeans,' 'Natives' and 'Foreign Orientals.' The system depended mainly on the paternal line of descent, meaning that some 'Europeans' had a high proportion of indigenous ancestry and some 'Natives' had significant European ancestry. It was also possible for Natives and Foreign Orientals to be legally assimilated to European status. During the occupation, however, the Japanese authorities had generally been influenced in their treatment of people by their physical appearance, rather than their official ethnic status." Robert Cribb, "Avoiding Clemency: The Trial and Transfer of Japanese War Criminals in Indonesia: 1946–1949," *Japanese Studies* 31,

- 2 (2011): 156–62; see also Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002). In English-language newspaper reports on the discovery of survivors of the enforced military prostitution system in Indonesia and Timor at the end of the Second World War, the term "Eurasian" is used for those of mixed descent. See Mackie, "Gender, Geopolitics and Gaps in the Records."
- 17 "Jap. [sic] Prisoners Pardoned," *Canberra Times*, July 7, 1953; Ronron Calunso, "Relatives of Philippine Leader Quirino Recall 1953 Act of Forgiveness Toward Japan," *Japan Times*, April 21, 2015. Available at www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/21/national/history/relatives-philippine-leader-quirino-recall-1953-act-forgiveness-toward-japan#Vq0cQa88ah8, accessed January 31, 2016.
- 18 Katharine McGregor, "Emotions and Activism for Former So-called 'Comfort Women' of the Japanese Occupation of the Netherlands East Indies," *Women's Studies International Forum* 54 (2016): 67–78; Lucy Hornby, "China's 'Comfort Women,'" *Financial Times*, March 20, 2015. Available at <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/b44ae604-cdc1-11e4-e8760-00144feab7de.html#axzz3rR25UkHS>, accessed November 14, 2015.
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- 24 Yang, "Revisiting the Issue of Korean 'Military Comfort Women.'" Both the Asian Women's Association and VAWW-Net-Japan have had name changes since then.
- 25 Shiota, *Mariya no Sanka*; Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 198; Yamatani, *Okinawa no harumoni*; Ropers, "Mutable Histories," 194.
- 26 Yang, "Revisiting the Issue of Korean 'Military Comfort Women,'" 68, n. 2; Maria Rosa Henson, *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny* (Manila: Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism, 1996); Jan Ruff O'Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence* (Sydney: Editions Tom Thompson, 1994); Graceia Lai et al., *Silent Scars*; Floyd Whaley, "In Philippines, World War II's Lesser-Known Sex Slaves Speak Out," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2016. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/30/world/asia/japan-philippines-comfort-women-emperor-kihito.html?_r=0, accessed January 31, 2016.
- 27 Soh, "The Korean 'Comfort Women' Movement for Redress," 1235.
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- 44 Yang Hyunah, “‘Finding the Map of Memory’: Testimony of the Military Sexual Slavery Survivors,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 16, 1 (Spring 2008): 82.
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- 46 This form of People's Tribunal can be traced back to Bertrand Russell and Jean Paul Sartre's People's Tribunal on the Vietnam War in 1967.
- 47 Yang, "Finding the Map of Memory," 84. The twenty to thirty volunteers were mainly university students from the Seoul area.
- 48 Kim Puja, "Global Civil Society Remakes History: 'The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal 2000,'" translated by Hideko Mitsui, *positions: east asia cultures critique* 9, 3 (2001): 616.
- 49 Kim, "Global Civil Society Remakes History," 612. A one-day public hearing was also held at the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice in New York on December 11, where fifteen survivors of militarized sexual violence from around the world testified.
- 50 McDonald et al., "The Judgement."
- 51 Kim, "Global Civil Society Remakes History," 614.
- 52 The project team at Wise Architecture included Sook Hee Chun, Young Chul Jang, Bokki Lee, Jiyoung Park, Kuhyeon Kwon, and Aram Yun. "Seoul House Becomes Museum Highlighting the Plight of Second World War 'Comfort Women,'" *Dezeen Magazine*, March 20, 2015. Available at <http://www.dezeen.com/2015/03/20/wise-architecture-museum-comfort-women-second-world-war-victims-seoul-south-korea/>, accessed January 31, 2016.
- 53 The butterfly is regularly used as a logo for political campaigns on this issue. See the "Butterfly Fund," established by the War and Women's Human Rights Museum in support of victims of sexual violence. Information available at https://www.womenandwar.net/contents/general/general.nx?page_str_menu=2405, accessed January 31, 2016.
- 54 Hornby, "China's 'Comfort Women'"; Peipei Qiu et al., *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves*.
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- 56 Muta Kazue, "Taipei Fujo Enjo Kikin Hōmon Repōto: Taiwan Ianfu to Josei no Kinken Hakubutsukan Ōpun o mae ni" ["Report on Visit to Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation: Before the Opening of the Museum"], *Women's Action Network*. Available at <http://wan.or.jp/article/show/3776>, accessed December 6, 2015.
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- 58 Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 197–201.
- 59 "Extraordinary Council Meeting—Comfort Women Statue," August 2015. Available at <https://www.strathfield.nsw.gov.au/council/council-and-committee-meetings/council-meetings-2/extraordinary-council-meeting-comfort-women-statue/>, accessed December 1, 2015. There was further controversy in August 2016 when a community group planned to display a replica of the Seoul statue in the local Korean Community Hall. (The War and Women's Human Rights Museum sells replicas of various sizes.)

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- 61 WSJ Staff, "Full Text: Japan-South Korea Statement on 'Comfort Women,'" *Wall Street Journal*, December 28, 2015. Available at <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2015/12/28/full-text-japan-south-korea-statement-on-comfort-women/>, accessed January 31, 2016.
- 62 "Japan Completes Transfer of ¥1 billion to South Korean 'Comfort Women' Fund," *Japan Times*, September 1, 2016. Available at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/09/01/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-completes-transfer-%C2%A51-billion-south-korean-comfort-women-fund/#.V9tOoLV1U7A>, accessed September 16, 2016.
- 63 "Ex-Wartime 'Comfort Women' Sue S. Korea over Deal with Japan," *Asahi Shimbun*, August 31, 2016. Available at <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201608310052.html>, accessed September 16, 2016.

Contesting the Nation(s): Haitian and Mohawk Women's Activism in Montreal

Amanda Ricci

This chapter comes out of a dissatisfaction with how we understand the so-called second wave feminist movement, that is, the resurgence of feminist activism in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, in Canada, and in particular in Montreal. While there have been a number of compelling studies on feminism in the province of Quebec, the historiography tends to focus on predominately white, French- and English-speaking women. Indeed, Montreal's women's history—for various reasons—nearly exclusively portrays the lives of working-, middle-, and upper-class French Catholic, English Protestant, and Ashkenazi Jewish women.¹ Building on recent scholarship, this chapter seeks to shed light on the multiplicity of women-centered narratives in Montreal, thus expanding the narrative regarding this period of Canadian women's history.² At the crossroads of the two Canadas, French and English, Quebec's metropolis was, and remains, a contested space. The city's fraught status stemmed not only from its dual national and multiethnic character but also its location on Indigenous territory. Indeed, white French-speakers—and not only Indigenous peoples—mobilized a colonized identity as part of a broader quest for self-determination during the period under investigation.³ Within this context, notions surrounding advantage and disadvantage, colonialism and anticolonialism were heavily debated. They were also integral to the upsurge in feminist activism in Montreal.

In order to uncover women activists' divergent priorities and goals informed by their respective social locations, this chapter conducts two case studies. The first focuses on the push for sovereignty as well as the campaign to eliminate article 12(1) (b) of the Indian Act in Kahnawake, a Mohawk community bordering Montreal. Under article 12(1)(b), women lost Indian "status" upon out-marriage. In turn, they forfeited the right to own property in the community and pass on membership to their children.⁴ The second case study outlines the multifaceted nature of Haitian Diaspora feminism where women's quest for autonomy was intrinsically linked to the transition of newcomers to the city as well as the transnational struggle to end the Duvalier dictatorship. The father-son regime in Haiti lasted from 1957 to 1986. Therefore, this chapter thinks seriously about the differences between marginalized women and how these differences influenced their civic engagement. It exposes the

entirely specific, territorial dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the material reality of racism in the lives of black peoples. By putting these case studies in the same analytical frame, however, the chapter also seeks to bring Indigenous and African Canadian historiographies in conversation with each other. The chapter therefore points to the interconnectedness of Canadian (and Québécois) settler colonialism and the country's neocolonial role in the Caribbean. Because women's location within these structures shaped their understandings of gender oppression, it argues that resistance to both phenomena on the local and international stages were major sparks behind the resurgence of feminist activism in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Although building upon previous studies of the "second-wave" feminist movement, this chapter goes beyond traditional analyses where only autonomous women's organizations have been studied.⁵ To this end, it maintains that feminist activism does not have to take place strictly within women-only spaces. More specifically, the chapter highlights Indigenous and Haitian women's leadership roles in mixed spaces dedicated to self-determination or anti-Duvalier struggles, as well as, when applicable, their parallel participation in settings where women predominated.⁶ The chapter also suggests that feminist activism existed in spaces where the label was not necessarily used. Historically, Indigenous and black women have been reluctant to adopt the term "feminism," both because of its association with white, middle-class women as well as Indigenous and Haitian women's own prioritizing of anticolonial and antiracist struggles.⁷ In other words, there were common organizational and ideological underpinnings behind Indigenous and Haitian women's activism. These commonalities transcended the limits of Montreal; that is, representatives from Indigenous and Haitian women's groups were highly active on multiple scales. They demanded equality within their communities and within the broader Canadian and Québécois contexts. They also took their campaigns to the global arena, participating in international conferences to end gender and racial oppression. Thus, Indigenous and Haitian women's activism mirrored the transnational nature of settler colonialism and neocolonialism. In Montreal, as we will see in the conclusion, the unequal social structures stemming from these two systems served to bring Indigenous and African Canadians together locally as well.

Resisting dispossession: Kahnawake Mohawk women's activism

On Montreal's south shore, the Kahnawake Mohawk community has a long-standing, worldwide reputation for assertiveness and militancy.⁸ During the 1960s and 1970s, however, political organizing took on new, revitalized forms where Indigenous youth, in particular, adopted the stance that the status quo was unacceptable.⁹ In this context, Kahnawake activism took on a paradoxical character, where, on one hand, it was localized and nationalistic, and on the other, it assumed Canadian and Québécois dimensions. For this reason, Kahnawake (also known as Caughnawaga) was simultaneously at the heart of a revitalized Haudenosaunee (also known as the Iroquois or Six Nations) nationalism, as well as the base for the Indians of Quebec Association (IQA) and the Quebec Native Women's Association (QNWA). Although

Indigenous leaders by and large encouraged equality through self-determination, Red Power ideology was by no means monolithic, and divisions existed between political groups. After Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's 1969 White Paper, which threatened to eliminate special status for First Nations peoples, Indigenous leaders across the country were especially on edge. Indeed, a significant rupture occurred between organizations such as the QNWA—the latter seeking the elimination of section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act where women lost Indian status upon out-marriage—and men (along with some women) who wanted to maintain the article within the legislation, fearing an erosion of an important basis for autonomy. The following section analyses the multifaceted nature of Mohawk women's activism in a manner inclusive of, but not limited to, the campaign to amend the Indian Act.

In Kahnawake, women were very willing to enter the broader political discussion on behalf of their people. In this era of rising French-speaking nationalism, white Francophone radicals laid claim to colonized status within the Canadian federation. This discourse opened up a space for Indigenous peoples, however narrow, to advance their own agendas. In 1965, for example, Kahn-Tineta Horn, a former member of the National Indian Council, the precursor to the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), who would later become a prominent, if controversial, Red Power figure,¹⁰ refuted the notion that French-Canadians were a colonized people at the public hearings on the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. She instead named them "the first invading race." "This would be more appropriate," Horn argued, "and then the English could be the second invading race." By participating in the *Preliminary Hearings*, the Kahnawake resident advanced perspectives that were, in her words, "suppressed, suppressed in the history books, suppressed everywhere." Although she participated in the public debate, her viewpoints were neither Canadian nor Québécois. As she asserted, "I am not a citizen of Canada. I am a private citizen of the six nations Iroquois Confederacy." Thus, the Red Power leader advanced an Indigenous national narrative and history. Referring to the Confederacy, she reminded her audience that, "We still follow the treaties and we still follow our constitution of our nation, which was developed in the year 900 A.D., and we still follow a constitution which is one thousand years old and the United Nations follows that constitution because they adopted the principles of our constitution in the year 1950. Now, we are a separate sovereign nation."¹¹ For residents of Kahnawake then, the scale was land, and the territory Haudenosaunee, that is, the area between Quebec, Ontario, and New York State.¹²

In response to changes at the federal and provincial level, however, Kahnawake residents organized in a pan-Indigenous fashion, refuting the White Paper as well as spearheading the foundation of the Indians of Quebec Association (IQA) in 1965 when, to quote *Our Land, Our People, Our Future*, "the province's native population became increasingly aware of the need to form a common front to handle negotiations with the provincial government."¹³ With the rise of a more assertive, territorial-based Francophone nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, the provincial government aimed to increase its presence within Indigenous communities. In the words of Martin Papillon, "Quebec and Aboriginal nationalisms rapidly collided in this context."¹⁴ Speaking to its understanding of indigeneity, the Indians of Quebec Association (which likely had

women members) argued that Indigenous peoples held special rights because they were the "original inhabitants" of the land, predating "any claim by the French and the English." "The Indian and Inuit People," as President Andrew Delisle reminded readers, "have never surrendered, ceded, or relinquished their lands—and never will."¹⁵ Based in Kahnawake, the IQA exemplified the community's leadership role in pan-Indigenous organizing. Residents of Kahnawake also travelled across the province to defend Indigenous peoples from Euro-Canadian encroachments. For example, Horn traveled to New York to seek funds to assist a Sept-Îles community. After the Royal Canadian Mountain Police (RCMP) and provincial game wardens tried to stop the community's inhabitants from netting salmon, twenty-eight people were arrested upon their refusal to cease this way of life.¹⁶ In other words, Indigenous leaders were active on many fronts.

Still, Kahnawake women's activism mirrored their own understandings of nationhood. In December 1968, hundreds of people from the Mohawk communities of Akwesasne and Kahnawake blockaded the International Bridge at Cornwall, Ontario, in order to protest duties levied on items worth over five dollars. Like the 1929 debacle, when Kahnawake's Paul Diabo was arrested in Philadelphia as an illegal alien, the customs were an affront to the Haudenosaunee understanding, or refutation, of the Canada-US border. Diabo, an ironworker following the tradition of many of his counterparts who moved to the United States for employment, petitioned against his deportation on the grounds that he was Indigenous, and therefore exempt from immigration laws as guaranteed under article 3 of the Jay Treaty of 1794. The latter recognized the Iroquois Confederacy's existence as nations and guaranteed their peoples' right to travel freely and without levy between the two territories.¹⁷ In 1968 as well, women and teenagers—speaking to the integral role they played in Indigenous societies—obstructed the passage of goods and people on the bridge. In response to this action, the RCMP arrested forty-one people, including Horn and her brother. Although she was later acquitted, the 29-year-old woman was initially accused of concealing an "offensive weapon."¹⁸ During the trial coverage, the defendants' lawyer referenced the Jay Treaty. John Sponika argued that the case took place against a wide "historical background," thus raising some "serious issues which appear to transcend the immediate charges." Demonstrating the events' importance, Six Nations chiefs, clan mothers, family members, as well as representatives from Cree, Blackfeet, and Micmac nations were in attendance during the trial.¹⁹ Despite strong political views, however, Horn, a former fashion model, was frequently dubbed an "Indian Princess." Euro-Canadian media made other references to Horn as well, commenting on her "pretty, mini-skirted," "attractive," "curvaceous," and "beautiful" appearance.²⁰

Nevertheless, Horn managed to defy the dichotomous view of Indigenous women—princess or squaw—in order to enter the public debate in a manner that ran counter to settler colonial tropes or victimhood.²¹ In an interview with *MacLean's Magazine*, Horn asserted an oppositional identity, claiming that Mohawk women were superior to white women: "I'm sorry if this upsets some people . . . I just happen to be able to judge the women I meet in the world—in New York, on reserves, in television, magazines, businesses—and the women of my reserve, for example,

impress me as being mentally superior and physically as having fewer aches and pains and more energy. I just happen to believe that Indian women have a higher standard of intelligence than other women."²² The Haudenosaunee leader's motivations were context-specific, and coming out of a particular historical moment. As Horn stated in the same interview, "The only kind of integration we can accept is an integration that means freedom to live, breathe, move, develop our culture within the framework of the whole community. We can't accept integration if it means that all Indians become white, or all whites can become Indians."²³ Therefore, Horn put forth a discourse of group persistence where Indigenous peoples sought equality vis-à-vis non-Indigenous citizens. Rather than viewing these demands as part of a larger dynamic, however, the federal government turned a deaf ear to community leaders who wanted "to re-write the Indian Act as they see fit." Moreover, the government looked fearfully south where, as reported in *Akwesasne Notes*, "Some Ottawa politicians who see what Black Power has done in the US are worried." Pointing to both the strength of the Red Power movement in the 1960s and early 1970s, as well as Horn's personality, the same article reminded its readers that "if Ottawa doesn't accede, some fear a new crop of Indian militants might emerge that will make Kahn-Tineta Horn look like a Girl Scout."²⁴

In addition to the Red and Black Power movements, the mainstream feminist movement was also part of this period of heightened contestation. After years of lobbying by the Committee for Women's Equality, the federal government set up the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) in 1967 in order to assess the socioeconomic status of women across the country. In total, Indigenous women presented nine briefs, detailing the extent of the discrimination they faced.²⁵ Encouraged by the Fédération des femmes du Québec's (FFQ) Thérèse Casgrain, Kahnawake's Mary Two-Axe Earley, on the part of thirty other Mohawk women, submitted a brief to the RCSW in 1968. This action led to a crucial Commission recommendation in 1970 that the Indian Act be amended in its treatment of women.²⁶ Two-Axe Earley married an Irish-American in 1938 and moved to Brooklyn. Once her husband passed away, she attempted to return to her birthplace, but was blocked by the Indian Act's provisions.²⁷ The woman activist's own experiences, as well as those of her friends, led her to challenge the discriminatory legislation. Thus, the issue of legislative sexism was most important to those whose lives were directly affected by it.²⁸ Two-Axe Earley's decision to reach out to Euro-Canadian women through the RCSW also laid the groundwork for future collaborations between major feminist organizations. However, Indigenous women organized separately first, founding pan-Indigenous organizations such as the Native Women's Association of Canada and its provincial affiliates. Established in 1974, the Quebec Native Women's Association, for example, was formed as a result of the landmark First National Native Women's Conference, convened in Edmonton in 1971. Attendees came from every province and territory to discuss the possibility of founding a national Indigenous women's organization as well as questions surrounding poverty, education, housing, and self-government.²⁹ By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Indigenous women's organizing extended significantly beyond issues that could be construed as strictly women's or legal concerns.

Against a backdrop of grassroots organizing that encompassed a range of issues, Indigenous women turned to the Canadian state to rectify the Indian Act's discrepancies. In 1970, "as Indian and women's consciousness rapidly expanded," legal scholar Kathleen Jamieson explains, "Jeanette Lavell, from Wikwemikong, Ontario, decided to contest section 12(1)(b), on the grounds that it discriminated against women on the basis of race and sex and thus contravened the Canadian Bill of Rights." Six Nations' Yvonne Bédard followed Lavell shortly thereafter.³⁰ The two women were buoyed by the RCSW's 1970 report, which condemned article 12(1)(b) as discriminatory.³¹

Although the push to eliminate section 12(1)(b) was always conceived as a battle against the federal government and not in opposition to other Indigenous groups, the turn to legislative recourse on the part of some women still resulted in a political rupture between Red Power leaders. For Harold Cardinal, the prominent leader of the National Indian Brotherhood, if the Bill of Rights was to reign supreme over the Indian Act, "that decision would wipe out the Indian Act and remove whatever legal basis we had for our treaties." Retrospectively recounting the emotional fallout concerning issues of membership vis-à-vis intermarried women, Cardinal explained that "those injustices can be best rectified when the Indian Act is amended." "We freely admitted that such a step was still down the road a way," as he wrote nearly a decade later, "but insisted that we had to first make sure that we have an Indian Act that was strong enough to stand by itself without being overshadowed by other pieces of federal legislation. That was the focus we had to maintain, not whether or not women who married off the reserve should lose their status." Another concern expressed by male leaders concerned the question of property rights because Indigenous men (and women) were fearful that white men, through marriage, would be able to gain ownership or sell Indian land. Within this context, the National Indian Brotherhood, along with the provincial organizations that included the Indians of Quebec Association, decided to publicly oppose Lavell.³² In February 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada heard the Jeanette Lavell and Yvonne Bédard cases together. By a five to four decision, the Court ruled against the two non-status women.³³

Shortly afterward, Two Axe Earley and sixty other women from Kahnawake attended the UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, making their cause known to a global audience. The UN sponsored three World Conferences on Women during the Decade for Women. Held in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985), these unprecedented gatherings on gender justice brought together feminists from all over the world. While she was in Mexico, however, Two-Axe Earley received a phone call from her daughter informing her that she faced eviction from Kahnawake. She immediately used the conference to tell the world of her plight, provoking an enthusiastic and supportive response from nongovernmental delegates.³⁴

In fact, the UN-sponsored conference consisted of two types of meetings. The first, the International Women's Year Conference, was for official, governmental delegations. The second, the International Women's Year Tribune, was open to anyone. As reported in *Akwesasne Notes*, Indigenous women were either absent or tokenized at the first conference. Moreover, the theme of the gathering—Equality, Development, and Peace—was approached in an "extremely narrow" fashion with no discussion of important subjects such as racism, imperialism, and colonialism. In contrast, Indigenous

activists from across the Americas were highly active and visible at the Tribune. For example, the US-based activist Madonna Gilbert (Thunder Hawk), representing the International Indian Treaty Council and the American Indian Movement (AIM), shared the stage with attendees from the South African, Zimbabwean, Chicano, and Australian Aboriginal liberation movements. During this multinational conversation, all the women identified a common struggle for survival vis-à-vis European colonization. Since they knew very little about the Indigenous peoples of North and South America, as the Red Power newspaper reported, these conversations were highly informative for African and Asian women. Thus, the women in attendance “made contacts with people from all over the world which will help in the struggle for self-determination.” They also fostered ties with each other, especially Indigenous delegates from Canada, the United States, and Mexico.³⁵

In other words, Kahnawake Mohawk women spoke for themselves on the international stage. By doing so, they undermined the authority of the Canadian state by not only pushing an agenda that ran counter to the federal government’s position on non-status women but also making ties with other Indigenous and anticolonial activists. Moreover, Two Axe Earley and her fellow Indigenous delegates called into question, even if indirectly, the “global feminism” of white North Americans. As Madonna Thunder Hawk said, “We’re fighting as a people for survival.”³⁶ Born and raised on South Dakota reservations, Thunder Hawk became active in the late 1960s as an AIM founder and leader, participating in the 1969–71 occupation of Alcatraz Island and the 1973 siege at Wounded Knee. She then went on to cofound the Women of All Red Nations in 1978. This women’s group sought to address, among other issues, sterilization abuse, culturally appropriate education, and the forced adoption of Indigenous children.³⁷ Sources confirm the distinct differences among women in Mexico City. In the FFO’s *Bulletin*, Ghislaine Patry-Buisson, the president of the Fédération des femmes du Québec at the time, portrayed the dual tendencies present at the gathering, where women from the “Global North” prioritized access to abortion, equal pay for equal work, and state-funded day care, in contrast to their “Southern” and, in particular, Latin American counterparts who insisted on discussing literacy, agricultural work, and American imperialism.³⁸ The UN World Conference of Women, then, was a moment of encounter, where Indigenous women further inserted themselves in transnational, anticolonial social movements and white Canadians and Quebecers paused for a moment of self-reflection regarding their place in the global political economy, even if the gendered effects of settler colonialism were left under-examined. For Two-Axe Earley, her intervention in Mexico City provoked a national and international media storm. As a consequence, the eviction notice was eventually withdrawn, yet the issue of non-status remained unresolved.³⁹

Although Two-Axe Earley’s stance could be interpreted as gendered anticolonialism, some members of the community, both men and women, saw the campaign to eliminate article 12(1)(b) by overriding the Indian Act as a direct threat to Indigenous sovereignty. As former NIB president George Manuel wrote in his seminal book, *The Fourth World*, “We cannot accept a position where the only safeguards we have had can be struck down by a court that has no authority to put something better in its place.”⁴⁰ Yet the complexity of article 12(1)(b) and its consequences extended beyond legal issues to

encompass a dearth of resources in the face of a potentially rising population. During discussions on intermarriage, Kahn-Tineta Horn, for example, expressed concern over the availability of housing in the community in her opposition to amending the Indian Act. On this point, Eileen Marquis, the editor of *Kahnawake News* and Quebec's delegate to the First National Native Women's Conference, agreed with her.⁴¹ There was, to say the least, a wide range of opinions among Indigenous women. Some women's organizations, however, advocated for the self-determination of Indigenous peoples, yet within a framework where non-status women were explicitly included in the political project.⁴² The Association des Femmes Autochtones du Québec/Quebec Native Women's Association (QNWA), a multilingual organization established in 1974, was a case in point. As a branch of the Canadian Native Women's Association, the QNWA was active on all levels—local, regional, and provincial.⁴³ More specifically, the Quebec Native Women's Association lobbied the federal government to eliminate section 12(1)(b), as well as to tackle disparities relating to education, health, economic development, and social services. The QNWA submitted a range of briefs, from the out-adoption of Indigenous children to the lack of culturally competent health care professionals in communities across the province.⁴⁴ As part of its dedication to cultural continuity, moreover, the Quebec Native Women's Association stressed the need for community control over education.⁴⁵ According to Red Power leaders, all students needed a culturally appropriate education.⁴⁶ In other words, male- and female-dominated Indigenous organizations' goals closely resembled each other, despite significant divergences on the question of non-status women.

After a long battle, the federal government decided to eliminate article 12(1)(b) for an estimated 16,000 women and 40,000 of their descendants. After many years of frustration, Two-Axe Earley was the first woman to regain her Indian status.⁴⁷ The most impactful event arguably occurred at the international level, however, when Maliseet Sandra Lovelace from New Brunswick went to the United Nations, arguing that Section 12(1)(b) was in violation of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The latter "protects the rights of minority groups to enjoy their culture, practice their traditions, and use their language in community with others from their group." In 1981, the United Nations ruled against Canada and in favor of Lovelace, thereby forcing the federal government to change the Indian Act in 1985. In order to bring the legislation in line with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Ottawa enacted Bill C-31, or a Bill to Amend the Indian Act.⁴⁸ This bill reinstated in the federal government's registry those who had lost their status due to out-marriage; in addition, it left the decision up to the bands to enroll these new members on their own respective lists.⁴⁹ In Kahnawake, the incorporation of "C-31s" was read in terms of the broader discussion on group boundaries, diminishing land base, and limited resources. In the context of shortages of housing or space and of external threats to the community, there was a great deal of anxiety surrounding who should be welcomed back and at what cost. Some worried that new members might not behave appropriately and according to collective notions of survival.⁵⁰ For these reasons, the community consented to the Moratorium of Mixed Marriage in 1981 and the Mohawk Law on Membership in 1984. Reinstatement "was far from automatic," as anthropologist Audra Simpson explains, due to these preemptive measures, based, in large part, on blood quantum.

New members who descended from non-status women had to have at least 50 percent Mohawk blood to be welcomed back into the community.⁵¹ The painful divisions and emotional debates surrounding membership therefore continued into the 1980s.

In other words, since Indigenous peoples were denied the mechanisms to ensure their collective survival and well-being in the face of territorial dispossession and a distinct lack of resources, non-status women and their descendants did not gain full equality vis-à-vis their respective nations.⁵² At the federal level, moreover, Bill C-31 created a new provision in section 6(2) called “the second-generation cut-off rule” or the “half blood requirement.” As Pamela Palmater explains, “This new rule meant that, after two generations of out-marriage both men and women will lose status.” “While Canada is not the only state to have ever used blood quantum,” as the legal scholar argues, “It has the dishonor of being the last.”⁵³ Although the Native Women’s Association of Canada conducted extensive advocacy work in order to assist those who wished to apply for Indian status, the organization nevertheless maintained a critical perspective, arguing that the Indian Act “remains an oppressive piece of legislation and only further entrenches discrimination and, in fact, threatens our future generations.”⁵⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, gender conflicts were exacerbated once reinstated women and their children returned to the community.⁵⁵ The tensions resulting from discriminatory legislation may have even discouraged women from residing in the community.⁵⁶

Though clearly imperfect, the revisions constituted a victory for some First Nations women; it is possible that they may not have had the same success without the support of Euro-Canadian feminists who continued their support for non-status women even after the RCSW. For example, the FFQ’s president, Sheila Finestone, made a series of phone calls to successfully halt the forced eviction of a non-status woman from Pointe-Bleue in 1978.⁵⁷ When interviewed by Judy Rebick, however, Gail Stacey-Moore, from Kahnawake, underlined the importance of political links between women of diverse origins, but also the significant differences in life experiences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, rendering deep and genuine relationships difficult.⁵⁸ In sum, membership questions cannot be separated from issues surrounding territorial dispossession and resources. To this day, who can or cannot reside in Kahnawake remains an explosive issue, one inherently linked to community survival.

Haitian diaspora feminism in Montreal

According to sociologist Carolle Charles, three elements shaped Haitian women’s activism in the Diaspora: opposition to the Duvalier dictatorship (1957–86), antiracist struggles, and exposure to the ideas of North American feminists.⁵⁹ Similar to black women across North America, moreover, Haitian women remained active in mixed settings throughout the height of the resurgence of feminist activism. More specifically, Haitian-born women were involved in multiple political groups during this period, from male-dominated groups, Haitian women’s organizations, to multiracial women-only settings, such as the Congress of Black Women of Canada and the *Ligue des femmes du Québec*.⁶⁰ Although there were multiple Haitian women’s

groups in Montreal, in the interest of coherence and brevity, this section focuses on the activities and membership of one group active since the 1970s, *Nègès Vanyan* (Strong, Vibrant Women), sometimes referred to as the *Rassemblement des femmes haïtiennes* (RAFA). RAFA consisted predominately of women associated with the *Maison d'Haïti*, an organization founded in 1972 to help new arrivals adjust to Quebec society. Its mandate was twofold: its members responded to the socioeconomic marginality faced by the Haitian Montreal community at large; and they continued the struggle for the restoration of democracy in Haiti, even, or arguably especially, while exiled abroad.

Similar to their Indigenous counterparts, Haitian women put forth an anticolonial political project that transcended, but was also highly informed by, the Canadian and Québécois national contexts. Referred to as transmigrants, Haitian exiles, in the words of sociologists Nina Glick Shiller and Georges Fouron, "live simultaneously in two countries, participating in personal and political events in both the (Diaspora) and Haiti." Expatriates remained attached to their country of birth long after leaving, sending money to family members, maintaining regular contact with friends, and closely following the political situation of their home country. In the Haitian case, the latter has been particularly salient.⁶¹ "Transmigration," to quote Barbara Burton, "is also about the traveling of much-layered and highly charged ideals."⁶² Haiti's iconic place in world history as the site of an unprecedented and inspiring slave revolt in 1804 only contributed to this tendency, reinforcing the community's "long-distance nationalism."⁶³ For instance, Yolène Jumelle, *Maison d'Haïti* founder and future president of the Congress of Black Women, started her 1989 study of the Haitian family in 1804, and after a sweeping gendered analysis, ended the text in contemporary Montreal.⁶⁴ Like the family, however, the transnational nation contained its own set of gendered hierarchies where women faced a particular set of challenges adapting to life in Quebec.⁶⁵ For both these reasons, it is unsurprising that the Montreal Haitian feminist narrative started in Haiti.

Whether writing from the perspective of Haiti or the Diaspora, activists and scholars trace the beginnings of Haitian feminism to the *Ligue féminine d'action sociale* (LFAS), a middle- and upper-class women's group established during the final months of the 1915–34 US occupation of Haiti. Historian Grace Sanders provides an excellent analysis on the continuities between the *Ligue* and women's activism in Montreal, and virtually every publication authored by Diaspora women referenced the LFAS, paying homage to the organization.⁶⁶ Regardless of their personal ties to the *Ligue*—in fact, many Montrealers were related to its original members—Diaspora leaders acquired extensive political experience in the Caribbean.⁶⁷ For instance, Adeline Chancy, one of the founders of the *Maison d'Haïti* and the *Rassemblement des femmes haïtiennes*, had been a member of *Femme Patriote*, an anti-Duvalier group active in the early 1960s in Haiti. The organization's reason for being formed was reflected in its newsletter: "Struggling for the establishment of a democratic society, struggling for the betterment of the Haitian woman, these are the objectives of *Femme Patriote*. The two struggles are inseparable." The women's group was associated with *HAITI-DEMAIN*, a clandestine anti-regime movement that published a widely distributed French- and Creole-language newsletter.⁶⁸ Adeline Chancy and her husband Max had to flee Haiti in 1965 because of these and other Leftist anti-regime activities.⁶⁹ Once

they left Haiti, the migrants' previously acquired political baggage came with them into the new context. Building on their experience, they were able to put forth a critical analysis of both Haiti and Canada/Quebec. From there, their sphere of political activity only expanded.

The French-speaking Haitian middle class settled in Montreal at a time when its public sector was undergoing a massive expansion. Because French-speakers were needed to fulfill important public service jobs, Haitian migrants, women included, were hired in the educational and health care sectors with relative ease, even if they were at times hired below their qualifications. Whereas the average Haitian woman in the first wave of immigration had more years of schooling than her typical Quebec-born counterpart, from 1972 onward, new arrivals came with decreasing levels of formal education, making integration into Montreal society more difficult. From 1976 to 1980, 60 percent of women immigrants who came to the city had not completed primary school. The statistics were not much better for men, or only marginally so. For this reason, new arrivals, and women in particular, were segregated in the manufacturing, textile, and domestic service sectors. This second wave of immigration, moreover, was relatively feminized. Out of the 24,300 Haitians admitted to the province from 1968 to 1980, 12,700 were women.⁷⁰ In fact, women often started the process of "chain migration" to Quebec's metropolis by responding to the industrial "opportunities" available to them.⁷¹ The reality of low education levels and female-headed households aggravated the problems inherent in migration, such as ensuring an adequate family wage or establishing a safe home for one's children. The issues that the Haitian community faced, one could argue, were in fact women's issues, although at times they were not only of concern to women.

As a direct response to the sharp increase in Haitian immigrants, Max and Adeline Chancy, together with other political exiles, founded the *Maison d'Haïti* in 1972–73. The center quickly became a reference for the growing community, and was completely funded by donations until 1978. While the organization gained government funding in 1978, which provided salaries for two fulltime employees and paid for select programs, citizen participation remained the driving impetus behind its initiatives. Young, progressive students such as Yolène Jumelle and mature adults with a history of political engagement worked together in this cultural and political space, with, significantly, a predominately female clientele.⁷² The *Maison d'Haïti* was extremely active on a number of fronts, focusing on the adaption, as opposed to complete assimilation, of Haitian Montrealers. Its leadership sought to promote the maintenance of tradition among the collectivity's youth, while at the same time encouraging their integration into the broader society.⁷³ To this end, the organization played an advocacy role, attempting to bring governmental attention to the "miseducation" of young black Montrealers, irrespective of mother tongue and in conjunction with the Quebec Board of Black Educators.⁷⁴ Members also ran activities for youth, providing cultural reinforcement outside the home.⁷⁵ Middle-class Haitians therefore took on the responsibility of leadership, trying to assist their working-class counterparts, who were increasing in numbers.

Not only were women among the original founders of the *Maison d'Haïti*, but they also addressed issues disproportionately affecting women. Indeed, the day-to-day

issues faced by the community, without discounting the difficulty that Haitian men faced in Montreal, were highly gendered. Starting in 1973, the Maison d'Haïti put into place French-language classes to assist Creole-speaking newcomers. By 1978, the objective of these courses shifted focus once the organization decided to concentrate more extensively on combatting high illiteracy rates, particularly prevalent among women.⁷⁶ In one of many *Collectif Paroles* addressing the issue, Chancy argued that low education levels was a problem embedded as much in the sending as in the receiving society, and that the inability to read exacerbated the challenges relating to the adaption process. Poorly educated newcomers from the so-called Third World were segregated in low-paying "subaltern" occupations. Because they possessed a precarious legal status, Haitian workers were oftentimes unwilling to contest their poor treatment in the workplace, while their children, subjected to social, economic, and racial discrimination, were at risk for high dropout rates.⁷⁷ In short, the Maison d'Haïti provided a space, even if occupied by both sexes, where women could also tackle the gendered difficulties inherent in migration.

Though based in Montreal, Chancy and her colleagues took their activism to the international stage, submitting a brief to the 1975 World Congress for International Women's Year, held in Berlin. The document they submitted to the conference, entitled "Femmes Haïtiennes," quickly became a reference point, as a "pioneering study of the condition of women in Haiti in the context of the struggle for democracy."⁷⁸ Indeed, the World Congress for International Women's Year provided an ideal setting for activists to speak out against the Duvalier dictatorship. For example, Anita Blanchard, a self-identified "peasant woman," recounted her experiences in prison, recalling how Duvalier's oppressive paramilitary forces, the Tontons, came to her village in search of her brother, whom they accused of being a communist. When they were unable to find him, the Duvalier militia captured Blanchard, torturing the young woman in an attempt to get her to divulge the names of her sibling's companions. In Berlin the Haitian woman asked the international community to stand in solidarity with the people of Haiti, especially the men and women who chose to speak out against the regime. She drew particular attention to the case of Laurette Badette, who, like many others, was imprisoned without trial since 1971, the whereabouts of her children unknown.⁷⁹ By relying upon a global network, Haitian feminists based outside the country were able to foster international support for both democratic and women's rights. Badette's liberation from prison in 1977 was considered a major victory for the pro-democracy movement, especially, as "Femmes Haïtiennes" makes clear, for women in the Diaspora, who were heavily invested in this particular national project even while abroad.⁸⁰

In short, the fate of women and their families was intrinsically tied to that of their countries. "Femmes Haïtiennes" attributed Haiti's underdevelopment to the country's neocolonial relationship with many industrialized countries, including Canada—one of the foreign powers propping up the Duvalier regime by supplying aid in exchange for important concessions to businesses.⁸¹ The Caribbean country, as RAFA argued, was in a state of economic catastrophe due both to Duvalier's policies and the imperialistic penetration of its economy. Not only was the country mired in dependency and underdevelopment, but the fundamentally unequal relationship

it had with First World countries led to the exodus of thousands to those countries where both political exiles and economic migrants faced exploitation, the fear of deportation, and racism on a daily basis.⁸² The former were often, not coincidentally, young, dynamic, and in the prime of their lives, as Canada (and the United States) sought to attract highly educated immigrants once racial quotas were eliminated in the 1960s.⁸³ This sort of analysis was part of a broader community discussion on the connections between neocolonialism, starting with missionaries and the businesses that followed them, political repression, emigration, and racial oppression in North America.⁸⁴

“Femmes Haïtiennes” also stressed the gendered nature of migration, because, for many women, “their position as primary financial supporters of the family forced them to migrate in order to fill this role,” as well as the integral role women played in the Haitian economy. For example, multinational corporations, including those run by Canadians, took advantage of Haiti’s large reserve of cheap labor and lax labor regulations. Approximately 70 percent of Haitian workers in multinational industries were women, who were making baseballs or television and radio parts for citizens of the First World. The presence of these companies reinforced Haiti’s economic dependence and further delayed development, which, in part, led to emigration.⁸⁵ In this case, patterns of immigration to Canada resembled that of their American counterparts, where, as historian Donna Gabaccia argues, migrant trajectories in the 1960s “mirrored the geography and history of American empire-building in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia.” “It was no accident,” Gabaccia suggests, “that the immigrants Americans deemed least desirable by century’s end came from those places in the world where investors, merchants, missionaries, and diplomats worked to expand American influence.”⁸⁶ Euro-Canadian colonialism can therefore be understood as extending past the country’s borders, going beyond, as well as complicating, the Indigenous-settler dynamic. Indeed, Paul Dejean, community leader and priest, referred to recent arrivals as the new “wretched of the earth” in his well-regarded book on the Montreal Diaspora, an explicit reference to anticolonial thinker Franz Fanon.⁸⁷

Yet, French Quebecers also combined feminism and anticolonialism. At the World Congress for International Women’s Year, the *Ligue des femmes du Québec* “used our presence in Berlin to publicize our national problem,” making sure they had the Quebec flag in view during the opening ceremony.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the extent to which French-speaking black women’s concerns were accounted for by predominately white organizations begs consideration. In the lead-up to the International Women’s Year conference, Chancy attended a meeting with the other Berlin-bound groups from Quebec. The *Ligue des femmes*, the *Parti Communiste du Québec*, the *Conseil Québécois de la Paix*, the *Fédération des femmes du Québec*, among others, met to discuss the international gathering as well as women’s issues more generally. The meeting minutes indicate the primary themes raised by each organization. For the Haitian group, “the immigrant woman and discrimination” were the most important concerns, highlighting the extent to which these issues were overlooked in most white feminist settings.⁸⁹ These questions carried over into other settings. The FFQ, for instance, paid scant attention to racial stereotypes in school textbooks, focusing solely on gender imbalances in the curriculum.⁹⁰ In contrast, for the Congress of

Black Women (to which many Haitian women belonged), the Maison d'Haiti, and the Quebec Native Women's Association, the elimination of racist and assimilationist thinking in the school system was a major part of their programs.⁹¹ In other words, African Canadian and Indigenous women's intersectional feminist discourses were in fact more all-encompassing, with deeper analyses of social inequalities that included, but were not limited to, sexism.

Although exposed to the discourses of the white Francophone women's movement, and in select cases to members of French-Quebecer-dominated organizations, women from the Maison d'Haiti appeared to work primarily within the Haitian community or within the broader black community—their two activist “homes.”⁹² In addition to the Berlin 1975 event, RAFA members attended numerous Congress of Black Women conferences from 1972 onward, participating in and shaping the activities of the pan-Canadian, mostly English-speaking women's group.⁹³ The autonomous women's organization stressed “the centrality of race and racism” in the lives of black women, as well as the reality of “triple-oppression.”

The Congress also explicitly used a global lens to consider the oppression of black Canadians.⁹⁴ Haitian Montrealers were key contributors to the internationalist ethos of the organization. At the 1977 conference, Constance Beaufile spoke of women's problems in the Caribbean country, as well as the “need for strengthening the bonds of sisterhood between black Canadian women and the women of Haiti.” Chancy similarly brought attention to the specificities of life under Duvalier and the importance of transnational political engagement, authoring two resolutions in 1977. In the first resolution, the Fourth National Congress of Black Women expressed its “solidarity with the struggles of people of Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa for their liberation against colonialism and from apartheid and demands that the Canadian government stop any form of aid to the racist government of Ian Smith and B. J. Vorster,” the presidents of Rhodesia and South Africa, respectively. And in the second resolution, the Congress vowed to support “the struggle of Haitian people for democracy,” demanding that “the democratic rights of political prisoners be respected; namely those of Laurette Badette and Denise Prophète, imprisoned since 1971 and 1973 without judgment,” and aimed to push “the Canadian government to take a stand against the violations of human rights in Haiti.” Similarly, Chancy insisted that the Canadian government intervene back home on behalf of the incarcerated husbands of two Haitian women living in Montreal, Françoise Ulysee and Lisette Romulus.⁹⁵ The presence of Haitian women, then, broadened the reach of the organization, extending its focuses beyond Canada and the English-speaking Caribbean.

Françoise Ulysee was in the audience at the Fourth National Congress of Black Women and gave a speech addressing both Haitian and Diasporic issues. “To be a woman in North America is already difficult,” she began, “but to be a woman and a Black immigrant can become a nightmare.” “As a woman [one] must face the social and economic discriminations that exist against the women in our society.” As she explained, “What is more, [women] undergo a cultural shock resulting from the migration process.” Part of their adjustment included living with “constant fear,” as foreign-born women were kept unaware of their rights, “haunted by the specter of expulsion,” making them “vulnerable to the exploitation of employers.” Their problems

were compounded by dependency on male partners, since, according to Ulysse, “The fear of being abandoned and obliged to take care of herself and her children alone constitutes one of her worst nightmares.” For these women migrants, the situation was even more complicated as “their husbands are often refugees or political exiles.” On that point, Ulysse’s husband, Edner, had been detained for thirteen years in the Caribbean country, and as his wife reminded the audience, “It is the same for thousands of others.” As Ulysse stated in her concluding remarks, “Only a new political thought will permit the Black woman to assume, in a positive way the differences of culture and way of living in North America.”⁹⁶ Thus, Haitian women’s positionality was informed by socioeconomic conditions in both Haiti and Quebec; and their activisms were shaped by the ideas and actions of autonomous groups located in Haitian, Québécois, and, in the case of the Congress of Black Women, Canadian national contexts.

Although the pan-Canadian organization was bilingual from its inception, French-speaking black women in Montreal still founded their own chapter in 1987, as differing linguistic preferences among activists interrupted the flow of meetings. According to Amanthe Bathalien, president of the organization, Haitian women found communication with other black and immigrant communities difficult. Even after the Francophone chapter’s establishment, the group had warm and friendly relations with Filipina women, for example; yet, because the latter favored English, the relationship was short-lived. In response to the language barrier, French-speaking black women from various ethnic and class backgrounds came together under their own section, the Ville-Marie chapter of the Congress of Black Women. While mostly Haitian and middle-class, that women’s group still managed to attract people from manufacturing sectors as well as other countries. It was a multigenerational space, where women brought their children.⁹⁷

Yet, reflecting its bilingual nature, French-speaking women were not marginalized in the broader Congress. Despite her preference for French, Maison d’Haïti founder Jumelle, a colleague of Bathalien and the person who first introduced her to the pan-Canadian organization, assumed the presidency of the Congress in 1988–89 and was vice-president from 1984 to 1988. Arriving in Canada in 1971 at the age of twenty-seven, Jumelle, the daughter of a murdered Haitian politician, was at the epicenter of the first wave of highly political Haitian emigrants.⁹⁸

It was also in the 1980s that the Duvalier dictatorship began to crumble. Once democracy was restored to Haiti in 1986, many members of the Montreal community returned to their country of birth to contribute to the rebuilding process. With this rebirth came a resurgence of women’s activism. According to sociologist Carolle Charles, “The presence and rate of participation of diaspora women in most of the new Haiti-based groups was striking.”⁹⁹ Nearly two-thirds of the founding members of new groups like Solidarité Famn Ayisyen (SOFA, Haitian Women’s Solidarity) and Kay Fanm (Women’s House) had returned from exile outside Haiti.¹⁰⁰ Pointing to activist continuities across borders, Adeline Chancy, a leader in literacy work in Montreal, assumed the position of director of the National Bureau for Participation and Popular Education in Port-au-Prince. There, Chancy remained committed to women-only political spaces, running a workshop on the rights and role of women in Haitian development. For Chancy, overcoming gendered norms in the formal

and informal education of women was integral to Haiti's future, as "the democratic struggle demands the massive participation of women. Yet sexist ideology remains one of the obstacles to this participation."¹⁰¹ Significantly, Chancy's workshop was partially funded by the Conseil du Statut de la femme du Québec, a well-funded government body, and the Canadian International Development Agency.¹⁰² It was also part of a larger push on the part of Haitian feminists to assert the integral role women played in national development and reconstruction.¹⁰³ Haitian Diaspora and antiracist feminism continues to this day, as women in Montreal maintain close ties with their counterparts in the Caribbean.

Conclusion

Much research remains to be done on the rapport between Indigenous and African Canadians. For the moment, however, we can note points of contact between leaders in these communities, which seemed to extend beyond the linkages fostered by the Quebec Native Women's Association and the Fédération des femmes du Québec. There were significant ideological differences between the two organizations, ones, however, that did not impede them from working together. Still, this rapport was not necessarily an instance of coalition-building, that is, fostering relations between women of similar social locations, but, rather, a question of strategy. In contrast, Indigenous and African Canadian women—over and above the actual alliances between the two groups—recognized each other's shared structural position. For instance, Évelyn O'Bomsawin, a QNWA president in the late 1970s, recalled leaving Odanak, an Abenaki community in the Center-of-Quebec region, to work in a factory near Montreal during the Second World War. Speaking about her experiences with discrimination, she mentioned the support networks to which she belonged alongside other racialized women, especially black women.¹⁰⁴ Feelings of solidarity went both ways. The Congress of Black Women of Canada, for example, reached out to Indigenous women during a 1974 gathering in Montreal.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, *UHURU*, a Montreal-based, English-speaking Black Power newspaper published in the late 1960s and early 1970s, criticized the unjust treatment of Japanese, Indigenous peoples, and black Canadians, thus highlighting potential pathways toward solidarity across community lines.¹⁰⁶

This mutual recognition translated into transnational social movements. Indeed, the Quebec Native Women's Association and the Congress of Black Women participated in the Hemispheric Seminar on Women Under Apartheid, held in Montreal in May 1980.¹⁰⁷ More than 200 delegates and observers descended on Quebec's metropolis in order to attend this conference organized by the Ligue des femmes du Québec. Attendees discussed the effects of South African apartheid on women, the role of women in the liberation struggle, and possible avenues of assistance that included a call for economic sanctions and divestment campaigns. Importantly, the Women Under Apartheid seminar was sponsored by the Secretariat of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women.¹⁰⁸ For the Congress of Black Women, this conference was part of a long-standing commitment to antiapartheid activism, as evidenced by the 1977 meeting. In 1983, Montreal hosted the Third Conference on Latin American Women.

Haitian women's groups were well represented among the participants who denounced human rights violations and neocolonialism in the region. There, delegates suggested that Indigenous leaders from across the continent meet each other, demonstrating the inclusion, at least rhetorically, of Indigenous people in African Canadian, and in this case, specifically Haitian, antiracism.¹⁰⁹ Montreal, thus, was also a site of globally minded activism where Indigenous and African Canadians occasionally reached out to each other. By analyzing Canada's ongoing role in empire-building at home and globally, we can gain a deeper knowledge of power relations within the women's movement and beyond. The history of feminism in Quebec and Canada is only beginning to be rewritten to include the voices, experiences, and political practices of Indigenous women and women of color.

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If Not Feminism, Then What? Women's Work in the African National Congress in Exile

Rachel Sandwell

In 1979, South African militant Thenjiwe Mtintso told American journalist June Goodwin that “the problem is that black women are not yet politicized enough to realize that we are in a state of war. Unfortunately, the men have developed, but the women have been left behind.”¹ The late 1970s were a fraught time in South Africa, one marked by uprisings by black students, and violent repression by the government, including killings and mass arrests of protestors. By the late 1970s, organizations across the townships of South Africa were coming together to prepare what would be the United Democratic Front, the mass movement of the 1980s that played a significant role in bringing about the end of apartheid, alongside the work of the African National Congress (ANC) in exile and the international solidarity movement. Women and men would both play a role in these movements, but it was not until later in the 1980s that there would be a South African women's movement.²

Mtintso was not alone in arguing that black women's chief need was to gain political understanding of the oppression apartheid visited on them. Shortly after speaking to Goodwin, Mtintso fled the country and joined the ANC in exile. This group had been working from outside South Africa since 1960 to overthrow the apartheid state by military and political means. Mtintso's stated position on women in 1979 closely echoed that of the ANC's even before she joined them officially. Since 1943 the ANC had maintained that women and men were equal, with equal rights and responsibilities in the movement.³ But beyond the insistence upon equality, the organization took no further steps to insist upon the transformation of women's experience. In the words of ANC stalwart Ruth Mompati,

I say to women who talk to me about sexual discrimination “I understand your concern, fight it, but never in isolation from the many other issues we face in this country ... I undoubtedly favor more women's participation in the affairs of the

country. Women must take the initiative in demanding this right, and this is precisely what is happening. For me liberation is, however, total liberation. Women's liberation is only one aspect of that totality."⁴

The ANC emphasized national liberation, in which women would be included, rather than the emancipation of women. Women's duty was to become "politicized" in this national liberation war.

Women's participation in South Africa's liberation movements has been a topic of conversation for almost as long as these movements have existed, among both activists and scholars. Most discussion has centered on two main questions: whether the liberation movements relegated women's concerns to a secondary issue (or, what the place of women's liberation should be inside national liberation struggles); and whether women's participation in these movements has been essentially conservative (upholding women's domesticity and traditional gender roles, rather than challenging them).⁵ Neither of these debates is unique to the South African context, although they play out in singular ways in South Africa.

Despite this rich tradition of debate, however, only a small amount of scholarship has addressed women's roles inside the ANC in exile, largely because sources are few and have only recently become available. Sociologist Shireen Hassim has provided the most in-depth investigation of this topic, in the context of her larger study on women's autonomous organizing inside South African politics. Hassim's works focus on the institutional structures available to women inside the ANC. While acknowledging the ANC's ambitions of women's equality and the many important women inside the organization, Hassim argues that ultimately the ANC in its exile period did not enable transformative gender relations. Her findings in this regard echo the testimony of many of her interview subjects, who complained of sexism, harassment, and the maintenance of constrictive traditional roles for women in exile.⁶

In this piece, without disputing Hassim's main conclusions about the limited nature of gender transformation in exile, I use a historical approach to offer new insights into gender politics in exile. I analyze two sites of "gender conversation," formal group discussions over women's rights and roles in the ANC and initial plans for an ANC child care programme, to argue that exile both intentionally and inadvertently provided spaces for new conceptualizations of women's rights, including for challenges to ANC orthodoxy. The focus will be on the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the population of women in exile increased dramatically and women's work within the ANC gradually transformed. In recovering these events, I argue that the initial, essentially conservative, plan for women's work yielded unintended results, encouraging women's self-conscious criticism of prevailing gender norms. Women developed analyses "as women" and demanded concrete rights. At the same time, few women rejected wholesale the ANC's emphasis on national liberation as a necessary condition for women's emancipation. Women within the ANC criticized "feminism," as they saw it as inadequate for solving the problems they faced as black women in South Africa. Their objections illuminate the ways feminism from the United States and United Kingdom travelled, and how it was perceived in different (trans) national sites.

Women and exile

Exile

By the late 1970s, the ANC had been based outside South Africa for almost twenty years. The first exiles had left South Africa in 1960 expecting to be back in a matter of years, but as time dragged on, hopes of speedy victory over the apartheid regime waned. Through the long years of exile, the ANC leadership established diplomatic posts and military camps in multiple nations. Many of these ANC posts were little more than small offices with a few, largely volunteer staff, situated in a few Western countries, Eastern Bloc countries, especially the USSR and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and sympathetic African countries.⁷ Their first military camps, established in Tanzania in the 1960s, were small and shared with other African liberation movements of the period, although ANC members also went for military training in North Africa, Ethiopia, and the USSR.⁸ In these early years, membership was probably only around 5,000.⁹ Their goal was to overthrow the apartheid state, by military and diplomatic means, but realization of this goal seemed distant.

In the 1970s, however, the fortunes of the ANC began to shift. Inside South Africa, the Soweto uprisings of 1976 saw students enter the streets in protest against apartheid education. The brutal response of the government, which killed hundreds and detained thousands of youth, many mere children, drew condemnation from around the world. International support for the ANC increased. At the same time, the instability inside the country drove thousands of young people into exile. Small ANC underground cells had continued through the quiet 1960s. In the 1970s these cells inspired youth and helped provide them with exit routes out of the country. The exile ANC membership swelled, growing by the end of the 1980s to an estimated 20,000.¹⁰ Many of these members were young, some in their teens, others in their early twenties. And many were women—or at least, many more than in previous years.

Many of these new exiles had little support beyond what the ANC could offer them. The ANC was still scattered across multiple nations, making it even more difficult to organize these new members. Headquarters were by this time in Lusaka (Zambia), but after the liberation of Mozambique and Angola in the mid-1970s, the ANC built up a substantial presence in these countries. By the end of the 1970s, most of the ANC's soldiers (members of its military wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, or MK) were based in Angola, mostly in isolated jungle camps. The majority of the ANC's civilian population was sent to Tanzania, where President Julius Nyerere had long been a supporter of the ANC's work. This geographic dispersion, at a time when communication and transit networks were weak and challenged by multiple wars, underscores the transnational character of life in the ANC.

Tanzania became the main site of the ANC's service provision, where the organization began to offer health care, education, and basic welfare support like food and shelter to its members. President Nyerere had granted a tract of land to the ANC, near the small inland town of Morogoro, about 200 kilometers from Dar es

Salaam. There in Morogoro, the ANC concentrated their population, building their school, SOMAFCO (Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College), eventually a hospital, and child care facilities. By the end of the 1980s, the ANC community in Morogoro would number around 5,000 and would include students and workers on the ANC's experimental farm and leather and woodworking factories, as well as many ANC members with health problems or young children.¹¹

Women

Women had occupied an ambiguous position in exile's early years. Black women had been at the forefront of political mobilization inside South Africa in the 1950s before the ANC left the country, organizing and participating in mass demonstrations.¹² Certain women rose to high positions inside the ANC in this period, and their seniority continued in exile. Once abroad, these women worked in ANC offices and also represented the ANC, travelling as international diplomats to conferences and meetings through Africa, Europe, and the Soviet Union. Most of these women were relatively experienced political activists when they left South Africa. However, despite these prominent figures, numbers of women in the organization as a whole remained small.

Through the 1970s and into the 1980s, this changed. As young women activists like Mtintso joined the ANC, they transformed the gender balance of the organization and women's roles within it. These younger women joining the ANC came from a very different political and social background than the earlier generation. Many of the older women in the ANC had their origins either in the trade union movement or in the educated African elite. Many were nurses or school teachers. These elite women in particular embodied a tradition of respectability.¹³ By contrast, the new recruits were steeped in a much different aesthetic and political tradition, one influenced by global youth culture of the 1960s and 1970s. Most were adherents of the Black Consciousness (BC) school of thought and practice. BC developed in South Africa in the early 1970s, taking some inspiration from the Black Power movement in the United States. It emphasized black self-determination and the overcoming of internalized racism and self-hatred inculcated by the apartheid system.¹⁴ Historian Daniel Magaziner notes that young activist BC women displayed a transgressive aesthetic, one that reflected their more confrontational political style.¹⁵ Former BC activist Deborah Matshoba reflected on women's style in the era, saying, "The hair had to be a natty fro, you know . . . We had to walk rough. Not like ladies."¹⁶ They also wore high heels, Matshoba recalled. "We wore them so high, with hot pants! Bare midriffs and walked with stilettos—we called them 'dangerous weapons.' We called them dangerous weapon because if we get attacked by these cops then we are armed."¹⁷ This assertive style and personal presentation was a world apart from that of the older women in the ANC.

It is difficult to get a sense of the gender expectations these young women would have brought with them or how these would have intersected with the expectations of the senior exiled men and women. Although historical works on BC and the youth rebellions of the 1970s and 1980s abound, very little of it addresses gender directly. What emerges from accounts of the period is a lived contradiction: women in these

movements were confident and largely equal participants, protesting alongside men, and running programs alongside them. At the same time, women still struggled for respect within these groups.

BC groups emphasized consciousness-raising and political teach-ins, but they also developed community health and education projects.¹⁸ In many of these projects, women took a leading role. High-profile activist Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, for example, was the director of a rural community clinic.¹⁹ Some sources have suggested that by the 1970s and 1980s women occupied a more public role in political activities and were less constrained to the private sphere.²⁰ Speaking in interviews before entering exile, Mtintso described BC founder Steve Biko's attitudes toward women, saying, "To Steve, a woman was a woman ... There was no discrimination."²¹ Mtintso also admitted that, outside of political discussions, women tended to be relegated to more traditional roles, such as cooking and cleaning. Ramphele presented a similar image of gender relations in this period in her published memoirs. Women in the BC movement could, she recalled, come to be accepted as "honorary men"—but they had to struggle for intellectual space and to be allowed to partake in typically male activities like sharing meat.²² Matshoba describes similar recollections but states the case more aggressively, noting, "We [women] asserted ourselves in the organization. We started smoking like them ... We spoke loud!"²³ As was the case in ANC politics at this time, women's liberation took a back seat to the more immediate question of black liberation. Nevertheless, the young women of the BC movement were perhaps more prepared to resist male authority than the older generation of women in exile. At the same time, there is no evidence that their position on women's issues differed significantly from what Mtintso had expressed—that women's struggle was to achieve full political consciousness as oppressed people, not as oppressed women.

Political upgrading

Before leaving South Africa, activist Thenjiwe Mtintso had demanded that women should be educated about politics. The official position of the ANC was essentially in accord with this idea—women, the ANC maintained, needed political education to understand their place in a revolutionary war. The body charged with providing this education was the "Women's Section." According to ANC policy, all women in exile automatically became members of their local "Women's Section," which was in turn responsible to the Women's Secretariat in Lusaka. One Women's Section member expressed their mandate well when she described their "major task of stepping up the political clarity of women so as to render them fit to function efficiently in all aspects of our struggle."²⁴ The focus was not on politicizing women with regard to their experience "as women," but rather as citizens of an eventual free South Africa. As feminist critics have observed, this approach, common across other African socialist contexts, ascribed any problems women might face to ideological challenges: women's position in society was seen as the result of their own "backward attitudes," and "mysticism," not as the result of material inequality. Consequently, proponents of this analysis believed that women's social position could be corrected by education (of women).²⁵ The ANC used

the term "upgrading," meaning that women would be "upgraded" to have the same level of political consciousness as their male counterparts.

In this section, I will demonstrate that despite their emphasis on transforming women, rather than transforming society, women's structures inside exile in fact created unexpected space for critiques of the ANC's gender politics. Paradoxically, the ANC's own insistence on women's equality enabled these critiques, underscoring the radical potential of exile as a space. With the influx of women in the 1970s, new Women's Sections were established in all regions where ANC members were present. From the start, the discussion groups, lectures, and seminars intended to provide this education became instead sites where women contested and resisted aspects of the ANC line. Although few records survive from these Women's Sections, those documents that remain reveal women members asserting different interpretations of policies, or calling for change. There was no wholesale rejection of the ANC's analysis on women—indeed, most agreed on the necessity of "upgrading"—but the varied responses of the multiple Women's Sections suggest that their meetings became sites for discussing women's issues in ways unintended by the initial ANC plan.

East Africa (Dar es Salaam and Morogoro, Tanzania)

The experience of the Women's Section of East Africa, which was the largest and most active ANC Women's Section, elucidates both the initial intentions behind political education and its limitations in practice. In April 1978, approximately fifty women met in Dar es Salaam to reactivate the ANC Women's Section there.²⁶ This Section had become defunct in 1973, as there were not enough women actively attending meetings.²⁷ The reactivation, and the large number of women at the meeting, pointed to the revitalization that the post-Soweto arrivals were providing to the ANC in Dar es Salaam. But older women, most of whom were long established in exile, dominated the meeting. Kate Molale was unanimously elected chair of the meeting, while Mittah Seperepere gave the main address. Both women had entered exile in the 1960s after extensive involvement in ANC work in the 1950s.

These older women seem to have shaped the agenda of the meeting. Seperepere's address detailed the history of women's contribution to the national liberation movement inside South Africa in the 1950s and can be read as an effort at educating the young women of the Soweto generation about previous women's struggles. The minutes record, "We want the young women to understand what the struggle means. The young women must be serious and not play around. The older women will not tolerate their frivolous attitude."²⁸ These comments point to already-existing generational tensions between the older women and new activists at the same time as they assert the purpose of the Women's Sections: to educate young women about "the struggle," namely, the struggle to liberate South Africa. As we shall see, however, the new arrivals would challenge the older generation's focus on struggle history in the years to come.

As more young people were sent to the ANC's growing community in Morogoro, the Women's Section there grew correspondingly. The East Africa Women's Section corresponded frequently with the Lusaka Secretariat and undertook a great deal of

administrative work, including child care. In this busy context, political education, the Women's Section's original mandate, became less central to their work. In a 1981 Report to Lusaka, the East Africa Women's Section advised the Secretariat that they had suspended political education meetings. The job of the Political Education Coordinator, established in 1979, had been frustrating and challenging, as the time-consuming work was "not appreciated by many." In the face of lack of interest in political education, the Section had concluded thus:

The majority of our women were more practically than intellectually oriented. Although we are involved in the fight against the fascist regime, we do not necessarily have to approach it from the same angle. Our women here have many daily problems in exile. These often lead to confusion and frustration. This is partly why they cannot be forced into political discussion when they are faced with concrete problems like food and clothing for themselves and their children.²⁹

Given the everyday challenges women were dealing with, political education felt abstract and "intellectual." The leadership in the Women's Section had come to conclude that they were being unrealistic. The Report explained, "We have to be practical and make them feel involved and not lectured to."³⁰ In this framing, women's quotidian needs took precedence over political discussion. Inclusion of the women in a meaningful way was more important than "upgrading" them to a party line. This report may also signal resistance if read between the lines—the young women had other concerns and didn't appreciate being lectured about history.

The Section's decision to discontinue political education, however, doesn't seem to have reflected a lack of interest in analyzing women's roles in the ANC. Instead the same report also complained about the absence of women's representatives in other governing bodies in East Africa, namely, those to do with the SOMAFCO school. The report argued:

In all of these it is not enough to have women members. Women members can be part of any organ as cadres of the movement. There are times when it is necessary to have a woman for the express purpose of representing women's interests, and the Women's Section should decide who should represent them.³¹

Here, distinct from the ANC line of upgrading women to appropriate political consciousness, the Women's Section insisted on the importance of women's representation *as women*. It is possible to speculate that the heavy involvement of these women with child care and other issues particular to women was contributing to a growing analysis of women's specific needs within a self-described revolutionary society.

The Section's work was intended to "upgrade" women to enable them to better understand their place as (gender-neutral) comrades in the ANC's struggle. In practice though, these ANC women dismissed the political education as unnecessary. They instead used the Section to make demands on leadership for greater rights and representation as women, not as gender-neutral beings.

Luanda, Angola

On the other side of the continent, ANC women based in Luanda, Angola, lived in very different circumstances. Angola was unstable throughout the period of the ANC's presence there. Its capital, Luanda, was battered by ongoing civil war and scarred by the recent pillaging of the departing Portuguese colonists. It is perhaps the words of novelist and ANC member Mongane Wally Serote that best capture the fractured and unstable city of this period, and the consequent uncertainty of ANC life there. Serote writes:

There was great unease. The city, made noise. Its steep and stony road, torn and dirty. The old battered cars and trucks, roaring up steeps and down slopes on the right side of the road, are very dangerous ... The people, who walked the streets, looked after themselves. They walked in the middle of the road, and ran onto what resembled pavements, at the sound of the coming cars and trucks.³²

Unlike the large and busy Women's Section in East Africa, women in the ANC's Luanda office were few in number, isolated, and in fairly immediate physical danger. Records from the ANC's Angolan offices are very sparse, reflecting the challenges of record-keeping in a context of war.³³

Nevertheless, women there formed a Women's Section. Fragments of their correspondence survive and testify to their political endeavors. In 1980 the Women's Section in Luanda sent a series of monthly reports to the head office, the Women's Secretariat in Lusaka. These Reports reveal a strict adherence to the party line—to the extent of rejecting a suggestion from the Secretariat that women could be disadvantaged within the ANC. Describing their meeting's response to a discussion document sent by the Secretariat, Jessica Monare, the Secretary there, wrote:

There's a part [in the discussion document] that says Women especially in MK [the ANC military] are not given enough scope after finishing their course, and most women are typists. We totally disagree with that because—(a) there is nobody so far from MK has gone for typing course then come back and worked as a typist; (b) After finishing our course, we work under different departments, we are having the example of the ordinance department where most people in that department are women ... So we rule out this question. We are given enough scope.³⁴

The Secretariat, it seems, was trying to incite discussion around women's disempowerment within the movement, but these women in Luanda rejected the assertion. Although small in number—the Section was composed of only ten women, they reported—they were confident in their work. They insisted that women in ANC, including the military, played multiple roles.

In further reports Monare went on to detail, with optimism, the excellent morale of the group and the progress they had made in discussing the ANC's "Strategy and Tactics" document, a key piece describing the ANC's military philosophy and

approach. They planned to next study the Freedom Charter, a key document defining ANC policy.³⁵ This study, Monare explained, was having concrete benefits:

Our comrades are more self-confident and bold. They do not only participate fully during our political discussions, but also contribute in general meetings and discussions. We now raise our views and opinions on political issues freely. This is one of the greatest achievements of our Unit.³⁶

The Luanda Women's Section unit felt itself to be making progress in increasing women's efficacy as ANC members. At the same time, they rejected any imputation of women's disadvantage.

Highlighting the challenges of long-distance administration, however, the Luanda Women's Section admitted that they were unable to contact women in the ANC's other Angolan camps and had no idea what work they were doing. In April of 1980, Monare advised the Secretariat, "We have not heard anything from the comrades in the camps about how they have organized themselves. There is absolutely no contact whatsoever."³⁷ This total communication failure underscores the discontinuities of the ANC exile experience and reminds us that there was no one representative "woman's experience" across these diverse and poorly connected sites.

Hassim points out, "Ironically and unwittingly—and despite the resistance of the military leadership—MK provided an important arena within the movement in which to raise issues of gender equality."³⁸ These women in Luanda felt MK was a space where they could participate in debate and move forward. Less occupied with material tasks than the women in East Africa, the ANC women in Luanda were more easily able to carve out time for more abstract political discussions, and in them, found relevance.

Maputo, Mozambique

Contrary to the besieged environment in Angola, ANC life in the Mozambican capital was for some years quite stable. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, ANC operated openly and with the support of the new revolutionary government. Conditions for women in Mozambique were particularly good. As historian Kathleen Sheldon has detailed, in the early years of the FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique) government, in liberated Mozambique, the new state made providing child care for working women a cornerstone of their social programs, to encourage women to enter the workforce.³⁹ Children and child care in general were important focal points for government intervention, efforts championed by the Organization of Mozambican Women and by Josina Machel, the wife of the first president, Samora Machel, and an important political figure in her own right.⁴⁰ Women's rights were placed at the forefront of the Mozambican revolution.

Perhaps inspired by this context, young ANC women based in Maputo provided the most vocal challenges to the ANC's policies and practice around women. Unfortunately, no records seem to survive from the Maputo Women's Section. However, records of the active Youth Section are available, and it is clear that many of its members were women.⁴¹

Writing in preparation for a Youth Conference to be held in Morogoro in 1982, the ANC Youth of Maputo raised women's rights as a specific issue. Their Report began by commending the ANC's gender politics, observing (inaccurately), "Since the formation of our Movement 70 years ago, the ANC's policy has always been that of treating and regarding all members as equals."⁴² The report celebrated the many historic accomplishments of women in the ANC, making the usual invocation of heroic women. The authors, apparently women, expressed great gratitude to the ANC:

We want to put on the record our heartfelt gratitude to the Movement and the comrades who have made it possible for us to see our selves [*sic*] as part of a new unfolding world in which we have as much say and role to play as our male comrades.⁴³

The Report then turned to a complaint—specifically about the failure to deploy women in MK, and about male chauvinism. Pointing out that only one woman had apparently been sent into active combat in South Africa, the Report stated, "It is important for us, as it is for the people who select cadres for the front to know why so many women are not fit to work on the ground at home."⁴⁴ In addition, they questioned the tendency to focus solely on women's education. Although women were told they were equal, not enough was done, they argued, to ensure women's equal participation:

Although females are being told they need to participate, very little if any at all is being done to see to it that these young women who yesterday knew their roles to be that of subservient and docile beings, who understood their main function in life to be only bearers and rear children, that their whole life should revolve around the bedroom, kitchen, and nursery, are taught now that they have a role to play and that the ANC is fighting to have all this corrected.⁴⁵

Again, these women agreed with providing education to new recruits, whom they pose as "domestic" and insufficiently politicized. But the Report leveled specific accusations against men in the organization. Citing male chauvinism as a problem still "alive" among men, they suggested "that yet another effort should be made to liberate our males of male chauvinism." Rather than settling for education to emancipate women from their misconceptions, they made a novel suggestion: "We therefore stress that male education is as necessary as the education for the female in our ranks."⁴⁶ This is a rare moment in the ANC archives, where women explicitly condemned male behavior.

This small sampling of moments from a variety of ANC sites in the early 1980s suggests the ANC policy of "political upgrading" played out in a variety of unexpected ways. Women in some sites affirmed all aspects of ANC policy, while women elsewhere raised complaints and questions and freely modified policy in practice on the ground. The picture that emerges is of a negotiated process—negotiated between the Secretariat and multiple regions—that put into practice an abstract plan to uplift women. Analyzing the same period, Hassim has concluded, "Not surprisingly, given MK's extremely hierarchical and authoritarian structures, it was also within MK that the limits of the rhetoric of equality were experienced."⁴⁷ I want to highlight the importance of what she labels "rhetoric." The rhetoric of women's equality, evoked

so explicitly by women in these Sections, could be used to demand change publicly from ANC leadership. What these women strove for, then, was the full granting of the promised right of equality.

Welfare work

As the ANC welcomed more members, many without external support of any kind, the organization found itself taking on a much greater role of welfare provision. Women, critics have pointed out, played a disproportionately large role in this welfare work. In particular, members of the large and active Women's Section of East Africa involved themselves in the management of the growing ANC community around them. Scholars have highlighted women activists' own complaints about this, noting that women felt relegated to caretaker roles. Hassim notes that "young militants later criticized the 'apolitical, social work' role of the Women's Section."⁴⁸ Here, I will explore the founding ideas and practices of one ANC program, their effort at comprehensive day care provision for their members, which commenced in the late 1970s in Morogoro. The effort to launch a full "national" day care program to provide care to all "ANC children," I will argue, was more radical than critics have noted, and as such, points to a more progressive consciousness within the organization than has otherwise been acknowledged. The point is not to congratulate the ANC, but to argue that, in focusing on the flawed outcomes of this day care program, scholars have underestimated the radical hopes that inspired it.

Beginning in the late 1970s, senior ANC women based in Tanzania began to write to the ANC leadership about the growing number of pregnancies in the area. It's unclear precisely how many children there were in the region—the best estimate that the Women's Section was able to provide in 1978 was a total of thirty-five infants born to ANC mothers. Yet they indicated that this number was incomplete and that there were many more.⁴⁹ While these numbers were not huge, they did provide a logistical problem. New recruits to the ANC who arrived in Dar es Salaam were accommodated initially in ANC-owned or rented safe houses in the city. One new exile, Baleka Mbete-Kgositsile, described her experience of living in one of these houses in a suburb of Dar in relatively positive terms. It was, she noted, "good to be in a house in which we lived like a large family of about twenty people. There were separate bedrooms for females and males and everybody took turns to cook breakfast and dinner, guided by a roster, and to clean shared spaces."⁵⁰ These houses seem to have varied in size and degree of crowding, as some former exiles' accounts describe them as less comfortable or salubrious.⁵¹ Certainly the early letters from the Women's Section there to the Secretariat emphasized overcrowding as a serious problem, particularly in early 1979. It is also reasonable to assume they were intended for relatively mobile and self-sufficient people—women who were pregnant or had newborn infants had a different set of needs.

Quite quickly, however, the senior women concerned with this problem began to make demands beyond merely additional housing or supervision for the mothers and their babies. Women and men in the area, both within the Women's Section and in the

ANC unit responsible for managing the community at Morogoro, began to propose a more ambitious child care plan.

Two women played a particularly prominent role in this visioning, Florence Mophosho and Baleka Mbete-Kgositsile. The two represented the two different generations of ANC membership coexisting in the region. Mophosho had been active in the ANC and unions in the 1950s, and had entered exile early in the 1960s, whereas Mbete-Kgositsile had been a part of the BC movement before entering exile in the early 1970s. Despite these differences, both women had one thing in common: both had left children behind in South Africa. Early in her exile career Mophosho wrote frequently to her friends about her efforts to get her daughter to join her. Unsuccessful, she conceded in 1968 that she and her daughter would have to wait and be "reunited in a free South Africa."⁵² But Mophosho died before seeing that free South Africa or her daughter. The choice to leave her children was similarly painful for Mbete-Kgositsile. In a moving article in the ANC publication *Voice of Women*, she described the sadness of choosing to leave her own children behind in order to fight for a better future, as she saw it, for all South African children. She wrote, "I hope my son will grow up to understand that it was because of love that I cannot begin to explain that he had to be motherless at that tender age."⁵³

It's hard to know what role their grief played in inspiring their efforts at developing a child care program. What is clear, however, is the senior women's voluntary childlessness in exile ceased to be the norm by the late 1970s. Rather than leaving children behind, women either brought them or had children in exile. Indeed, Mbete-Kgositsile would go on to have three children while outside South Africa.⁵⁴ As more and younger women joined the organization, fewer of them saw the need to postpone forming families. In part, these women and their partners may have recognized that their stay outside the country would be much longer than originally planned. They would not be returning to South Africa with an AK-47 to "liberate the country the Castro way," as a popular song had it. Instead, they would spend years waiting and building lives in exile.

Mophosho began to write letters to the Secretariat, and to potential funders, including UNESCO and a Canadian women's organization, detailing the ANC's ambitious plans for a child care program for all members. In 1978, she wrote to UNESCO's Dar es Salaam office, requesting funds and explaining that the ANC needed "a properly run childcare center, to enable young mothers to pursue their careers, and give the innocent children more security by improving their conditions as the future generation of our country."⁵⁵

In this request, Mophosho emphasized both the need to provide care for the children and also the desire to liberate mothers from their children in order for them to be able to return to full-time work for the ANC. The liberation of women from the duties of motherhood formed an ideological backbone for the early arguments about providing large-scale ANC child care, as an undated report on the child care center indicates:

Many of the mothers are themselves young, who have hardly had time to develop their own identities and role in the struggle. Even those who are married and have

planned the child do not necessarily want to forego further work for the movement, even if only for a few years. This is a neglect of woman power and there is a simple solution that would be of benefit to all.⁵⁶

The simple solution this report and others proposed was residential child care: Women from all over the African ANC regions would be sent to a child care center to give birth. After delivery, the mothers were to reside in the center with their baby. After this period of time, initially proposed to be one year, the women would leave their children behind at the center and return to work for the ANC, usually in another ANC region such as Lusaka or Angola. Once the children were old enough, they would enter the ANC primary school and stay in the school accommodations. These facilities were considered to be particularly useful for women based in the Angolan military camps; these "MK mothers" needed a residential facility for their children, as they could not bring the children with them to the camps. In her funding request to UNESCO, Mophosho highlighted that even ANC women working full-time in Lusaka should be able to leave their babies in the child care center, so that they would be able to "contribute [to ANC work] with no hindrance, convinced their children are under good care."⁵⁷ Additionally, women based in Morogoro, including students at the ANC school SOMAFCO, would leave their babies in the center and go back to reside in the school hostels after the requisite length of time. Planners at the time noted that the centers in some respects would resemble orphanages, because the children would stay there for so long under the supervision of full-time child care professionals.⁵⁸ One salutary report from early in 1979 suggested that these centers would "completely free [the ANC's] female cadres for the fulfillment of their revolutionary role."⁵⁹ Women would be emancipated from motherhood to do their jobs.

The provision of what was effectively "national" child care was a fusion between Soviet-influenced old guard thought and community-minded Black Consciousness within the ANC. Some of the preparatory documents for the child care centers refer directly to practices in the Soviet Union and also criticize the failures of the "capitalist West," pointing particularly to the isolation of mothers in Western society. Spencer Hodgson, a South African Communist Party member who worked closely with the ANC and played a large role in the administration of Morogoro, wrote the following on preparing child care centers:

In the West crèches are comparatively unknown. The rich employ a child minder or nanny. Working class women must also resign themselves to several years of confinement, often in high-rise buildings. The loss of women's earnings coupled with her lonely existence and often the chauvinistic attitude of her partner result in unhappiness and often social problems, such as child battery, shoplifting, etc.⁶⁰

Records also refer to a visit by "East German comrades," who provided their reflections on their own experience with child care programs, and early documents note that the Soviet Women's Committee in Moscow would contribute funds to the centers.⁶¹ At the same time, the theory and practice of Black Consciousness (BC) also may have

informed the day cares, given the involvement of the younger generation of women in planning them. Recent scholarship has emphasized the practical orientation of much BC work, highlighting activists' eager participation in popular education and the establishment of social services, including health care centers.⁶² Crèches, or day cares, were extensions of such community practice. Thus, child care planning was a unique site of sharing of ideas and putting theory into practice within the ANC. The program was certainly a radical break from prior practice in South Africa, where child care in the townships was provided by an inconsistent patchwork of small crèches in private homes and charity organizations like the YWCA.⁶³

Although the ANC day cares were beset by problems over the years, and never functioned as these early ambitious planners hoped, their later practical weaknesses should not erase from the historical record the transformative hopes that inspired them.⁶⁴ What then accounts for the comparative historiographical silence around these day cares? One possible explanation may be the very attitudes of the young women leaving South Africa, who quickly registered their resistance to working in the centers.

Recruitment of cadres to staff the centers provided an immediate, and telling, problem. Mbete-Kgositsile, who played a more immediate daily role in child care provision than did Mophosho, soon began to write to the Secretariat complaining of the difficulty of finding staff for the child care centers. In November 1978, as the first plans for the centers were being formulated, Mbete-Kgositsile wrote to the Secretariat in Lusaka expressing her worries about staffing:

During its discussion of the question of looking after ANC children, our committee found that the training of people for this task remains a problem. What makes a problem of it is that it seems there are no people, in our communities, who are willing to go and train in this field ... [W]e have to find a way to resolve this.⁶⁵

She even went so far as to suggest that the ANC try to recruit directly "at home" in South Africa for people who would enter exile specifically to train as child care providers, writing:

Unless the situation changes, maybe the movement should recruit directly from home for this purpose. Thousands of young people are unemployed and miserable at home. Some of them could be useful in this respect.⁶⁶

Writing again to the Secretariat a week later, Mbete-Kgositsile raised the same issue, and indicated that the Women's Section had been debating the question at length. Again she suggested the idea of recruiting directly for young people (she did not specify women) to become child care workers. This time she particularly noted that this field was "looked down on":

In further discussion of the reluctance, among our cadres, to study childcare, we felt that this is indicative of some of the sicknesses we have to fight against. Because of background our cadres tend to look down upon certain fields in which the movement needs manpower and flock to areas in which there are already many qualified cadres.⁶⁷

What are we to make of this reluctance of the young recruits to take up a career in child care? In part, this can be attributed to the bias in favor of military work among the new ANC members. These young people were fleeing a situation of increasing tension and outright violence inside South Africa. Many of them would have been detained without trial and tortured; many would have seen their friends and family killed or disappeared into the apartheid prison system, which allowed for lengthy incommunicado detention without trial. They left the country inspired by the ANC's Radio Freedom broadcasts, which began with the iconic sound of machine gun fire.⁶⁸ They expected to train and quickly return home to fight. This expectation led to much disappointment and frustration among the new recruits as their time in exile lagged on and prospects for active struggle dimmed. It also made them less inclined to pursue more prosaic careers like child care.

An additional interpretation is possible. Many of these young people would have seen their own mothers in domestic service to white people. It was very common in South Africa that black women would leave their own children and families to work as nannies and housekeepers for white families. This servitude, and the power structures it represented, was something youthful activists, frustrated with their parents' apparent compliance, rejected.⁶⁹ This attitude could be what Mbete-Kgositsile meant when she wrote, "Because of background our cadres tend to look down upon certain fields in which the movement needs manpower."

By extension, this same attitude could also explain some of the scholarly disregard toward this ANC program. Focusing on the fact that women disproportionately worked in this program, existing scholarship has underplayed the ambitions behind it. Hassim, who has written most extensively on women in exile, does note that women's work in welfare programs was critical for the movement's larger success. She also notes that "welfarist work pushed them towards progressive positions: in favor of sex education, condom provision, legalizing abortion."⁷⁰ While correct, this analysis neglects the fact that the welfare provision itself was radical.

Scholars writing on women's participation in South Africa's antiapartheid struggle both inside the country and in exile have pointed to the ways in which the figure of the woman as mother has frequently taken center stage. Daniel Magaziner observes that "the association of black femininity with motherhood and not with women's liberation is a long-standing trope in South African nationalism."⁷¹ Much work on black women's political participation emphasizes the symbolic elevation of "motherhood" in their activism.⁷² These works vary in the extent to which they take such a role as being a betrayal of feminism as such, or an indication that black women failed to find real emancipation. More recently, South African feminist scholars have taken issue with such analyses. Nomboniso Gasa, for example, has compellingly argued that defending the home, in the context of an apartheid state that sought actively to destroy it, was a radical act for black women activists.⁷³

It is clear that a language of "motherhood" pervaded the ANC's publicity around women. In one of the earliest interviews given after returning to South Africa, Mtintso, who had occupied positions of significant power in MK in exile, spoke to a journalist about the problems of the ongoing perception of women as merely mothers. Reflecting on the place of feminism in the movement, Mtintso told her interviewer: "There is

still talk of 'we as mothers and wives.' To me this is indicative of a problem."⁷⁴ At the symbolic level, the ANC maintained a maternal focus. But in practice, women and men within the movement in exile made concrete and dramatic efforts to limit the effect maternity would have on women's work. In developing day cares to "liberate" women from the demands of their own children, the ANC aimed to facilitate women's participation in the movement not "as mothers" but as cadres, soldiers, and workers. The scholarly focus on a "maternal" emphasis in ANC propaganda has perhaps obscured the radical "de-mothering" efforts enacted in practice across exile locations.

Conclusions

I have pointed to ways to reread women's experience in exile. I argue that the ANC enabled, at times against its own intentions, critical thought and transformative action. Women within the organization took on more active roles, rose within its hierarchies, challenged its practices, and sought to shape a new social order, in which women would be equal in the home and workplace. That these policies did not always work in practice should not be reason to forget that efforts were made. The fact of these efforts tells us a great deal—it reminds us that the ANC had an initial vision of gender transformation, however far the party mainstream has moved from that vision today.⁷⁵

Yet women in the ANC continued to object to what they saw as Western feminism. Understanding feminism as merely solidarity among women, the youthful had argued forcefully against such unity. In 1979 Mtintso told June Goodwin,

Just because we are women doesn't mean we have anything in common. Your child and my child are poles apart. I worry because my son may become a *tsotsi* [gangster]. My child is being influenced by the environment in Soweto. Do you have these problems? You don't. So what are we going to talk about? Recipes? A la king? I don't have enough money to make a la king. I'm going home tonight and cook pap and *vleis* [corn meal and meat]. Your maid is going to be cooking for you, so what are we going to talk about? Nothing.⁷⁶

In the years after exile, Mtintso was more reflective. To journalist Devan Pillay, in 1992, Mtintso complained of failures inside the ANC with regard to feminism, noting, "There is no understanding that there are various trends in feminism ... There is still no uniform understanding ... of feminism and the content of women's liberation."⁷⁷ But Mtintso hadn't abandoned her critiques of any easy assumption of solidarity among women.

In her long and compelling speech on the opening of the hearings of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997, Mtintso, then head of the Gender Commission, made the case for the specificity of women's suffering under apartheid. She articulated the particular suffering black women faced, describing her own experiences of being harassed and tortured by the police. Mtintso also spoke of the violence white women had enacted under apartheid. She said:

I don't see the signs of women who I thought would have been here today. Because there is this tendency to project women as this [*sic*] passive observers, helpless under these violations ... Today as other violators and perpetrators loudly refuse to come forward, there is a deafening silence on the part of those women who were perpetrators. We know there were women perpetrators. We know the sisterhood that we are talking about today. Some of it is artificial. As we go to women's conferences and hug and kiss, we are kissing with some of the perpetrators. It is okay that we kiss, but it is not okay that they do not come forward and talk about the role they played.⁷⁸

Mtintso here echoes her younger self's assertion of the uneven experience of women in the conditions of racist domination that constituted apartheid South Africa. In such a context, Mtintso argued, solidarity among women could never, on its own, be enough.

The space of exile failed women in many ways. However, the discontinuous world of exile, in which the ANC spoke a language of women's equality that faltered many times in practice, gave women a space to articulate demands. Told to "gain political consciousness," women could use the movement's support of their politicization to make demands on the movement, including radical demands for child care.

Notes

- 1 June Goodwin, *Cry Amandla!: South African Women and the Question of Power* (New York: Africana pub., 1984), 22.
- 2 There is still much work to be done on the organizations constituted by women of color and their allies in the mid- to late-1980s. See, for example, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, "What Price for Freedom? Testimony and the Natal Organization of Women," *Agenda* 13, 34 (1997): 62–70.
- 3 Frene Ginwala, "Women and the African National Congress 1912–1943," *Agenda* 8 (1990).
- 4 Quoted in Charles Villa-Vicencio, *The Spirit of Freedom: South African Leaders on Religion and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 207.
- 5 Key texts include Jo Beall, Shireen Hassim, and Alison Todes, "'A Bit on the Side?': Gender Struggles in the Politics of Transformation in South Africa," *Feminist Review*, 33 (1989): 30–56, doi:10.2307/1395213; Nomboniso Gasa, *Women in South African History: They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007); Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London: Onyx Press, 1982); Julia Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1993).
- 6 Jacklyn Cock, *Women and War in South Africa* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993); Thandi Modise and Robyn Curnow, "Thandi Modise, a Woman in War," *Agenda* 43 (2000): 36–40; Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa*.
- 7 For overviews of exile, see Stephen Ellis, *External Mission* (South Africa: Jonathan Ball, 2012); Arianna Lissoni, "The South African Liberation Movements in Exile, c.1945–1970," PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of

- London, 2008; Hugh Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years: The ANC in Exile in Zambia, 1963 to 1994* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2013).
- 8 See Christian A. Williams, "Living in Exile: Daily Life and International Relations at SWAPO's Kongwa Camp," *Kronos* 37, 1 (2011): 60–86, for discussion of the ANC's first shared camp.
 - 9 Steve Davis, "The ANC: From Freedom Radio to Radio Freedom," in *Southern African Liberation Struggles: New Local, Regional and Global Perspectives*, ed. Hilary Sapire and Chris Saunders (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2013), 117–41.
 - 10 Carla Tsampiras, "Sex in a Time of Exile: An Examination of Sexual Health, AIDS, Gender, and the ANC, 1980–1990," *South African Historical Journal* 64, 3 (2012): 637–63. Note that numbers are necessarily inexact. Both the ANC and the apartheid government had good reason to exaggerate numbers in exile during the 1960s to 1980s.
 - 11 See Sean Morrow, Brown Maaba, and Loyiso Pulumani, *Education in Exile: SOMAFCO, the African National Congress School in Tanzania, 1978–1992* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 2005).
 - 12 See Pamela E. Brooks, *Boycotts, Buses, And Passes: Black Women's Resistance in the U.S. South and South Africa* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008); Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*.
 - 13 Natasha Erlank, "Gender and Masculinity in South African Nationalist Discourse, 1912–1950," *Feminist Studies* 29, 3 (2003): 653–71; David Goodhew, *Respectability and Resistance: A History of Sophiatown* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).
 - 14 For a history of the movement, see Daniel R. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968–1977*, New African Histories (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010). Essays on the philosophy of the movement include notably N. Barney Pitso, *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko & Black Consciousness* (Cape Town; London; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: D. Philip; Zed Books, 1991).
 - 15 Daniel R. Magaziner, "Pieces of a (Wo)man: Feminism, Gender and Adulthood in Black Consciousness, 1968–1977," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, 1 (2011): 55. See also L. Hadfield, "Challenging The Status Quo: Young Women and Men in Black Consciousness Community Work, 1970s South Africa," *The Journal of African History* 54, 2 (2013): 247–67.
 - 16 Amanda Alexander and Andile Mngxitama, "Interview with Deborah Matshoba," in *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, ed. Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander, and Nigel C. Gibson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 275.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, 280.
 - 18 Julian Brown, "An Experiment in Confrontation: The Pro-Frelimo Rallies of 1974," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, 1 (2012): 55–71; Leslie Hadfield, "Biko, Black Consciousness, and 'the System' eZinyoka: Oral History and Black Consciousness in Practice in a Rural Ciskei Village," *South African Historical Journal* 62, 1 (2010): 78–99.
 - 19 See Mamphela Ramphele, *Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1996); Mamphela Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organization," in *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko & Black Consciousness*, ed. N. Barney Pitso (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991).
 - 20 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998, Vol. 4, Ch. 10.
 - 21 Goodwin, *Cry Amandla!*, 21.
 - 22 Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organization."

- 23 Alexander and Mngxitama, "Interview with Deborah Matshoba," 280.
- 24 "Women's Section Report—Reorganization of Women's Section in April 1978," September 2, 1978, MCH01- Box 4 Folder 1, Mayibuye Archive, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa (hereafter, Mayibuye).
- 25 Beall, Hassim, and Todes, "A Bit on the Side?," 48.
- 26 "Meeting of ANC Women in East Africa on Occasion of Revival of ANC Women's Section East Africa," April 23, 1978, MCH01-Box 4, Folder 1, Mayibuye.
- 27 General Report of the ANC Women's Secretariat, For the Period 1972/1973, MCH01-Box 1, Folder 3, Mayibuye.
- 28 "Meeting of ANC Women in East Africa on Occasion of Revival of ANC Women's Section East Africa," April 23, 1978, MCH01-Box 4, Folder 1, Mayibuye.
- 29 "ANC SA Women's Section East Africa Report," July 1981, MCH01, Box 6, Folder 4, Mayibuye.
- 30 "ANC SA Women's Section East Africa Report," July 1981, MCH01, Box 6, Folder 4, Mayibuye.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Mongane Wally Serote, *Scatter the Ashes and Go* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Ravan, 2002), 130. Grammar as in original.
- 33 Given that much ANC activity in Angola was military, it is possible that more records exist but have not been released by the ANC.
- 34 "Report from Luanda," March 1980, MCH01-5.1, Mayibuye. (The discussion document is not preserved, unfortunately.)
- 35 "Report from Luanda," April 1980, MCH01-5.1, Mayibuye.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa*, 97.
- 39 Kathleen Sheldon, "Crèches, Titias, and Mothers: Working Women and Childcare in Mozambique," in *African Encounters with Domesticity*, ed. Karen Tranberg Hansen (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 296. See also Nadja Manghezi, *The Maputo Connection: The ANC in the World of Frelimo* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana, 2009).
- 40 Sheldon, "Crèches, Titias, and Mothers: Working Women and Childcare in Mozambique," 297.
- 41 "Youth Sections" were intended to function just like "Women's Sections," only with youth rather than women as their constituency—to guide, politicize, and mobilize. In practice, of course, someone could be both a woman and a youth.
- 42 "Paper by ANC Delegation from Mozambique: Young Women in the Liberation Struggle," October 1982, MCH01-8.2, Mayibuye.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa*, 99.
- 48 Ibid., 88.
- 49 See Arianna Lissoni and Maria Suriano, "Married to the ANC: Tanzanian Women's Entanglement in South Africa's Liberation Struggle," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, 1 (2014): 129–50.
- 50 Baleka Mbete, "In for the Long Haul," in *Prodigal Daughters: Stories of South African Women in Exile*, ed. Lauretta Ngcobo (Durban: University of Kwazulu Natal Press,

- 2012), 78. Several exiles' accounts describe arriving in Tanzania and provide a sense of the type of accommodation available. See accounts in Ngcobo, *Prodigal Daughters*. Also Mwezi Twala's critical account provides rich detail of the relative chaos of ANC accommodation at this time. See M. Twala with E. Benard, *Mbokodo: Inside MK: Mwezi Twala: A Soldier's Story* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1994).
- 51 See also L. Schuster, *A Burning Hunger: One Family's Struggle Against Apartheid* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006).
- 52 Florence Mophosho to Ray Simons, June 13, 1968 and August 21, 1968, Jack and Ray Simons Collection, BC1081-P34.3, University of Cape Town Historical Manuscripts, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 53 *Voice of Women*, 1978, issue 3, p. 6.
- 54 Mbete, "In for the Long Haul."
- 55 "Florence Mophosho to UNESCO, Dar es Salaam," December 5, 1978, MCH01-4.1, Mayibuye.
- 56 "Project—the Programme for Child and Baby Care," No date, MCH01-2.4, Mayibuye.
- 57 "Letter from F Mophosho to Women's Section East Africa," November 2, 1978, MCH02-4.1, Mayibuye.
- 58 "Spencer Hodgson's Report on Crèche," 1979, MCH01-4.1, Mayibuye.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 "Minutes of Meeting of Committee of Women's Section, EA, Held at Morogoro," January 1979, MCH01-4.1, Mayibuye.
- 62 Leslie Hadfield, "Challenging The Status Quo"; Hadfield, "Biko, Black Consciousness, and 'the System' eZinyoka."
- 63 Work on this topic is very limited. Community activist Ellen Kuzwayo provides discussion in her memoir. Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (London: Women's Press, 1985).
- 64 For a more complete discussion of the ways these day cares played out in practice, see Rachel Sandwell, "'Love I Cannot Begin to Explain': The Politics of Reproduction in the ANC in Exile, 1976–1990," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41, 1 (2015): 63–81.
- 65 "Letter from B. Kgositsile, Regional Secretary, Women's Section, E Africa, to Secretariat, Lusaka," November 7, 1978, MCH01-4.1, Mayibuye.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 "Letter from B. Kgositsile, Regional Secretary, Women's Section, E Africa, to Secretariat, Lusaka," November 14, 1978, MCH01-4.1, Mayibuye.
- 68 Davis, "The ANC: From Freedom Radio to Radio Freedom."
- 69 See discussion in Jacklyn Cock, *Maids & Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980).
- 70 Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa*, 92.
- 71 Magaziner, "Pieces of a (Wo)man," 57.
- 72 Ibid.; Anne McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family," *Feminist Review* 44, 1 (1993): 61–80; Kim Miller, "Moms with Guns: Women's Political Agency in Anti-Apartheid Visual Culture," *African Arts* 42, 2 (2009): 68–75; Julia Wells, "Maternal Politics in Organizing Black South African Women: The Historical Lesson," in *Sisterhood, Feminisms, and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), 251–63; Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*; Cherryl Walker, "Conceptualizing Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21, 3 (1995): 417–37.

- 73 Gasa, *Women in South African History*.
- 74 Devan Pillay, "Women in MK," *Work in Progress*, 80 (1992): 18.
- 75 For a detailed critique of current ANC thought on women, see Shireen Hassim, "Democracy's Shadows: Sexual Rights and Gender Politics in the Rape Trial of Jacob Zuma," *African Studies* 68, 1 (2009): 57–77; and Pumla Dineo Gqola, "'The Difficult Task of Normalizing Freedom': Spectacular Masculinities, Ndebele's Literary/Cultural Commentary and Post-Apartheid Life," *English in Africa* 36, 1 (2009): 61–76.
- 76 Goodwin, *Cry Amandla!*, 124.
- 77 Pillay, "Women in MK," 19.
- 78 Thenjiwe Mtintso, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Human Rights Violation – Women's Hearing* (Johannesburg, 1997), 10–11, <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/women/masote.htm>.

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