

# Voices

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## Introduction: Tidemarks and Legacies of Feminist Anthropology

*Hanna Garth (UCLA) and Jennifer R. Wies (Eastern Kentucky University)*

This collection traces the legacies of feminist anthropology and the women who broke ground, made waves, and pushed the boundaries of the discipline of anthropology. In the 1970s, feminist leaders within the anthropology of gender rose up, etching tidemarks into the frameworks of the discipline. Feminist anthropologists established an anthropology of women, bringing women and gender to the forefront of ethnographic inquiry (cf. Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). These early works and those that followed exposed the ways in which women's lives had been systematically devalued and under-theorized within the anthropology literature. Feminist theorists revealed the ways in which women sought and gained power, innovated solutions to oppressive patriarchal societies, and played a significant role in economic production and household-centered labor. Soon the construct of gender was delineated from sex, and the concept of universal "womanhood" was destabilized. The field was swept from an empirical focus on women to include gender as a mode of analysis (Lewin 2006), and broadened to include critical perspectives on social inequality. For example, Carol Stack (1975) developed a women-based theory of family structure and kinship in an African American community to write against the culture of poverty ideology.

The works in this issue carry forth these feminist legacies through their theorizations of public anthropology, reflexivity, and ongoing critical reflections about the discipline of anthropology. As Wies's piece illustrates, feminist movements in anthropology mirror public concern and social movements. She traces the importance of continuous engagement with public interests and the ways that the incorporation of salient public issues maintains the relevance of the discipline. Rothstein's analysis of June Nash's theoretical contributions and Ardren's tribute to the legacy of Annette Weiner demonstrate that it is essential to feminist anthropology and an anthropol-

ogy of gender to incorporate the work of our predecessors and recognize their contributions to anthropology as a whole. Similarly, we need to be prepared to continue pressing for change when tides are slowly rising, as Crooks and Moreno reveal in the way women and gender are treated in studies of human biology. Finally, both reflexivity and public anthropology lay the groundwork for continued critical reflection of the discipline. Haldane rises to this challenge to interrogate the anthropology of gender-based violence and calls for an expansion of a feminist anthropological framework to understand, and ultimately redress, violence against women. Tandon's piece also responds to this call by continuing to question how "woman" is constructed.

Collectively, and across subdisciplines, the authors celebrate the influence of tidemark feminist theorists and practitioners in our conceptualizations of women and gender within anthropology. By offering critical perspectives on the anthropology of women and gender, this collection offers insight into the ways that feminist tidemarks influence our own anthropological contributions.

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## On the Material and Mentoring Cultures of Feminist Anthropology

*Jane Henrici, August 2012, afapres@gmail.com*

In July 2012, I spent a morning looking through some of the letters sent out as part of the founding and setting up of the Association of Feminist Anthropology in late 1988. I owed my opportunity to the fact that, thanks to the work of previous AFA presidents, many of the records central to the history of the AFA now form a functioning archive. Correspondence and other papers from the time of the establishment of AFA through 2010 are accessible for research at the National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institution's Support Center (<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/about.htm>) just outside of Washington, DC; in 2012, I also began discussions with the Smithsonian archivists to be able to add more recent and future AFA records digitally.

Looking through those early letters it seemed to me that nearly 25 years later many of the same issues that confronted feminists in anthropology, anthropologists interested in gender, race, sexuality, and other aspects of identity, and women globally remain pertinent. Certainly, those who contribute to AFA activities—through sessions, writings, workshops, award submissions, and meetings—continue to have to push communications and the sharing of responsibilities to improve conditions across borders, taxonomies, prejudices, policies, practices, and stereotypes.

These issues appear within our research, our jobs, our correspondence, and our service to one another. Perhaps it is unsurprising that a section such as ours, founded with an overtly politicized core, would support activist and sometimes angry exchanges. In addition, it seems almost a cliché about global feminisms that many of us who have volunteered to serve as elected or appointed board members have agreed to do so in large part because of some seemingly shared sense of the obligations and joys of mentoring. A quick search through past AFA candidates' platform statements comes up often with variations on the idea of serving on the board as a way to help other feminist anthropologists, as the candidates themselves had been helped, as well as to encourage successive "generations" of anthropology to remain feminist—however defined or understood.

The practice of mentoring—however defined or understood—meanwhile has expanded in recent decades as an activity far beyond that of feminisms and feminist anthropologies. Most of the activities that receive the title of "mentoring" internationally nevertheless remain informal, untrained, unsupervised, unevaluated, and perhaps of questionable

worth. At the same time, scholarship on the topic indicates that mentoring, like so many other exchanges, can be a deliberately political act which, when part of a larger context of such support, indeed can strengthen and expand networks and other resources for both individuals and collectives.

In research on women's political and labor participation and policies relevant to those, we find that informal and formal, and between and across (peer) levels, of mentoring increasingly are regarded as fundamental to career development for a range of occupations at different income levels. Meanwhile, mentoring in many nations is touted as especially helpful within efforts toward staff and colleague development and diversity—however defined or understood. One example of this is the policy in several nations to encourage greater numbers of women and persons of other relatively marginalized groups to prepare for jobs that average higher wages, which at present means a focus on the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); mentoring is considered important to that intervention.

This widening demand for mentoring however does not seem accompanied by a tightening of standards for its practice. Instead, guidelines and limitations tend to proliferate for those supposedly being mentored while those who claim the title of mentor seem to receive it as a sort of side effect of experiences and accomplishments.

In addition, existing research on mentoring shows that as potentially constructive as the activity can be it is insufficient to remove inequalities and discriminations or set up protections. Safety and trust, and challenges from many sides including that of competition for jobs and promotions, also affect mentoring efforts. Finally, finding time, space, and other resources with which to aid one another might help a field, organization, or people more generally but like any such exchange come with costs that some participants try to circumvent.

A session at the AAAs in 2009, organized by Hanna Garth and Holly Wardlow and sponsored by the Committee on the Status of Women in Anthropology, reportedly included a set of presentations that discussed mentoring within different research contexts and questioned it as an activity especially for and by women and limited to a specific set of roles. Indeed, the session abstract notes concern for the potentially exploitative character of what may be labeled as mentoring.

Within the politics of feminist anthropology, it seems important to continue to question the concept of mentoring even as we might push to demand that the activity improve. For one thing, mentoring practices need to evolve along with the context and content of work, including that of anthropology, just as we have to find digital ways to share our past

history within our archives. For another, since mentoring itself is also a form of work, then standards for its improvement also actually could benefit from forms skill training and professional development, and perhaps should be reviewed for compensation. Regardless, along with so many other issues critical to conditions affecting differences among and for women, mentoring seems part of not only the past quarter of a century of AFA history, but its present and immediate future.

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AFA is pleased to invite graduate and undergraduate students to submit essays in feminist anthropology in competition for the Sylvia Forman Prize, named for the late Sylvia Helen Forman, one of the founders of AFA, whose dedication to both her students and feminist principles contributed to the growth of feminist anthropology. The winners, one graduate student and one undergraduate student, will receive a certificate; a cash award (\$1,000 graduate and \$500 undergraduate); and have their essay summaries published in the Anthropology Newsletter.

We encourage essays in all four subfields of anthropology. Essays may be based on research on a wide variety of topics including (but not limited to) feminist analysis of women's work, reproduction, sexuality, religion, language and expressive culture, family and kin relations, economic development, gender and material culture, gender and biology, women and development, globalization, and the intersectionality of gender, race, and class. Please Check the AFA web page for details of the 2012 competition: <http://www.aaanet.org/sections/afa/forman.html>

The 2012 undergraduate and graduate award winners will be announced at the AFA business meeting in San Francisco.

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## AFA Dissertation Fellowship Announcement

The 2011 AFA Dissertation Fellowship winner was Shankari Patel (UC Riverside, Thomas Patterson, advisor) with "Journey to the East: Pilgrimage, Politics, and Gender at Postclassic Yucatan."

The AFA Dissertation Fellowship provides a \$2000 award to a doctoral candidate in anthropology for a dissertation project that makes a significant contribution to feminist anthropology. The award is intended for the write-up phase of a dissertation project. The 2012 grantee will be announced at the AFA business meeting in San Francisco. The deadline for the 2013 applications is June 15, 2013. Please check the AFA website for updates and more complete information on the fellowship competition.

# June Nash and the Gendering of Political Economy

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As Freeman (2001), Lutz (1995), and others have pointed out, theory is most often what men do about men. Even with the significant influence of feminist anthropology over the last few decades, if one looks at anthropological theory syllabi or books, “theorists” are still overwhelmingly men writing about men. Except for Mary Douglas, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict, where women have entered theory it has often been in a separate section (or ghetto) called “Feminist Anthropology.” The purpose of this paper is to suggest that women writing theory goes beyond such a limited gaze. By analyzing selected works of June Nash I will show how her contributions have transformed anthropological political economy. As Freeman, commenting on the impact of using gender in discussions of globalization, notes “taking gender seriously not only adds to the analysis at hand but produces a different analysis” (2001:1008). I will show how Nash by focusing on the division of labor within, among, and beyond families has contributed to a different and deeper understanding of class, gender, capitalism, and culture. As Barbara Leons (email to the author, August 1, 2011) commenting on an earlier version of this paper suggested, Nash developed a “more sophisticated political economy, which included a broader range of experience (including family [and] women, among other things.” In doing so “she produc[ed] a ‘truer’ picture of reality .....that is not bound to a truncated vision that excludes female experience ... just as it must not exclude history, globalization, “ or, I would add, men or anyone else.

In her introduction to a special issue of *Critique of Anthropology* entitled “Autonomy in an Age of Globalization: The Vision of June Nash” Florence Babb points out that “June Nash’s biography and bibliography reveal some of the landmark moments in anthropology’s history” (2005:211). This paper is divided into four parts. Each part focuses on a particular work representing a different period in anthropology and in Nash’s career and landmark moments present in those works: superb ethnography, attention to class, gender, power, and history, placing the local in the context of broader processes and the impact of local agency on those processes.

In the first part I discuss Nash’s first monograph, *In the Eyes of the Ancestors: Belief and Behavior in a Mayan Community* (1970). I describe how in this analysis researched and written in the late 1950s and 1960s one can see the beginnings of what Babb (referring to Nash’s co-edited works on gender in the 1970s and 80s) describes as “insights [which] are the bedrock of much subsequent theorizing on gender and political economy” (2005:211-12).

In part two, I explore her 1979 book *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us: Dependency and Exploitation in Boliv-*

*ian Tin Mines*. Here she breaks new ground with a powerful analysis of class and labor conflict. Despite its subject of mines, which are treated in most analyses only in terms of men, in this book (as in the later autobiography of mine-worker Juan Rojas, *I Spent My Life in the Mines*) gender is an important framework that deepens the analysis of class.

In part three, I briefly touch upon three volumes which most explicitly address gender, *Sex and Class in Latin America* (1980), co-edited with Helen Safa, *Women, Men and the International Division of Labor* (1983), co-edited with Maria Patricia Fernandez Kelly, and *Women and Change in Latin America* (1986), a follow up volume of the earlier collection, again co-edited with Helen Safa. In these volumes we see how Nash’s earlier insights are developed in conjunction with the growing feminist scholarship, globalization, and the new international division of labor.

Part four discusses her book, *Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization* (2001) in which she weaves together the complex threads of culture, gender, ethnicity, class, and globalization and produces an account that provides a model for contemporary anthropological political economy.

## *In the Eyes of the Ancestors: Belief and Behavior in a Mayan Community*

Like other works of the 1950s and 60s, *In the Eyes of the Ancestors* is a holistic description of kinship, religion, politics and economics in an indigenous Mayan community. Although it is in many ways a structural–functionalist analysis, her innovative departures from that approach run throughout the monograph and represent important steps towards the anthropological political economy that she increasingly develops in subsequent works.

One of the most important legacies of this book is her emphasis on what people in the community she was studying thought as well as what they did. Other works of the time often emphasized thoughts as opposed to behavior and their authors’ idea of what people thought was often what the anthropologist thought they thought. Nash, on the other hand, listened to what was said. Her stress on “local-level understanding” led her to use participant-observation with what she describes as “extensive eliciting.” She questioned the “the implicit assumption in participant-observation that ‘seeing is believing’.” Instead, she says “rather than impose my own perceptions on the simplest field description, I relied on informants’ statements about where, when, what, to whom, and how things were happening.” (1970: xxiii) Furthermore, she paid attention to all the people, not just men.

Perhaps because of her sensitivity to what people in the community were actually saying and experiencing, she

presents a community that is neither static nor homogeneous. In contrast to the dominant structural-functional approaches of the time, change and variation are constant threads throughout her analysis. Much of the book addresses the influence of extra-local relations, at the same time, continuity, an important concern of many community members, is also very present in her analysis. She also perceptively critiques analyses which are based on the erroneous assumption that there is a single perception of the way things ought to be done and she stresses the range of permissible behavior (1979:xxiii, xxiv).

In Chapter One (and then later in Chapter Eleven), years before the anthropology of space and place became an important concern in the discipline, she describes the organization of place by both the nation for political administration and by indigenous beliefs about good and bad spirits. Chapters Two and Three focus on traditional and new economic activities. Women's, men's, and children's activities are included and she describes such changes as the decreasing authority of older generations and the way in which new commercial activities are reformulated "to fit their own pattern" (1970:96). In the chapters on family and rituals, again, she shows change as well as continuity and provides rich descriptions of the behavior of both men and women. After description and analysis of religious life and politics in Chapters Five through Eight, she offers a prescient examination of "The Competition for Power" between new young leaders familiar with the national culture and the established pattern of the age-dominated authority system, between the civil authority and the curers, factionalism based on new economic activities, and other conflict areas involving the new and the old. Local agency is recognized in her stress on "the large input of local energies in bringing about change" and how the example of Amatenango "defeats the notion of the non-western segment of the world as a passive recipient of the gifts of the West" (1970:268).

### ***We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us***

If change is part of the story in *In the Eyes of the Ancestors*, in *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (1979) it is the story. Historical process is more apparent here. Nash begins with a history of mining in Bolivia and the national and international political and economic contexts of Bolivia's mines over time. Chapter Two traces the impact of mining on the lives of miners and their families as revealed through miners' autobiographies, myths about the past, and historical accounts of mining and labor organizing in Bolivia. As in *Eyes*, a major theme is how tradition may ease the transition to modernization (1979:6) and how "[p]resent and past are fused in the struggle for survival" (1979:21). In many ways *We Eat* is similar to *Eyes*. She begins with the miners' history and the larger context of national and international political events, then she discusses family life, housing, and services. She stresses the ways in which workers and their families

continue to define and assert themselves through traditional kin groups, patterns of reciprocity and exchange, and spiritual beliefs and practices in a new context. Nash describes how women tend to be restricted to domestic activities with limited opportunities to generate an income but, again with incredible foresight, she anticipates contemporary work on social reproduction with a discussion of the significance of women's organization around consumption issues and their importance in "maintain[ing] the traditions that make life seem worthwhile and may even ensure survival" (1979:313).

The greater part of her analysis in *Mines*, and what has attracted the most attention from other scholars, centers around the inhumane work conditions of the mines, class consciousness, and the struggles to change those conditions. These themes lead her to an important analysis of class consciousness, alienation, and struggles to change conditions in the mines and mining communities. The theme of inequality and exploitation dominates this as well as her subsequent work. But, Nash continues to listen to the people with whom she works and to integrate their thoughts about domination and exploitation and its impact on their lives into broader theoretical frameworks. In the concluding chapter of *Mines* Nash discusses class consciousness. She critiques what she refers to as "meta-theories ... [that] put the conditions observed in a set of propositions the theoreticians would derive if they were experiencing those conditions." This, she points out, does not "always (or perhaps ever) coincide with the ontological propositions of the men and women in the work setting" (1979: 321).

She goes on to incorporate the view from the ground level, using the perspectives of various groups of men and women of the mining community, rather than her own, to propose a double dependency among the workers in Bolivia and in Third World countries. This more generally involves a "position between consciousness of exploitation, which stems from alienation from the rewards of one's work, and consciousness of dependency, which stems from alienation from the means of production" (1979: 334). This double dependency, she notes, has not been adequately treated in theory or practice" (1979:334).

This might in fact be an appropriate conception with which to begin to address questions about class consciousness and the intersection of gender and class, an area that we have still not yet fully theorized. One of the points she makes about the two types of consciousness is that they "may negate each other, since consciousness of dependency leads to a search for security and the cultivation of patron-client relations." (1979:332). She goes on to suggest that "By rejecting not only the tactics springing from this dependency but even the existence of such consciousness in the working class, theorists have failed to deal directly with the kinds of relationship in which dependency is cultivated" (1979:334-35). In her subsequent work Nash pursues this issue of depen-

dependency, for example in her analyses of Pittsfield (1985, 1989), and especially in her work on women, their reproductive and productive work, and the relationship between dependency and the devaluation of women's work.

### **Gender and Class**

These concerns also underlie her writings and the articles included in the three volumes that she co-edited in the early 1980s. This body of work begins with Nash's chapter in the 1980 collection *Sex and Class in Latin America* which critiques both existing social science models as well as those of first world feminists. Her chapter and the articles included have influenced feminist and gender studies within and beyond anthropology and anthropological political economy for decades. One of the many notable characteristics of this volume as well as much of Nash's efforts throughout her career is her recognition of the importance of the work of Latin American scholars. Half of the articles in *Sex and Class* are by Latin Americans. Not only does Nash listen to people in the communities she studies for the everyday details of their lives, but she listens also to the scholars from those areas whose contributions help her and her readers understand those lives.

The second volume, *Women, Men and the International Division of Labor* (1983), focuses on the growth and consequences of the new international division of labor. It has been cited hundreds of times and has influenced research and theory on production, consumption, globalization, and many other areas in many disciplines. Although awareness of the importance of gender is present in all of Nash's work, from the earliest to the latest, her writings are never confined to women or gender. She has always stressed intersecting inequalities, including gender, ethnicity, and class. Here her analyses are framed in the context of new patterns of exploitation, such as globalization, and old and new patterns that may counter that exploitation.

### ***Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization***

As mentioned earlier, Nash concluded her analysis of power in Amatenango in *Eyes for the Ancestors* by suggesting that the Amatenango case "defeats the notion of the non-western segment of the world as a passive recipient of the gifts of the West" (1970:268). Twenty four years after *Eyes for the Ancestors* was published, on January 1, 1994 the West was made fully aware of what the non-western segment of the world, as represented by the Zapatistas, thought about the "gifts of the West." In *Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization* we see the coming together of the many strengths already noted: listening to the voices of those she studies, attention to agency as well as structure, history, and culture, and even more than in the past, a pulling together of Mayan voices (with their alternative logic to that of international capitalism) with a wide range of accounts, including her own and others' earlier analyses, and comments

by scholars, journalists, and political figures. In this way she describes and analyzes the various threads over time, place, and diverse groups that eventually brought thousands of *campesinos* and indigenous people together and she describes the religious and secular organizations, meetings, networks, and processes through which their demands for autonomy have been expressed.

### **Conclusion**

I began this paper by noting that Nash is not often found on theory syllabi or in theory books. Although her work has been enormously significant, as indicated above, Nash, like other women, is often absent in discussions of theory. She is a superb ethnographer who listens to those she ultimately writes about. In part, this may be why she is absent from our theory books. I want to suggest, however, that this is precisely why she should be included in those books. In her 1992 article, "Interpreting Social Movements: Bolivian Resistance to Economic Conditions Imposed by the International Monetary Fund," Nash notes how in the deconstructive critique of anthropologists such as Clifford and Marcus, the authoritative voice of the anthropologist is questioned. She points out that this "authoritative voice" often comes by usurping informants' contributions. Nash, not only did not usurp anyone's voice, but she consistently acknowledges the importance of the many voices of her informants. In this article that meant giving voice to "the complexity of 10,000 people" (Nash, email to the author, October 23, 2011). She suggests that "we must constantly test our own interpretations against those of our informants in a dialogic approach" (1992:292). It is this ability to always keep both broader theoretical analysis in relation to what is really going on from the perspectives of the participants that makes Nash's work so significant.

In her article on "The Gender of Theory" Catherine Lutz asks "What is theory?" (1995:252). She answers by noting several "signals" that something is theory. Among the signals she suggests are the following: First, she mentions self-labeling, as when an author such as Bourdieu (and I would add Ortner below), entitles a work *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Second is a signal "that the writing allows readers to imagine that the writing describes a wide variety of instances rather than a single case" or where "statements are denuded of their origin in a writer and his or her experience or are stripped of their reference to a concrete phenomenal world of specific contexts and history" (Dorothy Smith, cited by Lutz 1995:253). Lutz points out also that abstract language, academic jargon, and what is seen as more difficult to read than ethnography are also signals of "theory." And she asserts "Writing theory is celebrated as an art (as opposed to the craft of ethnography) and coded masculine" (1995:255). This opposition between ethnography and theory is apparent in William Roseberry's 1988 article in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* on political economy. He writes:

More than the others cited here [Wolf, Mintz, and Leacock] she [Nash] has always taken a fundamentally ethnographic approach to political economic problems” (165).

What Roseberry did not acknowledge, however, is the importance of Nash’s ethnographic approach to contemporary anthropological political economy. Ortner in a critical review of political economy in a 1984 article entitled “Theory in Anthropology since the 60s” repeats (without mentioning Nash) a number of the criticisms of political economy that Nash had earlier made in her 1981 article in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* and in *Mines*. For both Nash and Ortner (and probably many others) anthropology’s distinctive contribution to political economy comes from “viewing other systems from ground level,” that is, “from the perspective of the folks” being studied” (Ortner 1984:143). Ortner also comments that political economy is “too economic, too strictly materialist.” and for this reason is often seen as having little to offer anthropology” (1984:142).

Looking at Nash’s political economy we can see that political economy has a great deal to offer anthropology. Nash’s work has all of the stresses that Ortner found missing in political economy: attention to culture and symbolic processes, history, and a society’s own structure and history. This is exactly what Nash has been arguing since her earliest efforts. Long before Ortner, for Nash, like Eric Wolf, history does NOT just arrive, like a ship from outside. In fact, what makes Nash’s contribution to anthropological political economy so unique and so important is that she sees history, and not simply the history of what happens in terms of “the impact of (our) history on that society “[as Ortner rightly points out is often the case (1984:143)]. For Nash, and this perhaps is one of her most important contributions, a community’s history is important also for offering alternative solutions to the inequalities of the present whether they are inequities of gender, class, race, and/or ethnicity.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that June Nash engendered anthropological political economy but that was only part of her enormous contribution. What Nash does: validates and honors peoples’ own perspectives and understandings while always providing context in what we might term embedded theory. Nothing that she has done has ever left “theory” in the same place where she found it (Leons, email to the author, August 1, 2011).

Although not always recognized in discussions of theory, her influence on feminist anthropologists, political economists, and Latin Americanists among many others, attests to the importance of this embedded theory.

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# Slowly Rising Waters: Women in Human Biology

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In their 2006 edited volume, *Feminist Anthropology: Past, Present and Future*, Geller and Stockett (2006:2) write that “physical anthropology has yet to even adopt some of the most rudimentary feminist insights.” It is this statement that we seek to explore in our paper. First – as a point of clarification – we will be addressing a sub-field within the larger frame of “physical anthropology,” that of biological anthropology, or human biology. This is the field of study that seeks to understand human biological variation – how it is patterned (or not) and the causes behind that variation. Like other aspects of physical anthropology, human biology is embedded in an intellectual history that is marked by a strong, and often explicit, identification with science, an objectivist approach and the scientific method. At the same time, human biology, as practiced by biological anthropologists, is firmly grounded in anthropological understandings of the relationship between the body and the complex social, cultural and natural environment of which it is a part. Thus, our examination of feminism and human biology begins by exploring connections between feminism and physical anthropology.

During the past four decades, the development of feminist scholarship has raised fundamental challenges to the way many “scientific” disciplines, including physical/biological anthropology, formulate hypotheses, collect and analyze data and develop theories. An emphasis of feminist scholarship is that there is no single “truth” in science – there are multiple truths that are, in part, the consequences of different experiences of and in the world by both the researcher and the researched (see, e.g., Harding 1986, 1987; Hartsock 1997; Mayberry and Rees 2001). This recognition has led to numerous suggestions, and even demands – from reformist to revolutionary – to change science as we know it. From the perspective of a feminist human biology, those changes demand a deconstruction of false axioms, logic and conclusions and a reconstruction of reality. This reconstructed reality challenges biological determinism through recognition of biological development as the result of complex processes not solely arising from genetic blueprints, but through a larger engagement of organisms with their worlds. These “worlds” are not always the same, nor are they experienced in the same way by different people. As Darna Dufour<sup>1</sup> points out in the 2005 Pearl Memorial Lecture to the Human Biology Association, rather than “biology,” what we may need to think about are “biologies” (Dufour, 2006).

By the 1970s, this work of deconstruction and reconstruction in human biology was taken up by some feminist

researchers in physical anthropology and its cognate disciplines, e.g., primatology, paleoanthropology and prehistory. Women scholars of primatology began to question stories of primate behavior that privileged androcentric groupings, male choice of mates, and warfare and infanticide as central drivers of, and contributors to, the perpetuation of the species. Instead, women primatologists such as Linda Fedigan (1982), Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (1981) and Barbara Smuts (1985), among others, asked questions about and observed the behaviors of female primates in relation to each other, to their offspring, and to male primates. Based on more complete empirical evidence than was previously available because of gender bias in the doing of science and the production of knowledge from that doing, these scholars were able to re-write stories of non-human primate behavior that centered female primates in the narrative. In this way, they were able to account for what Haraway (1989) argues is a fuller and more valid understanding of their research subjects and their relationships in and to their worlds.

Scholars of science such as Londa Schiebinger (1999) argue that this revolution in primatological thinking and scholarship occurred because these women scientists chose to ask different kinds of questions based on their own gendered ways of being in the world. By doing so, they challenged the very structure of primatological science and the narratives produced from it. They, like some archeologists (Gero and Conkey, 1991; Conkey and Gero, 1997) brought social theory to their research, and by doing so made clear that gender as process in primate societies had consequences for potential behavioral and biological outcomes. They did not assume naturalized divisions of behavior based primarily on sexually dimorphic, reproductive biologies.

Earlier, scholars of human evolution such as Adrienne Zihlman (1987), Sally Slocum (1975), Nancy Tanner (1981) and others were re-thinking and challenging male-centric stories of hominid origins and evolution. From their perspective, the “hominid way of life” took on new and different dimensions when they privileged female gathering over male hunting and the carrying of offspring and gathered food over the carrying of meat and tools. In her rendering of this important aspect of the gendered history of anthropological science, Schiebinger (1999) points out that these attempts to re-write evolutionary stories were less successful than were those of women primatologists and later, women prehistorians. Citing Meg Conkey (Schiebinger 1999:138), she argues that the perspective of these important scholars did not go far enough in challenging “naturalized” dualisms, e.g., man the

hunter vs. woman the gatherer, and male vs. female divisions of labor. Nevertheless, as made clear by numerous authors in Hager's (1997) edited volume, *Women in Human Evolution*, this body of work subverted the patriarchal notion of women as mere reproductive vessels through which the species is perpetuated. Instead, this research and scholarship centered women as contributors to and innovators of many of the behaviors that we now characterize as fundamentally human.

Challenging the basis of scientific stories, as pointed out by many feminist scholars of science, requires that we challenge the very structure of our science and the way we do it (e.g., Birke, 1986; various authors in Tuana, 1989; Nelson and Wylie 2004 and other authors in same issue). Thus, in engendering primatology, paleoanthropology and prehistory, the research enterprise changed as theoretical and methodological underpinnings shifted and the very idea of what counted as "data" was altered to become more varied and inclusive. Female primates were "fleshed out," and their central roles in social organization and production of culture were added to their roles as mothers and sexual partners (Fedigan 1982). And the lost women of prehistory were looked for and found, and their central places as inventors of things and innovators of culture uncovered (Gero and Conkey, 1991). This excavation of gender required asking broader questions about gender at work, about gendered social dynamics and interpersonal relationships.

Given the importance of the feminist critique and resulting response by some feminist researchers in fields that contribute to our understanding of past and present human biology – responses that in many ways reconfigured the science – we ask whether human biology research and scholarship has risen to the challenges posed by the feminist critique? To answer this question, we turn to three analyses of journal articles in human biology done by Geraldine Moreno-Black (and in the case of the first analysis, her student Cheri Vitez) between the years 1977 and the present. In these analyses, we trace the number of articles about women, but also, we look for a feminist influence in these articles. As Schiebinger (1999) and others caution, the movement of women into fields of science, and the increasing appearance of scientific work by and about women do not necessarily guarantee a more feminist approach to scholarship.

### Waves, Currents and Tides

The western feminist critique in anthropology and other disciplines is often explained through the use of the wave metaphor. In this explanatory model, periods of activism toward specific liberatory goals are organized into three distinct time frames called "waves."<sup>ii</sup> American feminism's First Wave is usually defined as the period of activism from the 1830s through the culmination of the women's suffrage movement of the 1920s. During this time, the women's movement focused on bringing women into full participation in public and professional life. Within the academy, anthropologists

sought to include women's voices in ethnography to give a "female" perspective to events. However, given the male bias in ethnographic accounts resulting from a culture that valued men's experiences over women's (Reiter 1975) and/or the inability of male researchers to access women as research participants (Stockett and Geller 2006), this effort proved less than successful.

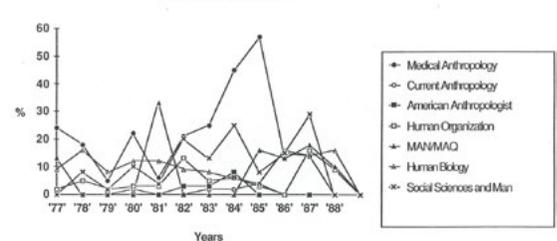
The Second Wave Movement in American feminism, from the 1960s through the 80s,<sup>iii</sup> saw feminist philosophers of science challenging science as "objective empiricism" and calling for a science built from multiple knowledges and multiple ways of being in the world (di Leonardo 1991). Anthropologists began to challenge paradigms and models that excluded women from culture or equated their role in society with reproductive biology (see, e.g., Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Reiter 1975). "Sex" and "gender" were criticized as descriptive categories that could be used interchangeably and that naturalized the consequences of cultural ideologies and social processes. And the category "woman" was criticized for its assumption that the experience of being a woman was a monolithic one – a criticism that would take on greater importance with the following Third Wave.

The literature review that forms the analytic portion of this paper begins during the Second Wave, and encompasses the period 1977-1988 when Second Wave critiques were at their height. Searching for strands of feminism in human biology, Moreno-Black and Vitez (1990) embarked on a project of reviewing human biology/medical anthropology articles. At that time, the *American Journal of Human Biology*, the official publication of the Human Biology Council (later the Human Biology Association) was not in existence, so Moreno-Black and Vitez drew on articles from seven journals in which human biologists published,<sup>iv</sup> selecting all of the articles written about women or gender, a total of 220 articles. They then tracked the number of articles written over the ten years looking for publication trends. Figure 1 indicates a great deal

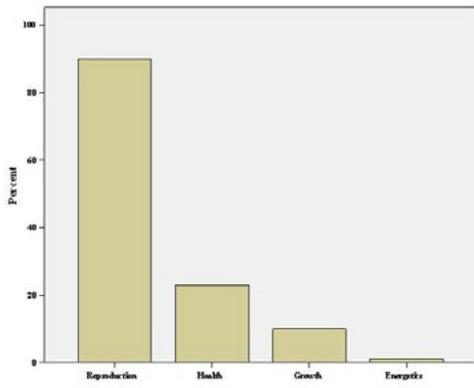
of variation in the number of articles published by and about women, but with peaks and valleys vis-à-vis specific journals. All in all, however, there is slight movement upward in the number of articles written by and/or about women. We see this as a small a current, if not a wave.

Heeding the critique of women as simply "reproductive vessels," Moreno-Black and Vitez then sorted the 220 articles

Figure 1. Comparison of the Percent of Articles written about women over the past ten years in the seven journals.



into categories of content with respect to human biology. Figure 2 indicates the vast majority of articles included content about Reproduction and Reproductive Lifeways,



while articles on Health, Growth and Development, and Energetics – all traditional categories of human biology research – received far less attention.

For the final step in the Phase

1 analysis, Moreno-Black and Vitez extracted themes from the feminist critique of science, and from these, developed analytic categories to be used in identification of a feminist approach in the journal articles. A fundamental question that had arisen earlier in their work was how to distinguish or name these categories. Barbara DuBois (1983:108) argues that “naming” is probably the first order of interpretation in science because “naming defines the quality and value of that which is named – and it also defines reality and value to that which is never named ...” Therefore, Moreno-Black and Vitez chose to extract themes from the literature rather than creating their own categories. These extracted themes are listed in Figure 3 along with the number of articles represented in each category (note that an article could be in more

Figure 3. Characteristics of Feminist approach in Articles: Phase 1 (Feminist Articles=28/220 (13%))

By women	136
About women	205
For Change	16
For Women	12
Deconstruction	12
Reflexive	5
Oppression	4
Subjectivity	3
Lived Experience	2
Reject dualism	1

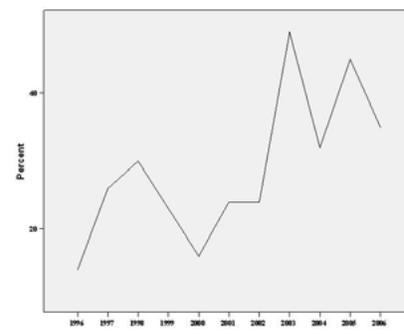
than one depending on its content). These data support the caution that re-

search about women or by women is not necessarily feminist; the number of articles that could be categorized “feminist” according to the themes was 28/220 or 13%.

A little more than a decade after the work of Phase 1, Sara Stinson’s 2003 article, “Participation of Women in Human Biology, 1975-2001” appeared in the *American Journal of Human Biology* (AJHB). Stinson examined the trends in women’s participation in the field of human biology through an examination of membership in the key organization, authorship of articles in AJHB and the extent to which women had been the subject of research published in the journal. Her analysis indicated women’s membership in the organization had increased from 25% to over 40% and women’s authorship in the AJHB increased from 20-30%. The analysis also indicated that more research articles focused solely on

“females” than solely on “males” although she conceded that this may be the result of a focus on aspects of biology only found in females, and/or a tendency to assume male biology as that typifying the species. This publication sent us back to the literature to determine if feminism had entered the field along with women.

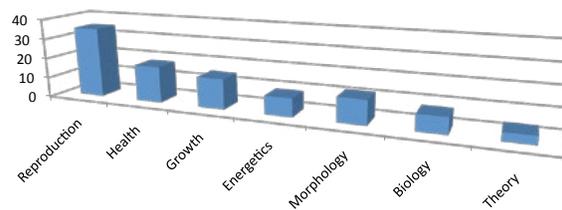
The Phase 2 analysis focused on a single journal, the *American Journal of Human Biology*, which came into existence in 1989 and is now, as it was then, the journal of the Human Biology Association (formerly Human Biology Council). It is a peer-reviewed publication, published six times per year, and includes original research, theoretical articles and reviews, abstracts and minutes of the annual meeting presentations, and brief communications in the interdisciplinary field of human biology. Following the strategy laid out in Phase 1, Moreno-Black identified articles with content focusing on women or gender. During the ten-year period between 1996 and 2006, 210 of the journal’s 759 articles (28%) were identified as such, with a substantial increase in the percent of articles over the time period (Figure



4). This increasing percentage, in addition to Stinson’s findings, seems to indicate that the feminist concern to “make women visible” has been successful.

Continuing the analysis, Moreno-Black then turned to sorting articles into human biology content categories to determine how women’s biology was being portrayed and interpreted. This exercise revealed increasing variability in content area over Phase 1 (Figure 5) with the addition of new human

Figure 5. Percent of Articles by Category 1996-2006 (n=210)



biological content categories of “anatomy,” “physiology” and “theory.”

Comparing Phase 2 to Phase 1, we see that the category of “reproduction and reproductive lifeways” continues to be the most represented among the articles; however, the total percentage of articles in this category is less than in Phase 1 (36% vs. 81%). We see this as a positive current.

For the third part of the Phase 2 analysis, Moreno-Black again looked for signs of “feminism” in the work. At this time, feminism was undergoing further transformation in the so-called “Third Wave,” in which essentialist notions of femininity were being challenged, and a heightened emphasis was being placed on the discursive power and fundamental

ambiguity inherent in all gender terms and categories. As a consequence, Moreno-Black generated categories from the current literature (rather than relying on previous categories) by which to judge the presence of a feminist perspective in this second collection of articles. The analytic categories generated from review of the literature on feminism were much more variable than during the previous Phase 1 analysis, as can be seen in Figure 6. This increased variability, we argue, reflects the increasing insistence on “cultural and

**Figure 6: Analytic Categories**

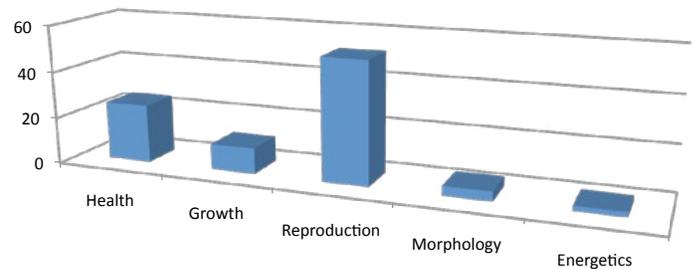
Reproduction (14)		
Menarche (10)		
Puberty (15)		
Menstruation (4)		
Menopause (15)		
Fertility (5)		Reproductive Lifeways
Pregnancy (8)		
Lactation (10)		
Fetal (3)		Child Care & Outcome
Birth Order (1)		
Birth weight (4)		
Health (4)		
Disease (9)		
Mental Health (7)		Health/Illness
Nutrition (7)		Medical Issues
Obesity (11)		
Mortality (2)		Survival
Growth (21)		
Development (4)		Developmental
Maturation (5)		
Biology		
Mental Development (1)		Development
Sex Ratio (1)		
Physical Activity (10)		
Energetics (7)		Physical Exercise
Physical Performance (2)		
Dentition (4)		Body Form/Morphology
Morphology (21)		Anatomy
Physiology (1)		
Hormone (2)		Physiology
Genetics (4)		
Theory (4)		
Evolution (1)		Theoretical Issues
Gender Bias (2)		
Life History (1)		

human variability” in the Third Wave Movement (Stockett and Geller 2007:11), which necessitates attention to the multiple locations women occupy in society and the effects of layered and/or intersectional experiences of gender, age, class, race, ethnicity, etc. on human biology. But even with the increasing number of articles over time, and the greater diversity and complexity in Third Wave feminist theory, only 20 articles (10%) could be categorized as “feminist” in the Phase 2 analysis of the human biology literature. We feel it important to note, though, that the small number of articles that included a discussion of theory or that specifically addressed some of the feminist perspectives were important because they provided an opening for feminist perspectives that would later lead to new forms of knowledge creation and methodological strategies.

In preparation for the 2012 American Anthropological Association session for which this paper was written, a

Phase 3 analysis looked again at the articles in the *American Journal of Human Biology*, this time between the years 2007 and 2011, updating the previous analysis. Within this four year period, Moreno-Black identified 214 articles on women and/or gender out of 446 or 48%. Many of these articles, however, were a simple sex or gender-based comparison, and these were eliminated from further analysis, leaving 92 papers that focused solely or significantly on girls and women. Like Phase 1 and 2, these were sorted into content categories (Figure 7) revealing an increased percentage of articles in the

**Figure 7: Phase 3 - Percent of articles by category (n=92)**



“Reproductive and Reproductive Lifeways” category compared to Phase 2 (57% vs. 36%). The analysis for feminist content, which utilized the same categories as Phase 2, revealed that 11% could be categorized as “feminist” compared to 10% in Phase 2 and 13% in Phase 1. Despite the increase in the number of articles published, there was no significant change in the number of articles that were ‘feminist.’

### Is there a Rising Tide?

The data we present here do not indicate a rising tide of feminism in human biology research in terms of numbers of feminist articles, despite increases in the number of women in the field and increasing attention to women’s biology in human biology publications. However, we are heartened by a change in the content and perspective of the articles we deemed “feminist” in Phase 3. What we found in this most recent analysis is an approach to research on human biology that does not rely on an uncritical presentation of single-cause explanations stripped of their social and political context, as certainly was the case in Phase 1 if not Phase 2. Instead, the Phase 3 feminist authors situate biology within highly negotiated, gendered processes of economic and social change, thus revealing complexity and heterogeneity. For example, in their 2011 article, “Nutrition in transition: Dietary patterns of rural Amazonian women during a period of economic change,” Piperata et al. (2011) show how changes in nutritional status reflect changing access to the market economy facilitated through new, gendered wage labor markets and through gender-specific targeting of cash transfer programs. In their 2008 article, “Mixed-longitudinal growth of breastfeeding children in Moroto District, Uganda (Karamoja subregion): A loss of biological resiliency?”, Gray et al. (2008) show how child growth can reach the limits of innate resilience as environments deteriorate and women caretakers suffer emotional distress from decades of armed

violence between communities. The difference between these articles and earlier ones, whether the authors declare themselves feminist or not, is an attention to context and history, the activities that constitute peoples' lives – women's and girls', men's and boys' – and an analysis of the impact of these histories and activities on biology and well being (Inhorn and Whittle 2001:553). We propose that this more feminist perspective awaited not simply the movement of women into the field of human biology, but the development of a fully biocultural approach, in other words, a change in the way we do our science.

These shifts in perspective and approach, although perceptible in only a handful of articles, are being included in the mainstream journal in the field. To us, this represents a rethinking of how women, gender and human biology are conceptualized and researched – a trend that was presaged in our Phase 2 analysis and which is built on the legacies of feminist science and feminist anthropology. Whether or not this trend will continue or be recalled by mainstream science awaits a Phase 4 analysis somewhere down the road. At this moment, however, our conclusion is that the feminist waters are slowly rising in human biology, but we still await the feminist wave.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

We thank Jen Wies and Hanna Garth for organizing the session and for inviting us to participate, and we thank Stacie King for chairing. Thank you also to Amy Harper and the anonymous reviewers of our paper for your helpful comments and suggestions. Finally, our heartfelt thanks to all the "Squeaky Wheels" for their courage and their legacies.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> According to the Human Biology Association website, between 1983 and 2010 only six of 28 Pearl Memorial Lecturers have been women.

<sup>ii</sup> We acknowledge that serious critiques have been leveled against the wave approach by a variety of scholars (Guy-Sheftall 1995; Ruth 1998; Springer 2002 in Mann & Huffman 2005; Siegel 2007; Stockett and Geller 2006). The wave approach is often criticized, and rightfully so, as emanating from a fairly mainstream, Eurocentric standpoint and vision. It thus downplays the importance of individual small scale collective actions; rather, its tendency is to draw attention to common themes that unify each wave, obscuring diversity and marginalizing the more radical and already marginalized. For our purposes however, the wave approach has merit, because it does provide a way to present an overview and provide a backdrop against which to view general trends within critical periods in the complicated collective past of feminist thought and history (Siegel 2007).

<sup>iii</sup> Many scholars argue that the women's movement took a hiatus following the winning of women's suffrage in 1921, emerging as the Second Wave in the 1960s. However, once again, this perspective all but ignores the ongoing resistance to male domination by women across time and space. Nevertheless, in context of our discussion of a feminist perspective in the field of human biology within the U.S. academy, we see the period between the first and second waves as a time when women moved into the academy in greater numbers but did little to alter the theoretical or methodological status quo. In other words, we do not find indication of a feminist perspective developing in human biology research during this time period.

<sup>iv</sup> The journals *American Anthropologist*, *Current Anthropology*, *Human Biology*, *Human Organization*, *Medical Anthropology*, *Medical Anthropology Newsletter*/*Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, and *Social Science and Medicine* were chosen because they are peer-reviewed, prestigious journals that include articles relevant to human biology. For journals that publish articles from multiple disciplines, only those articles where at least one author self-identified as an anthropologist were selected.

<sup>v</sup> We deliberated on one article that was clearly informed by "critical" theory – thus meeting Third Wave requirements – but was not focused on gender. To keep our analysis as "comparable" as possible, we did not include this article in the "feminist" column; however, we are still a bit uneasy over this choice.

<sup>vi</sup> We note, however, that many of the authors whose work we deemed "feminist" in Phase 3 were the same authors, or their students, whose work we deemed "feminist" in Phase 2. As one reviewer commented, "This seems very, very interesting in terms of the reproduction of theoretical frameworks or tides... Wouldn't it be interesting to plot a social network analysis or kinship diagram of this phenomena?" We agree that it would.

# The Women-Nature Correlation: Mapping the Legacy of Ecofeminism

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## Introduction

In environmental history, as in many other fields of study, key actors were assumed to be male, hiding women's involvement (Scott 1988). Not only were women's activities and engagement with ecology excluded from all history, but denial of their presence also led to a lack of attention to their struggles and responses to environment policies, rendering them passive and powerless non-actors. There has been a long standing debate in feminist anthropology regarding the relationship between women and nature originating from cultural ideologies about women's biologically-inherent nurturing personality based on their role in reproduction and extended periods of child care. This, at one time a dominant ideology, gave rise to the notion of women being closer to the environment (nature) and thus more able to identify with ecological conservation efforts and sustainable development of natural resources.

One theoretical framework that rests on this supposition is ecofeminism which relates the subordination and oppression of women by men to that of the environment by culture. Focusing on ecofeminist perspectives that were once influential in mapping out trajectories of women's development in the rural third world, this article seeks to explore and critique this paradigm, tracing its linkage to discourses of feminism in order to examine the role and significance of women in development initiatives and environment conservation movements. The advent of modern industrial and development models and their effect on village women in their quotidian lives, influenced by theoretical shifts in dominant feminist and development discourses, proves significant in such an examination. This article thus deconstructs and analyzes the ecofeminist paradigm in a post-colonial, Third World context, with the help of ethnographic examples, asserting a new way of thinking about ecofeminism and its legacy within anthropological literature.

## What is ecofeminism?

As a response to the 'women-less' representation of environment history and policy, the ecofeminist approach gained prominence in the 1980s. Asserting that women enjoyed a 'special' relationship with the environment this approach took as its premise discourses of 'natural' and bio-physical connectedness, based on the belief that women interacted with the environment more closely than men on a daily basis through activities that were considered 'reproductive' in nature, such as gathering fuel and fodder, collecting water for household use, and food production (Leach and Green 1997:345).

As Maxine Molyneux and Deborah Lynn Steinberg have said, "[E]cofeminism is constituted by, and draws upon a diverse range of political and theoretical projects including environmental studies, critiques of science and modernity, development studies and a range of feminist critical writing and activism" (1995:86). Closer to home in feminist studies, the discourse of ecofeminism is reflective of several different strands of Western feminist ideologies that arose in the North as part of second wave feminist theories (Agarwal 1992:120). More specifically, this paradigm argues that women are closer to nature and men are closer to culture, a concept first introduced in anthropological discourse by Sherry Ortner (1974). In trying to find the logic underlying the universal devaluation of women, Ortner argued that the second-class status of women stemmed from being "identified with" or "a symbol of...something that every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself" (1974:72). She suggests this 'something' to be nature, arguing that every culture, i.e. human consciousness, is engaged with manipulating nature in order to generate systems of meaningful forms such as symbols, artifacts, and so forth. Thus, if "it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if women were considered part of nature, then culture would find it "natural" to subordinate [women]" (73). She further clarifies that by virtue of women's bodies and its functions, the social roles that this places her in and her resulting psychic structure, all align her with nature more than culture, implicating her as a universal subordinate to man.

Ortner has since modified her views, but this strand of thought continues to inform the arguments of ecofeminism. Although ecofeminism recognizes that the conflation of women with nature is ideological, based on certain beliefs and values that places men and women in a hierarchy, rather than representative of reality, proponents nevertheless emphasize the 'women are closer to nature' ideology, highlighting their bio-physiology as a reason for this (Mies and Shiva 1993; Salleh 1984).

Ecofeminist scholars have over time suggested different versions of this ideology. Ariel Kay Salleh (1984) has taken the extreme view of calling women's link with nature as biologically inevitable. On the other hand, ecofeminist pioneers such as Ynestra King (1981) and Carolyn Merchant (1980) accept the view that women are "ideologically constructed as closer to nature because of their biology" but critique the nature-culture dichotomy as false (Agarwal 1992:121). Attempting to bridge the gap between these poles, King has

argued that “the liberation of women is to be found neither in severing all connections that root us in nature nor in believing ourselves to be more natural than men” (1981:15).

### **Ethnographic Example**

Here I present a case study of an environment conservation movement in India in order to lay a backdrop on which to map the tidemarks of the ecofeminist argument - that women are more dependent on the environment and thus more adversely affected by environment degradation than men. The Chipko movement was staged in the Chamoli district of northwest India in 1972-73 to protest the auctioning of 300 ash trees to a sports goods manufacturer when localshad recently been denied access to fell a few trees in order to make agricultural implements for the community. The movement relied on village women hugging trees to prevent felling, which grew in popularity with help from outside feminist activists, prominent Indian environmental activist and ecofeminist Vandana Shiva being one of them, until it had spread regionally (and nationally) to incorporate other resistances to tree felling. The involvement of local women in these protests could be analyzed on two levels; first, they were jointly protesting along with village men against nonlocal contractors, and second, they were positioned against the village men due to differences in priorities regarding resource use.

How does the Chipko movement relate to newer approaches of gender and environment discourses? Was the holistic, interactive approach of women in the movement related to women’s sensibilities, personalities, ‘gentler and more sensitive qualities,’ that prompted the desire to save the trees, or was there a deeper political-economic motivation? According to Jain, the answer lies in seeing women’s primary involvement in the Chipko movement as “a struggle for material resources in the context of gender-ascribed natural resource dependence, and women’s limited opportunities as compared with men to out-migrate” rather than a result of ‘natural’ attachment (as cited in Leach and Green 1997:352). Alternatively Guha (1989) has suggested that the Chipko movement was a peasant movement rather than a women’s movement.

### **Ecofeminism and Development**

In this section I map various feminist ideologies that have theoretical connections with ecofeminism in order to trace the legacy of ecofeminism on contemporary development discourses, demonstrating their linkages by drawing upon ethnographic examples. By understanding how these schools of thought have influenced each other and contributed to each other’s development, I provide a better vantage point of the tidemarks of ecofeminist ideology on gender and environment theories today. The Women, Environment and Development (WED) approach of the 1980s has been interlinked with ecofeminism almost since the latter’s origin. It drew heavily on the women in development (WID) approach that was popular among development analysts and policy-

makers in the 1970s<sup>1</sup>. What WED inherited from WID was a static conception of women’s roles, gendered division of labor, a focus on solely women’s activities ignoring the role of men, and the portrayal of women as a homogenous group. Although WED discourses do not explicitly state the ‘natural’ connection of women with the environment, the policies generated as a result of the WED approach implicitly hint at it just as ecofeminism does (Leach 2007).

Melissa Leach and Cathy Green argue that it is in upholding this ‘special’ relationship of women with the environment that WED aligns itself conceptually with ecofeminism (1997:345). Thus, contrary to viewing women as victims of development initiatives, these approaches stress on women as ‘carers of the natural environment’ by virtue of their extensive knowledge and interaction with local ecologies (Leach 2007). As proponents of WED and ecofeminism saw it, this meant that women were less victims of environmental degradation practices of development programs than bearers of indigenous, traditional knowledge of the local environment. Thus development initiatives regarding environment conservation sought to focus on women and utilize their knowledge in order to better implement development programs. From a feminist perspective, it was thought that such a step would pass the reign of control over the environment on to the women themselves, empowering them in turn.

### **Women as targets of development**

At a time when development practitioners were under pressure to recognize both, environment and gender concerns, the alliance between WED and ecofeminism was adopted by a wide variety of agencies such as the World Bank and other NGOs to improve development efforts (Leach 2007:70). A common sight in the Bhil tribal villages of Jhabua, in the state of Madhya Pradesh in India<sup>2</sup>, is of women tending to everyday domestic and field-related activities. Collecting firewood from forested areas, transporting water from wells, ponds and tube wells to their huts for domestic consumption, food production, providing child care, and assisting with agricultural activities are just some of the duties in the long list of women’s responsibilities. Women overwhelmingly contribute their time and labor towards their households, have significant responsibility for family subsistence, and spend much of their time interacting with the natural environment. Being a drought-prone area with erratic monsoons and arid weather, crop failure in this region has led to large-scale seasonal migration by men to nearby urban areas in search of labor<sup>3</sup>. Compounded by restricted opportunities for the women who remain behind to earn income outside of the village, development efforts by the State and NGOs are being expended to train them in income-generating activities such as fish production, basket weaving, pottery, and selling produce grown in domestic vegetable gardens, capitalizing on knowledge and accessibility of the natural resources available to them.

In the time I spent in Jhabua I met many *Mabila*

*Mandal* (Women's Organization) workers from local NGOs who spent days in villages talking to the women, inquiring about their quality of life, promoting the new 'fish-production schemes,' among others, that would improve their cash income and contribute meaningfully to household expenditures. They would train women willing to learn how to go from hut to hut collecting small amounts of money to buy the initial startup fish or vegetable seeds, manage the money in a government bank account opened for them with the help of the NGO workers, and start their own 'fishery' or vegetable garden. I talked with enthusiastic women who were keen on these development initiatives, and then heard about how interest in the schemes, money in the bank, and the fish slowly dwindled and died<sup>4</sup>. The simple fact was without a proper market system in which to sell these items – minus a middle-man – cash would not and could not flow in. And more often than not NGO intervention ended after the training stage<sup>5</sup>.

### **Ecofeminism and Conservation**

Ecofeminist arguments inspired a range of social and environment movements in the 1980s, from grassroots to larger international networks. For instance, ecofeminist ideas resonated equally in the localized Chipko movement in India and in the preamble to Women's Action Agenda 21 discussed in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) conference that took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. Subsequently, the ideology behind the Chipko movement as being a women's movement to protect the environment spread like wild-fire and mobilized other conservation efforts by rural women around India.

In Dongri Paintoli village a potato-seed farm was to be established by cutting down a tract of oak forest, but this was protested against by the women. Cutting down of the forest would mean the eradication of their only nearby source of fuel and fodder, adding five kilometers to their fuel-collecting journeys. Alternatively, this scheme was supported by men because it meant receiving a cash income, but as the women perceived it, cash in the hands of men would not always be spent on the household and children (Agarwal 1992). The men and women of the village also differed on what trees to plant according to their priorities, as "women typically prefer trees that provide fuel, fodder and daily needs, the men prefer commercially profitable ones" (Agarwal 1992:148). What this study suggests is an association between the gendered nature of providing for a family's subsistence needs and responding to threats against resources that fulfill those needs. This differential gendered valuation of the environment – how men and women value and to what end they use the environment – forms the basis of ecofeminist claims of the 'natural' link between women and the environment.

One of the biggest critiques of ecofeminism and WED perspectives has been that in most cases the programs not only failed to accomplish their primary goal of achieving gender equality, but also failed to succeed in conservation

efforts. According to Leach, emphasizing women-environment links in development discourse was either motivated by "acknowledging women's environmental roles so that they could be brought into broader project activities such as tree planting, soil conservation and so on, mobilizing the extra resources of women's labor, skill and knowledge," or in order to justify environmental interventions that targeted women through women's groups (2007:72).

This failure can be attributed to different expectations of the benefits that the development program would bring. For example, women as targets of the program might well be more inclined to try to provide for her household rather than participate in resource conservation, opposing the implementing organization's expectation that women will unquestioningly comply with conservation efforts<sup>6</sup>. As Leach points out, in certain cases, projects of conservation supplement women's already present responsibilities, proving more detrimental than empowering and project 'success' is usually secured at women's expense, by appropriating women's labor, unremunerated, without meeting their needs or securing them the benefits that are promised. Thus not only do women-environment relations overlook issues such as "intra-household dynamics, resource access, and agrarian property and power" but, as she eloquently puts it, "the fallacy [lies in] assuming that women's participation in environmental projects is coterminous with benefit" (Leach 2007:75), by assuming that it is what women want and need.

Such tensions are evident in other conservation efforts in India. For example, in the Joint Forest Management (JFM) program, the government aims to manage forested areas in conjunction with surrounding rural communities. Heavily derived from early ecofeminist literature, policy planners decided that involving women was not only desirable but necessary since they would be more committed to protecting the forests due to their dependence on its resources more so than men. In the concluding section of this article, I explore these underlying assumptions about 'women as natural carer' rather than their investment in material causal aspects, but what is important to note here is that the provisions made in the JFM policy for participation of women actually restricted their participation rather than promoting it. For instance, in the largely patriarchal rural communities, the manner in which JFM committee members held public meetings inhibited women from speaking (Sarin 1996). Similarly, having a one person per household committee member rule actively prevented women from becoming committee members since almost always a male representative is chosen within the household. Other insensitivities to such things as timings, availability, increasing work burden, illiteracy, and so on actively prevents women from taking part in the JFM program (Agarwal 1997). Not only do women not benefit from this program but they have the added burden of contributing time and labor, and in some cases, are coerced to participate.

## Deconstructing ecofeminist theories

Two of the major proponents of ecofeminism in the late 1980s and 1990s have been Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva whose co-authored book *Ecofeminism* (1993) has contributed prominently to environment, development and feminist discourses. Molyneux and Steinberg note that this work attempts to create a dialogue between “a Western feminist and ‘Southern’ feminist standpoint.” It offers critiques of modern science and scientific rationality as “the core constituents and the driving motors of capitalist accumulation” which along with colonialism are the forms of patriarchal violence that seek to control nature, and by extension women. They argue that “the scientific pursuit and production of universalized ‘truth’ is seen to be grounded in the exploitation of women, nature and the ‘Third world’” (1995:86, 89). Shiva’s (1988) work in India takes us further by suggesting that the adoption of such industrial/development models is a “radical conceptual shift away from the traditional Indian cosmological view of nature as...the feminine and creative principle... which in conjunction with the masculine principle...creates the world” (Agarwal 1992:124). She argues that the older notion of humans as a part of nature has been subsumed by beliefs about humans as separate, above and dominating over nature, in a violent and repressive way. Elaborating further Shiva talks of a “pre-colonial golden age” when femininity, the environment and its conservation were essential to women’s livelihoods (Shiva 1988:4). But it is this conception of the “pre-colonial golden age” and ubiquitous feminine principle that proves problematic. Through such an essentialist view of ‘woman’ and representation of the Hindu principle as universal, ecofeminism meets its most trenchant critique; as though the ‘Northern’ feminist of the 1970s with her WID approach has been transposed on the ‘Southern’ feminist. The vantage point has changed but the ideology remains the same – that of homogeneity and essentialism, external to grassroots reality. Most importantly, the generalizations and universal application of this theory have been heavily criticized as not taking into account cross-cultural and historical variability in the meanings attributed to ‘male’ and ‘female’ categories and the way they are differentially linked to the environment. By obscuring cultural and historical particularities such ecofeminists fall into the same dichotomous trap as Western (second wave feminism) ideologies, “offering only a single, inverted alternative to supposed female is to male as nature is to culture hierarchies” (Leach and Green 1997).

Another line of critique came very early on from anthropological feminist scholars. These critiques specifically highlighted the shortcomings of the proposition that women are closer to nature and that women’s subordination is solely, whether indirectly or directly, related to reproduction and bio-physiology. Anthropologists such as Sherry Ortner (1974), Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Michelle Rosaldo (1974) also came under scrutiny for arguing that the roots of gender inequality could be traced to a division between

domestic and public spheres of activity. Rosaldo later revised her earlier assumptions by saying that women’s status in societies is more a result of “the meaning her activities acquire through concrete social interactions” rather than a direct function of her activities and biology, pointing to the importance of understanding gender in “political and social terms, with reference not to biological constraints but local and specific forms of social relationship” (1980:400). Alternatively, in the ecofeminist argument, by assuming a natural link with the environment, issues concerning property and power that might lead to unequal gender relations are obscured. Similarly, Vassos Argyrou (2005) proffers that ecofeminists’ view of nature rejects modern scientific and rational thought in favor of forming an identity with the environment based on emotional relationships. Emerging from these critiques, the importance of gender, rather than women, comes to the forefront in environmental theories in the 1990s. This gender and development (GAD) approach maintains that women cannot be isolated from gender relations and it is gender relations, not women, which need to be the object of analysis.

The premise of ecofeminism that categorizes women in a homogenous group in relation to their environment has also been heavily critiqued by anthropologists and other-feminist scholars alike. By viewing women as a homogenous group, ecofeminism ignores the multiple identities that constitute women according to ethnicity, class, age, caste and local ecology. This type of examination begs the question of how gender and environment debates are affected by the politics of voice and the power relations involved in setting feminist research agendas. Who is theorizing and analyzing whom, and how does this influence the trajectory of the debate? Chandra Mohanty’s work (1991) was pioneering in its argument for defining a third world feminist perspective. She suggests that in order to be able to reach a somewhat coherent interpretation of women’s lives, third world women cannot be constituted as a unitary interest group. Women’s lived experiences are shaped by diverse social ideologies and understandings of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, histories and material (economic) interactions.

Shiva’s work, on the other hand, and her attempts to highlight the plight of rural women in India, and by extension all third world women, is not salient to contemporary feminist environmentalism because the analytical lens is heavily influenced by ‘elitist’ assumptions; she fails to “address the conceptual and material factors which distinguish individual or groups of women from each other” (Leach and Green 1997:350). For instance, upper caste women in a village might have differential access to resources as compared to women of lower castes, and might even actively prevent the latter from accessing these resources. Micaela Di Leonardo calls this ‘the embedded nature of gender’ which proposes that “women must be seen not only in relation to men but to one another” (1991:30). As Mohanty warns, “defining third world women [as a common interest group] in terms of their

'problems' or their 'achievements' in relation to an imagined free white liberal democracy effectively removes them (and the 'liberal democracy') from history, freezing them in time and space" (1991:7). In Jhabua, not all women were able to join the development schemes being implemented by NGOs. Women from some of the poorer households could not pay the initial contribution and were thus excluded from the scheme altogether. I observed that most young, newly-married girls were also not interested in participating, nor were elderly women, whether they had the economic necessity and capital to take part or not.

This criticism also leads to a larger issue of the importance of analyzing feminist discourses, and indeed ecofeminism, from the gaze of rural women of the South rather than from the view of Northern 'white' and Southern-elite feminists. Ecofeminism originated in the North, as did second wave feminist theories, aiming to 'advocate' for oppressed women in developing and under-developed nations. Not only do most of its proponents play into the historical dichotomies of 'us' and 'them,' and 'observer' and 'subjects/observed' but they also seek to 'save' third world women from detrimental colonial and development agendas. The overly divisive aspect of ecofeminism in dichotomizing between a "harmonious, timeless pre-colonial golden age and the destructive effects of capitalism and colonialism" (Leach and Green 1997:351) is dangerous in its presuppositions. As most of the premise of ecofeminism rests upon a critique of post-colonial, Western, externally-applied, harmful development practices versus traditional, indigenous, sustainable, eco- and women-friendly activities, some ecofeminist scholars effectively produce and maintain this binary, which is problematic on many levels. The dichotomy assumes a classless, un-stratified, un-changing environmental society prior to colonialism, essentially reducing the material aspects of people's changing gender and environmental relations, fundamentally misrepresenting crucial relationships between gender, ecology and colonial politics (Leach and Green 1997). As di Leonardo puts it,

"[S]imply too many 'primitive' women have been recorded as experiencing extreme exploitation and oppression at the hands of men in their own societies to lend credence to the argument that Western contact, colonialism, or capital penetration are alone responsible for all inegalitarian gender relations in foraging and horticultural societies" (1991:15).

While definitions of masculinity and femininity have been restructured as a result of colonial and capitalist dynamics, and ideologies of how men and women relate differently to economic and environment activities have been shifted, according to Leach, "the image of western thought and colonial science as monolithically wiping out other [traditional] views and knowledges" is problematic (2007:76). She indicates how this image "obscures the complex content and political-economic relations of production of colonial

and modern scientific discourses, and the processes through which they articulate with rural people's own" (76). Additionally, some ecofeminists make the mistake of viewing pre-colonial subsistence communities as isolated categories with no outside links via trade and commerce, a notion that has been proven false by post-colonial and globalization scholars.

Related to this argument is lambasting the notion of the 'woman as natural carer' of the environment. Amita Bavisakar demonstrates in her ethnography of the Bhil an instance where she observes an (woman) informant cutting down a living tree rather than collecting dead wood for fuel. She says that such deforestation is common and "part of a series of practices which tend to treat the forest as a given...[and].. resources seem to be used without any qualms about waste; there is no attempt at conserving for the future" (1995:148).

Lastly, another critique of ecofeminism has been that different categories of men are largely ignored in debates, almost as if women are posited against the White industrial man rather than various local male identities. Further, this also poses the problem of treating women and men as dichotomous, obscuring the various relations that exist among them. As Agarwal (1992) shows, in several conflict situations regarding the environment not only do women take oppositional stances to the men in their local communities, but the community as whole (composed of men and women) sometimes confront the industrial threat.

It is worth mentioning here that Niamh Moore (2008) brings attention to the fact that most anti-ecofeminists levy heavy criticism on all ecofeminist alike, not taking into consideration those ecofeminists who themselves critique the essentialist nature of this ideology. I have wherever possible tried to critically analyze those premises of ecofeminism that are essentialist, monolithic and simplistic in nature without falling into the essentialist trap of arguing that 'all' ecofeminists have the same ideologies. For instance, Merchant's (1980) analysis of the connection between women and nature is illuminating in its historical perspective. She shows that in premodern Europe the image of earth as a nurturing mother, deserving of respect, opposed the view of nature as wild, uncontrollable and violent, and thus sanctioning cultural control over it. With the advent of Scientific Revolution and market-oriented economies, she suggests that the latter image became prominent, further supporting the exploitation of nature and male dominance over women. Although this perspective does not deny the parallel subordination of women and the environment, it does not neglect the material aspects of this domination that is based on "economic advantage and political power" (Agarwal 1992:122).

### **New Approaches**

Despite critiques, ecofeminism has retained its salience and traces of its main arguments can be found influencing different schools of thought, such as feminist environmentalism (Agarwal 1995) and feminist political ecology (Rochelleau et al 1996). These approaches focus on the material

aspects of gender-environment relations, “drawing attention to the nature of gendered knowledge, questions of resource access and control, and the engagement between local struggles and more global issues” (Leach 2007:74). By proposing that women’s and men’s relationships with the environment emerges from “the social context of dynamic gender relations,” the notion of a preexisting ‘special,’ ‘natural,’ unchanging relation between women and the environment is effectively placed into question. But, as Seager proffers, what these approaches have in common with ecofeminism is

“a commitment to illuminating the ways in which gender, class, and race mediate people’s lived experiences in local environments; an interest in examining the ways in which human-environment perceptions and values may be mediated through “gendered” lenses and shaped by gender roles and assumptions; an interest in examining the gendered nature of the constellation of political, economic, and ecological power in institutions that are instrumental players in the state of the environment; and an interest in exploring the interconnectedness of systems of oppression and domination” (Seager 2003:950).

Similarly, Agarwal and other scholars have suggested feminist environmentalism as a perspective that grows from ecofeminism. She argues that the relationship between women and nature is already structured in a gendered way, rather than being ideologically constructed as one of the reasons for male (cultural) domination over women and nature, thus suggesting “that women’s and men’s relationship with nature needs to be understood as rooted in their material reality, in their specific forms of interaction with the environment” (1992:126). Therefore the point is not to debate whether nature is to culture as women is to men, but to ask: if women are the knowledge bearers of ecological practices, how can this be converted to better systems of conservation? In the JFM program, women were seen to be the knowledge bearers of ecological practices by policy planners from simple observations of their daily chores. The material, economic aspects of why they were the primary users of the environmental resources were not investigated. With better planning the program can perhaps successfully employ women to manage and protect forest resources without having to further question why women should be the targets, but this may overlook certain important aspects of the relationship between women, their environment, and their socio-cultural realities.

Kathi Wilson’s (2005) study of the First Nations People in Canada points toward interesting directions for contemporary ecofeminist discourse. Focusing on the biological and spiritual connections between land and Anishinabek women, as well as Anishinabek men, she observes that these linkages are very important to the community and that women celebrate their reproductive and fertility connections with Mother Earth. Though critics of ecofeminism might be

troubled with “the implications such essentialized and hierarchical connections have for women and other oppressed populations,” overlooking such connections may well be just as concerning (Wilson 2005:348). The question then is how to reconcile indigenous cultural beliefs about women’s connections with nature without falling into dichotomous traps that lead to their further oppression and exploitation. For instance, by misunderstanding women-nature links, environmental-development practitioners have more often than not placed the onus of conservation activities on women thereby increasing their already overburdened workload. Instead, what is required is critical engagement with the cultural and historical particularities of different communities, and a need to listen to their voices (Wilson 2005) in order to generate a more nuanced understanding of the women-nature correlation.

Within anthropology ecofeminism fell into disfavor almost immediately after its conception and has never quite recovered. While it is more accepted in fields such as geography, economy, women’s studies, environmental studies, international development and even theology, the absence of ecofeminist ideology in popular GAD literature, except as a critical analysis framework suggests a wariness of the gender essentialism that underlies the approaches of particular ecofeminists’. Feminist anthropologists are also cautious of the term “ecofeminism,” mindful of its dual and dichotomist implications (women and nature at one end and men and culture on the other). Rather, it is more useful to talk of feminist environmentalism and feminist political ecology. But as Moore (2008) reminds us, not all ecofeminism is essentialist, and ignoring aspects of it that is not, itself essentializes ecofeminism. Noel Sturgeon articulates this impasse by saying, “rather than see the recurrence of essentialist moments in development discourses on women being a part of an ongoing process of political struggle stimulated by feminist interventions, these scholars [Agarwal, Jackson, Leach and Rao] critique “ecofeminism” instead” (as cited in Moore 2008:471). While some anthropologists such as Anna Tsing (1997) and Tania Li (2002) have been able to move beyond critiquing ecofeminism’s ‘universalist, essentialist stance’ and engage further with different understandings of ‘woman’ (whether as ‘natural carer’ or not), as well as the environment and the politics of ecofeminism, there is more to be accomplished before the legacy of ecofeminism and the tidemarks it has left on feminist discourse can be accepted within anthropology, in order to shape contemporary GAD theories in a meaningful way.

Yet this problem of essentialism is one that has tremendous implications for feminist theory within anthropology. Recently, feminist scholars (Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison, Cecile Jackson, Ruth Pearson and Ann Whitehead among others) have indicated a need for reasserting gender’s engagement with natural resource development as a political project. By questioning why women (as a biologi-

cal category) are the primary users, managers and collectors of environmental resources to begin with. They suggest redefining and reclaiming the category 'woman' as a way of navigating threads of commonality and difference that run through gender analyses (Baden and Goetz 2005; Coles and Wallace 2005; Cornwall et. al. 2007; Jackson and Pearson 2005; Sardenberg 2007). Jackson and Pearson (2005) argue that although 'sex' has fallen out of favor with feminists, as a biological category it "crudely...frame[s] what women appear to have in common" (2005:5), while the cultural specificity accorded to women through gender differences presents itself as problematic by suggesting the absence of commonalities. They suggest that it is an important task to overcome this impasse by recognizing that despite being socially constructed, the existential experience of biological sex can prove meaningful to women (2005). "Recovering a female subject risks essentialism; [but] refusing a female subject risks erasing gender difference" (Jackson and Pearson 2005:8).

Perhaps, by conceptualizing the various meanings of 'gender' and 'women' as they are understood by women themselves, as well as development practitioners and researchers, an examination of women's relationship with the environment that avoids essentialisms, yet recognizes the existence of gender (biological) differences, may be within reach. Gayatri Spivak encapsulates this idea succinctly: "those who claim to be, or to speak for, 'women of the South' must also take care not to (mis) represent the diverse positions of different women, nor to collapse the complex multiple social identities of women into a simplistic notion of gender identity" (as cited in Jackson and Pearson 2005:7).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This was rather late since WID was already under heavy criticism by the 1980s.

<sup>2</sup> I conducted fieldwork in Jhabua in 2006 and 2010 for my Master's and Doctoral research respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Seasonal migrations have always been an integral part of Bhil society, but in the past two decades the number of community members migrating has increased exponentially, such that most households now have at least one member that migrates (Baviskar 1995).

<sup>4</sup> This was not a universal occurrence. In some villages the scheme worked, usually in the ones located closer to the town areas and on major roads.

<sup>5</sup> In tribal areas, usually women have more mobility compared to caste communities, therefore permission from the patriarch or head of the family (for instance, an elderly father who was too old to migrate) to go to markets would not pose as much of a problem as accessibility to markets. But in some caste communities this would be an added hindrance for women.

<sup>6</sup> see Rocheleau's (1988) work on women's groups in Kenya and her argument that they partook in conservation efforts in order to access famine relief food from organizations rather than for conservation purposes.

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# Women's Production: Annette Weiner and the Study of Gender in the Prehispanic New World

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Often the most productive cross-pollinations within anthropology happen accidentally, when the work of an anthropologist within one sub-discipline strikes a chord in the minds of those working in what we all too often consider a separate sub-discipline. Like the highly detailed cosmology described by an ethnographer or the deep time depth given to a modern cultural practice by an archaeologist—throughout the history of our discipline, we have found new and powerful interpretive inspiration in the work of other anthropologists who conducted fieldwork on the opposite side of the globe or in societies with radically different social structures.

The rich application of Annette Weiner's contributions to the study of prehistoric societies of the New World is a perfect example of the power of our discipline to generate not just cross-cultural analogies or comparisons, but to imagine and investigate invisible social processes of the past through the careful reading of well-documented ethnographic examples. Weiner's research and theoretical contributions established an entirely new perspective on gendered production and exchange in prehistory, and her ideas have shaped our current understanding of nearly all the prehistoric societies of the New World.

Weiner was a powerful advocate for archaeologists, biological anthropologists, and social-cultural anthropologists to speak to one another about the socially constructed nature of science and anthropological theory (Weiner 1995). Her work was also an important early contribution to the field of feminist studies, especially the analysis of variance and the ways in which certain women created structural systems of power and influence. In the 1970's, when male dominance was considered a cultural universal even by many feminists, Weiner's research revealed how the social capital that women produced was a central component of status enhancement in New Guinea (Weiner 1976, 1978, 1979). Today the study of variation and difference, and the intersections of gendered and other identities are core components of modern feminist research (Stockett and Geller 2006). Annette Weiner's documentation of the means by which the status of all members of a kinship group were tied to the economic production of certain female relatives demonstrated not only that women were not peripheral to systems of authority as previously described, but that domestic production was key to understanding the intersection of identities based on gender, age, kin, and wealth.

## Background and Biography

Dr. Annette Barbara Cohen Weiner (1933-1997) was

born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After high school she married and worked as an x-ray technician, eventually entering college when she was 31 years old. During her sophomore year she read *Stranger and Friend*, the autobiographical account of anthropological fieldwork by Hortense Powdermaker (1966), and became interested in anthropology.

In 1968 she received her B.A. in Anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania and in 1974 her doctorate from Bryn Mawr College. She is best known for her original and provocative studies in Oceania, many of which challenged earlier canonical publications by the renowned anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1922, 1929, 1935). Weiner revisited Malinowski's findings by articulating the important roles played by women in Trobriand society as well as the means by which gifts were ascribed value. In 1976, the University of Texas published her doctoral thesis as *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange*. She subsequently published a French translation of her doctoral thesis, *The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea* (1988), *Cloth and Human Experience* (1989), *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (1992), as well as numerous articles. Weiner conducted most of her ethnographic fieldwork from 1969 - 1991 in diverse regions that included Western Samoa, Bastrop County, Texas, Pakistan, Antigua, and Guatemala.

She began her academic career in 1973 as a visiting Assistant Professor at Franklin and Marshall College. In 1974 she took a position at the University of Texas, and she moved to New York University as Professor of Anthropology in 1981. In 1984, she assumed the title Krieger Distinguished Professor of Anthropology. She served as Chair of the Department of Anthropology at NYU, as Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and as President of the American Anthropological Association until her untimely death in 1997.

## Legacies

Annette Weiner made fundamental contributions to the study of gender through her exploration of the value of cloth and other goods produced by women in various societies of Oceania (1976, 1989, 1992). Reacting to earlier structuralist analyses of the societies of Oceania (by Malinowski and others) that described women's roles as ambiguous, and their meaning in society as defined by associations with fertility and pollution, Weiner documented the powerful ways in which women's production of the cloth used in ritual exchanges was central to the maintenance of status within kinship groups. The ranked lineages of the south Pacific rely upon ceremonial exchanges of goods at key moments in the life cycle such as marriages, funerals and inaugurations.

At these junctures, vast quantities of cloth made by female relatives are assembled for exchange in order to maintain the social relations established by the individual during his or her lifetime. Weiner was able to show that these circulations of cloth have profound political consequences that are rooted in the kinship obligations of sisters and brothers, obligations that do not change over the course of a lifetime and which constitute a mechanism for the maintenance of kinship groups.

She provides this example from her work in the Trobriand Islands: at a funeral, the sisters of the deceased member of their matrilineage dispense bundles of banana leaf cloth to members of other matrilineages who gave objects to the deceased during his or her lifetime (Weiner 1989:40). By doing this, Weiner argues, the women expose and reclaim for their own matrilineage “all that went into making the dead person more than they were at conception” (Weiner 1989:40). Cloth, because it is made in women’s homes and is ubiquitous, had been overlooked as a source of wealth that underwrote the political hierarchy. Weiner showed that a product made by women, alone and in small groups but not in any highly structured or controlled manner, was an “agent through which kinship identities are translated into political authority” (Weiner 1989:33).

Perhaps even more significant than the recovery of women’s key role in the maintenance of power relations in Oceania or the political importance of an ephemeral craft good, was Weiner’s development of a theory of “inalienable possessions.” In her studies of cloth circulation, Weiner noted that often older, special cloth was considered a treasure to be hidden away and protected from the gift exchanges that occurred on ritual occasions (Weiner 1989:35). The longer this cloth was safeguarded as an heirloom, the more power it accumulated from contact with ancestors and mythic beings of the past—as it transcended the lifetime of the maker, it transcended time and temporality. In its ability to transcend time, Weiner learned that this cloth became not only sacred but brought the immortal into the everyday. Thus it became a highly charged object that was not circulated or exchanged, and a challenge to the usual gift exchange system. Weiner came to call this the paradox of “keeping-while-giving,” and she considered it simultaneously a major social challenge as well as a key component in the renegotiation of kinship group status. Old cloth carried with it the history of past relationships, and inheritance of this precious material provided a connection to ancestors and thus older kin networks. These sorts of objects, which were taken out of circulation and whose primary value came from keeping them within the family, she called “inalienable possessions.”

Weiner’s model challenged earlier notions of reciprocity and gift exchange because she saw exchange as defined as much by what goods were held back as what was given. In the Trobriands and Samoa, women often made these

inalienable possessions, because they made cloth, and Weiner elucidated clearly how the ability of women to keep while giving was a position of power. This power extended not just within the household but primarily within the extended kinship group and thus women as producers of cloth were key to political and social negotiations between lineages. Cloth wealth, and its circulations or storage, marked the current state of relationships between members of a matrilineage to those people who are related primarily by spouses and fathers (Weiner 1989:55).

### **Contributions to Archaeology**

By looking at what was exchanged as well as what was not exchanged, Weiner’s focus was on production and how production enhances the status of the producer and her household (Mills 2000:337). Oceania happened to present a case where some of the most important social capital was ‘soft wealth,’ or cloth, made by women. Weiner’s work provided exquisite detail on the role of women as household producers and the social capital that resulted from this work. Production, especially at the household level, has always fascinated archaeologists and good artifactual evidence is often available for a variety of craft production activities at many sites. Too often in early studies craft production was assumed to be gendered male, or at least the production of politically and socially significant crafts was considered to be the work of men. As soft wealth, cloth has come to be understood as a primary medium for a range of significant social phenomena—as identity marker, currency, ritual tool, and in many other ways, cloth can materialize social values and knowledge. In many of the ethnographically known cultures of the New World, cloth was made primarily by women, and current models support its manufacture by women in pre-contact periods as well. Thus Weiner’s model for women’s production of politically and cosmologically charged cloth within a household context provided a powerful template for how to understand women’s production in other societies where cloth was known to be a significant social currency. Her perceptive analysis of ethnographic details within the context of women’s production activities left a profound legacy within the analysis of household economies, both modern and ancient.

Weiner was a student of archaeology early in her career and came to appreciate the way objects acquired a unique history, or biography (Myers and Kirsten-Gimlett 2001, Wright in press). In a candid interview on her ideas about art and material culture, Weiner followed up on an idea of Marcel Mauss (1954) that things retain some of the qualities or attributes of the person associated with them: “I don’t think something gets really, really valuable until it has a history, its own genealogy of famous lineages, famous kings, till it really represents not just me, but more than me” (Myers and Kirsten-Gimlett 2001:291). Rita Wright suggests that the perceptive elucidation of how objects accrue layers of value

may have been one of the greatest contributions to archaeology in the work of Annette Weiner (Wright in press). Layers of value are the result of the historical trajectories of material goods, as they circulate through society and through time. Weiner added a greater understanding of the importance of considering the accumulated experiences of objects, and their cultural age or density, when analyzing systems of exchange. This perspective acknowledges the agency of objects and the affect their biographies might have upon systems of circulation. For archaeologists who often encounter heirlooms, patched or mended artifacts, and objects that have been passed through many hands before their eventual deposition in the archaeological record, Weiner's documentation of not only object "density" but the means by which everyday objects accrue such significance within systems of social relations, was a revelation.

In a far from exhaustive review of publications by archeologists working on the pre-contact cultures of the New World, it is obvious that Annette Weiner's research has had a major influence upon the way craft production and especially women's production is conceptualized (see also Ardren 2007). In the Maya area where textile production by women continues to encode significant cultural values, Weiner's theories have been used by a number of scholars to model the social capital women weavers may have had during the Classic period. Julia Hendon draws a parallel between Weiner's research in Oceania and the Classic Maya as she notes women's labor was critical to the success of rituals, and rituals were a major source of status enhancement (Hendon 1997:45). Because the evidence suggests craft production was highly gendered in the pre-contact Maya area, Hendon concludes the value placed on cloth and other women's work led to social and economic complementarity between genders (Hendon 1997:45). Rosemary Joyce likewise felt Weiner's models were relevant for understanding the Classic Maya, especially women's control over the production of goods necessary for ritual and the status that resulted from this control. She notes that 16th century Spanish accounts of the Maya of Yucatan mention women engaged in household production of cloth and ceramics, and women are shown in these activities in small figurines from the Classic period (Joyce 1996:189). In a later work Joyce suggests these depictions were an opportunity to claim credit for the productive work of women by the house societies or kin networks to which they belonged (Joyce 2000:88). Joyce and Susan Gillespie drew on Weiner's observations about the gendered nature of households and household objects. Objects can be gendered for many reasons, including who produces them or wears and uses an item, but Weiner stated that cloth was gendered female because it is an impermanent good, like women who leave their house of origin at marriage (Weiner 1992:59, Gillespie and Joyce 1997:195).

Archaeologists have also utilized Weiner's work as an

example of the social life of things, or the ways in which objects and material culture have life cycles of production, use, exchange and abandonment. Prior to Arjun Appadurai's book of this title, Weiner stressed the active role of objects in creating social relationships and transforming social organization (Costin 1998:5). Ethnographic examples of the dynamic nature of material culture, how it shapes social interactions and responds to cultural change, have always been particularly useful to archaeologists as they attempt to reconstruct the social structures behind the material evidence of the past. Weiner's studies of cloth were exemplary in the nuanced understanding of how common objects, produced in every household by every woman, could assume such a range of different social values given their context of consumption. Likewise, Weiner documented the changes that occur in craft producers as a result of their involvement in the creative process. Artisans of highly charged media are affected by the cosmological significance of their creations, and while a few early Spanish accounts of New World cultures document a similar experience for artisans within Maya or Aztec society, Weiner's research suggested details of this transformative relationship that simply do not exist in ethnohistoric documents. Cathy Costin used Weiner's work to explore how crafting can become a central aspect in the social identity of artisans, and thus change how the artisan is perceived and valued within her household or kinship group (Costin 1998:7).

Annette Weiner's perceptive elucidation of the value of inalienable possessions, or the objects that are withheld from circulation even when a society enforces or expects exchange at every significant ritual juncture, was perhaps her greatest contribution to the field of anthropology as a whole. Her definition is worth quoting at length: "inalienable possessions are symbolic repositories of genealogies and historical events; their unique subjective identity gives them absolute value placing them above the exchangeability of one thing for another" (1995:33). While Weiner made it clear that inalienable possessions could be non-tangible, like land rights or ritual knowledge, her documentation of how common material objects could become so charged as to be guarded as treasures with textured layers of meaning has had particular relevance for archaeologists. John Clark (Clark 2007) has struggled with Weiner's definition of inalienable possessions and how it can best be integrated into the traditional concepts used by archaeologists of goods versus commodities. Many archaeologists have suggested the materials they excavate in unusual contexts may represent inalienable possessions of past cultures. Barbara Mills suggested that in the prehistoric Southwestern US, items produced in small quantities and passed on through lineages or religious societies enhanced the status of the producer and had to be ritually discarded rather than desecrated by profane use (Mills 2000:337). She considers that many of the objects found in burials and caches fall into the definition of inalienable possessions, based on their

presence in a context not associated with normal “use,” but rather with a depositional context that suggests an invocation of their symbolic connection to authority and power (Mills 2000:337).

Annette Weiner is rightly considered a tidemark theorist not only for her contributions to economic anthropology and studies of Oceania, but especially in light of her profound understanding of gender and women’s roles in the societies of Samoa and the Trobriands. In addition to recording the pivotal position of women in status enhancement rituals, Weiner was able to widen her perspective and identify the hidden side of gift exchange—the power of women to decide what is kept while giving. Her perception of the power and potential contained within the productive activities of women and their subsequent decisions about what to exchange and with whom in ritual contexts has enriched the entire field of anthropology and especially feminist studies. These ideas have proven especially useful for archaeologists of the New World, where productive activities were highly gendered and the crafts women made were central to ritual processes of cultural reproduction. Weiner herself would have embraced her admiration by archaeologists—in her presidential address to the American Anthropological Association in 1993, she called on anthropologists to “transcend the narrower objectives of all traditional core sub-disciplines to think about research areas that provide mutual and necessary interaction” across sub-disciplines, and the social sciences more broadly (Weiner 1995:17). Weiner’s work stands as a testament to the power of broadening our perspective to see the less visible members of society, the less visible social processes at work, and the less visible power structures that exist in every culture.

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## Report on the Zora Neale Hurston Travel Award

We are pleased to congratulate the following students, who each received grants for travel to the 2011 American Anthropological Meetings in Montreal.

**Erin Durbin-Albrecht**, University of Arizona

**Margie Serrato**, Texas A&M University

**Wendy Vogt**, University of Arizona

The Zora Neale Hurston Travel Award has been an AFA tradition since 2002. The award honors the contributions of pioneering African American anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston (visit the AFA website for further information on her contributions and accomplishments). Eligibility is restricted to students and recent PhDs focusing on issues of concern to feminist anthropology. Preference is given to individuals from underrepresented US groups. The winning awardees will be notified prior to the AAA meetings, but the awards will be formally announced and checks given out at the AFA business meeting held in conjunction with the AAA meetings. The winners of the 2012 awards will be announced in the next issue of *Voices*. See the AFA website to apply for the Hurston Travel Award.

# What Are We Missing? Expanding the Feminist Approach to Gender-Based Violence

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## Introduction

Anthropologists have long studied violence, in myriad forms<sup>1</sup>; and feminists have worked to prevent, understand, and theorize gender-based violence since the 1970s (Wies and Haldane 2011). So what have we achieved, and where do we go from here? While this article is not intended to be a comprehensive review of anthropology's engagement with gender-based violence, I would like to highlight some of the key tidemarks demonstrating the important role feminist anthropologists have played in developing this field of study, and then identify gaps in knowledge we might seek to fill in the future. I will build on the advice put forward in a previous issue of VOICES<sup>2</sup> by Louise Lamphere (2010:40) and Peggy Sanday (2010:41) who compel us to be mindful of how social beings are gendered within both local and international contexts; to acknowledge the physical bodies present in all acts of abuse; and to remain committed, as feminist anthropologists, to the possibilities of social and cultural change in this topical minefield. I add one suggestion here: if we pull our disciplinary sub-fields together, to produce a thicker exploration of gender-based violence, this may allow us to see the terrain before us with fresh eyes.

## Tidemarks: Early studies of gender-based violence

While anthropology came rather late to the topic of gender-based violence itself when compared to the other social sciences, anthropologists were recording the physical punishment of wives by husbands and acts of violence perpetrated against women or children early in the 20th century. As early as 1928 scholars<sup>3</sup> noted acts of violence that we may today characterize as domestic violence without labeling it as such. The topic of domestic violence was specifically addressed at a 1987 working session of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Oceania. The papers from the ASAO eventually became the 1990 special issue of *Pacific Studies*, edited by Dorothy Counts.

Counts' work laid the foundation for the language and method we needed to address the specific topic of domestic violence in our field. While Counts asserted that anthropologists may be hesitant to address the issue due to our investment in cultural relativism<sup>4</sup>, she also argued that anthropologists must study the issue if only because it is so widespread, and quite obviously has a negative impact on people's lives. Soon thereafter, feminist scholars Christina Toren, Victoria Burbank, Martha MacIntyre, Margaret Jolly, and Christine Bradley<sup>5</sup> addressed the topic of domestic violence while providing detailed accounts drawn from local perspectives. Their pioneering work has influenced a new generation of scholars,

who have moved from noting domestic violence in their fieldsites to centering it in their analyses.

Another major work was published in 1990, focusing on a different form of violence: sexual assault and rape. Peggy Sanday's 1990 book *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood and Privilege on Campus* was one of the first major anthropological studies to engage with sexual violence and explore forms of abuse against women "at home"—thus opening the door for U.S.-based scholars to examine their own local contexts of violence through an anthropological lens. Sanday's work simultaneously made sexual violence and U.S.-based research legitimate topics of study.

## Legacies of fragmentation

Following from the Counts and Sanday publications, feminist scholars engaged with violence across topics and continents. While a majority of publications within the field of gender-based violence focus on forms of abuse we categorize as domestic or sexual violence, feminist anthropologists expanded the field to include new theoretical models (structural violence, social suffering, and political economy) and forms of abuse which did not fit into the lexicon of violence between intimate partners or strangers (rape as a weapon of war, torture, political violence, and discrimination).

A new phase of research commenced with the publication of Sally Merry's 2006 book, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*, which has become the most influential text in the field. Merry, through her use of violence as a lens on human rights discourses and globalization, has cemented gender-based violence as an important field of study within feminist anthropology and beyond. What is notable about the framework of the book is the departure it takes from its predecessors. Merry's shift in focus and theoretical orientation explains why none of the foundational texts listed above make an appearance. First, it explicitly uses a deterritorialized ethnographic approach rather than focus on a particular place, though it draws heavily from a Pacific and Pacific Rim context; second, Merry uses gender-based violence to examine the discourse of human rights, rather than to study gender-based violence itself; and finally, there are no bodies. The attention is on language and process, rather than on the physicality of violence—a divorce of discourse from corporality. Merry's book signals a significant change in how scholars have come to deal with the topic of violence. It highlights the splintering of the discipline between those who approach violence as a medical issue, and those who situate it squarely in the political and/or legal realm. This is a splintering within

cultural anthropology, and thus attempts to converse with archaeology and biological anthropology have fallen short of the mark. While Merry's book opens up rich opportunities to explore how human rights discourses are put to work (or ignored) around issues of gender-based violence, this work does not attend to what Lamphere (2010) reminds us is central to our studies—to understand gendered bodies, and the processes and conditions of gendering social beings.

The pioneering feminist anthropologists who studied violence taught me something about the venerable anthropological lodestar: holism. They suggested something critical about how we might address the corporality of suffering and abuse and relate it to the policy directives that criminalize it. Of immediate concern to me is the way that we have separated domestic violence as a human rights issue in one specialization of the discipline, and a health issue in another. I agree with Shell-Duncan's point that if we treat a problem as a medical issue, we make the mistake of believing we can solve it with medicine (2008). To believe that domestic violence can only be addressed by attending to transnational discourses, "sites" that don't seem very situated, and abstracted women somehow divorced from the culturally-specific corporality of suffering, is probably not the only answer.

An additional impact of the more recent work in the field is the ways scholars operationalize the terms "gendered violence," "gender violence," "gender-based violence," and "violence against women" without much consistency or discussion as to whether or not the forms of violence are differentiated by degree or by kind. As feminists continue to engage with this topic, we need to address the usefulness of each term. My recent experience as a team consultant for the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Violence Against Women made clear the importance of precise language: we were explicitly informed to focus on acts of violence against women, both structural and interpersonal, but to avoid discussing any acts of aggression by women against men or children. How is this different from gender violence or gender-based violence?

### **Toward an integrated theorization of violence**

In my own research amongst front-line workers, I've found that workers do use precise language to describe the problems they encounter, and they also recognize the somatic and cultural damage caused by violence. Workers suggest that we cannot separate the clinical, physical and psychosocial needs of patients from their legal and economic needs, anymore than we can separate the victims' minds from their bodies. The workers seemed to believe that it all goes hand in hand. Scholars who identify as legal/political anthropologists, and those who identify as medical anthropologists, can mutually strengthen each other's understandings of the problem, and thereby come to more efficacious solutions<sup>6</sup>. Following from this, our intellectual concerns cannot be separated into those whose problems are medical (the victims) and those whose acts are criminal (the perpetrators). We have to try and

understand not only the experiences of those who are abused, but of those who perpetuate the abuse in the first place. And this leads us into territory that is fraught and uncomfortable for many feminist anthropologists.

One area we have been reluctant to engage is women's perpetration of violence. There are understandable reasons for this—research definitely demonstrates that women are the majority of victims of intimate partner violence and sexual assault, and that the majority of forms of structural violence are perpetrated by men. But anthropology has a longstanding interest in what we can learn from minority populations, and this may be just as true with gender-based violence as it is with kinship theory. Recent studies in psychology have found that nearly 33% of college age women report using physical violence on a male partner, as well as 68% of young women used some form of emotional abuse with their male partners (Leisring 2009). Why? And what do anthropologists have to say about this? When Jennifer Wies and I conducted the literature review for our book (2011), we found two ethnographies that stood out for their attempt to explain women's use of violence—Victoria Burbank's 1994 book on Aboriginal Australian women, and Holly Wardlow's continued work with the Huli in Papua New Guinea. While Burbank and Wardlow do not share a common theoretical orientation, they are both grappling with questions about how women are violent, and to what end. Workers in my studies have long identified women perpetrators, but are often quick to explain it away as aberrant behavior or an anomaly. We are far from understanding why men commit violence, and even further away from understanding why women do.

Yet, as Natalie Zemon Davis has argued (1973), that violence should not surprise us—that it is striking precisely because it is so normative—then all human violence must be considered anthropologically. There are anthropologists who attempt to explain why they believe men use violence against women. For example, human behavioral ecologists and evolutionary psychologists have long argued that the paternal disinvestment model explains why men abuse women, and attention must be paid to a dual reproductive strategy (Stieglitz et al 2011). While this may be antithetical to how feminist anthropologists often conceptualize the problem, at the very least we should be engaging, rather than dismissing, this line of inquiry. Counts' collection was at least entertaining possible reasons for why things happen. When I argue we need to rethink the way we approach violence studies, I believe we have to identify why we think the problem exists. If our theorizing to date amounts to descriptive accounts of social processes, we are no closer to preventing abuse now than when the anti-violence movement began 40 years ago. We've either reduced abuse to a reproductive strategy, or medicalized the problem into a humanitarian corner (Ticktin 2011).

Anthropology should consider a return to grand theory, of asking the why rather than just describing the how. This

is not reductionist, nor is it positivist. It is feminism at its finest, when we seek to identify the causes of social ills and seek solutions to remedy it<sup>7</sup>. We can imagine alternatives to the present social and political order. We go through periods in our discipline of fragmentation and synthesis, and this seems to also happen in the ways we address and categorize the abuse far too many people experience across the world. And since we are, to paraphrase Veena Das, in the middle of something that is not settled<sup>8</sup>, i.e. we haven't come close to "answering" the violence question, Das claims we don't have to have things fully understood to still be successful. Our journey together will make for some imagined alternative.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Wies and Haldane's *Ethnographic Notes from the Front Lines of Gender-Based Violence* for a more comprehensive literature review on anthropology's engagement with violence. Also, numerous Annual Review of Anthropology articles have focused on forms of violence: Phillip Walker's 2001 piece on bioarchaeology and violence; Veena Das' 2008 work on gender and violence, Jill Korbin's 2003 focus on children and violence, and Carole Nagengast's 1994 piece on the state and violence are a few of the outstanding reviews of anthropology's exploration of violence in its past and present forms.

<sup>2</sup> The Fall 2010 issue of VOICES is a critical contribution for understanding feminist engagement with the topic of sexual abuse and sexual violence as forms of gender-based violence, providing ethnographic accounts of women and children's experiences.

<sup>3</sup> As early as 1928, Margaret Mead, in writing about one young woman in a Samoan village noted that "she had been married at sixteen and against her will to a man much older than herself who had beaten her for her childish ways". Much later, Marshall Sahlins, wrote in 1962 that "most men maintain the prerogative of giving their wives a sound beratement or occasionally a good beating" in his work in Fiji (Sahlins 1962:116). Sahlins also noted violence between women over a sexual indiscretion. In 1976 Andrew Arno published a piece detailing one man who physically forced himself on a woman and beat another, and Jill Korbin's work as early as 1981 focused on child abuse in Hawai'i.

<sup>4</sup> See Sanday (2010) for her nuanced argument on cultural relativism and suffering.

<sup>5</sup> See Bradley (1994), Burbank (1994), Jolly (1996), MacIntyre (2000) and Toren (1994) for some of the earlier disciplinary pieces on addressing forms of violence against women.

<sup>6</sup> Nia Parson's forthcoming book *Traumatic States: Gendered Violence, Suffering and Care in Chile* (Vanderbilt University Press) marries political and medical anthropological analysis, mirroring the way frontline workers view the problem.

<sup>7</sup> Recent publications like *Creating Consilience: Integrating the Sciences and the Humanities*, call for a "vertically integrated" approach for the study of culture and human behavior, but lack a feminist analysis.

<sup>8</sup> Veena Das' comments from the 2011 American Anthropological Association annual meetings in Montreal, Canada. Das served as discussant for the panel "Beyond the Body Proper: Biopolitics and Biocontingencies" Thursday November 19, 2011.

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# Feminist Anthropology for the Publics: Tidemarks, Legacies, and Futures

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As this special issue illustrates, across the subdisciplines of anthropology, feminist theorists and practitioners have interrogated the construction of gender and the roles of women within society. A clear theme throughout the selections in this issue is that feminist anthropologists have forcefully engaged issues of critical public concern. In this piece, I explore the legacies of feminist anthropologists who, inspired by public sentiment and issues, produced anthropology for the public. Using selected tidemarks and a historical perspective, I illuminate important similarities in this history, differences in approaches and issues, and the creativity of feminist anthropologists' outreach efforts to the public. The legacies of these tidemark pieces prompt us to consider the future of feminist anthropology.

## Tidemarks and Legacies

The first tidemark piece I selected is one that is familiar to many social scientists and is widely recognized as a tidemark in feminist anthropology: *The Family* (1906), by Elsie Clews Parsons. Reprinted multiple times, *The Family* is drawn from a series of lectures Parsons delivered at Barnard College (Lamphere 1989). In the text, Parsons questioned U.S. middle-class society's emphasis on woman-as-mother/wife and argued for women's equal inclusion in the public sphere—especially in the political sphere, which at the time was dominated by males (and included her spouse, United States Representative Herbert Parsons). In this text, she proposed the idea of “trial marriages” that would allow couples to experiment with their relationships in a semi-permanent state to ascertain their suitability for lifelong partnerships. She also advocated for the availability of birth control that would allow for new possibilities for family life (Deacon 1997).

In her era, Parsons' ideas and advocacy outlined in *The Family* were radical, new, exciting, and controversial (and indeed, remain controversial today). However, it is in the title and presentation of the material that I find Parsons' greatest legacy for feminist anthropology. Originally published as *The Family: An Ethnographical and Historical Outline with Descriptive Notes, Planned as a Text-Book for the Use of College Lecturers and of Directors of Home-Reading Clubs*, Parsons deliberately set out to write this text for women to use as a tool for community-building with other middle-class women (who were also wives and likely mothers). In the preface to the first edition, she states:

“Unfortunately, in many parts of our country, a college education is not yet considered as necessary or as desirable for young women as for young men. The supporters of the arguments that the place for girls is exclusively in the home must take their stand on the ground that the home education given to girls of college age, seventeen to twenty-one, is, or may be, su-

perior to academic education (*plus home education*), *i.e.*, it more adequately trains the girl for her future life. Perhaps this text-book will prove a useful guide for the *intelligent* mothers who hold this view of the value of home-training and who, *single-handed*, undertake the responsibility of fitting their daughters for useful and joyous womanhood.” (Parsons 1906:x, emphasis original)

In this statement, Parsons laments that college education is often withheld from young women<sup>1</sup>. She argues that educating girls and young women provides an opportunity for them to live “useful and joyous” lives. Furthermore, in this introductory proclamation, Parsons explicitly states that her text is designed to advance the education of girls and young women and provide support to the mothers who wish to educate their female children. She writes a text that is both about the women for whom she is writing, as well as calling upon those women to reconsider the public-domestic divisions in U.S. society as the status quo. By writing directly to “directors of home-reading clubs” operating in the domestic sphere, Parsons pursues an explicit goal of connecting with a public audience, establishing an important legacy for anthropologists and feminist anthropologists alike.

Decades later, we find feminist anthropologists engaging a dramatically different public. In 1943, Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish co-authored a rarely-discussed pamphlet entitled “The Races of Mankind.” Written for U.S. troops, Public Affairs Pamphlet #85 outlined evidence to counter a public racist belief system and discourse. The authors connect their argument to the cause at hand, saying that “thirty-seven nations are now united in a common cause, victory over Axis aggression, the military destruction of fascism,” and that this unified force included “the most different physical types of men” (Benedict and Weltfish 1943:1). These different types of men, they demonstrate through straightforward language and engaging cartoon drawings, are of the same race of humans that are fundamentally equal with each other.

While this piece is explicitly advancing tolerance for racial and ethnic diversity, a seemingly minor graphic on page 19 (see Figure 1) speaks to the legacy of these two feminist anthropologists. In this surrounding section, Benedict and Weltfish describes that intelligence is determined by a person's environment including “income, education, cultural advantages, and other opportunities” (Benedict and Weltfish 1943:18). As proof, they present the example



Figure 1

that “Southern Whites” scored lower than “Northern Negroes” on the IQ tests administered by the American Expeditionary Force in World War I. To demonstrate their point further, a cartoon attributed to Weltfish showing five children is included in the text. In the center sits a child whose hue is meant to indicate African descent, and below her is the caption, “Susie Brown knows all the answers.”

The drawing of Susie Brown is an important legacy for feminist anthropology. In a pamphlet crafted for male troops, it would have been easy, perhaps even more appropriate, to portray the “smartest child” in the room as a male. However, the authors selected to portray the child as a girl, illustrating a creative, subtle, and persistent approach to advocating for the equality of women and girls. While we will never know the effect this image may have had on the GIs who received the pamphlet, it serves as an example of consciousness and persistence in pursuing a cultural shift towards gender- and racial- equity. Indeed, this legacy laid the groundwork for an intersectionality framework that integrates the multiple positionalities a person holds.

Shortly after this work by Benedict and Weltfish, the field of anthropology shifted into a value-explicit stage, wherein “anthropologists began to take responsibility for problem solution” (van Willigen 1993). Dominating this era is the very public work of Margaret Mead, whose writings appeared in popular news outlets and magazines, complementing her public appearances in congressional hearings and on the television. The piece I include here is a 1962 Redbook Magazine piece entitled, “Is College Wasted on Women?” The article responds to what Mead identifies as an “anti-education of women” sentiment that creeps into the minds of people in the United States. She explores the various cultural influences that reduce support for women’s higher education, and specifically identifies additional challenges for women who are mothers, since motherhood is not seen as a profession that requires postsecondary education.

In response to statements against women’s pursuit of a college degree, she rebukes:

“Implicit in these biased arguments are several very odd assumptions about college, and about marriage as well. One is that a college education is only a preparation for a “career.” Another is that marriage is not a career!” (Mead 1962:6)

Mead’s answer to the questions of whether college is wasted on women is a firm “no.” In this one-page article, Mead addresses the public outcry over the trend for women to obtain a college education. Mead emerges as a strong supporter for women’s pursuit of higher education and goes on to support her argument by stating:

“In giving a woman a chance to become a more complete human being, a college education also gives her a chance to become a more complete mother... And when her family is grown and there is time, the college education with which she began her adult life makes it possible for her to continue that life with dignity and self-respect.” (Mead 1962:6)

In this piece, the legacy is the presence of Mead’s human-

ity as an anthropologist. In her rebuttal to these assumptions about the appropriateness of women’s higher education, Mead shows that she is operating between her anthropological positionality and her role as an inspiration for the women’s movement. Mead’s support of women obtaining college degrees rests largely on a framework that supports a woman-as-mother normative. In her logic, she invokes the cultural tone of her era and does not suggest something as radical that women pursue college degrees to obtain a career in the public sphere. She is influenced by the cultural norms of her time by drawing upon a model of woman-as-mother to justify her argument.

Thus, there is another legacy in this piece, supportive of Mead’s approach in this article. By incorporating the gendered norms of the era, she meets *her* public in *their* cultural context. She does not distance herself from the commonalities she shares with the public identities around her, which can become a message of blame and condescension. Rather, Mead draws from the cultural tools at hand to make her argument for the advanced education of women.

I turn now to a piece published in the Village Voice in 1992, Micaela di Leonardo’s “Black Myths, White Lies: Rape, Race, and the Black Underclass.” In this piece, di Leonardo connects her own experience as a woman in what she presents as an “autobiographical holographic image” with the tenets of anthropology and addresses an issue experienced by a significant proportion of women around the world: sexual violence (di Leonardo 1992:27). Though her primary argument is the deconstruction of a racist political-economic structure, the poignancy of gender is visceral. Her description of the rape of a woman and the professor’s wife who fears her children will be beaten by her husband reminds the reader that the experience of being a woman is about living as one statistic or another- victim of rape, black woman, white woman, wife, mother, or simply *woman*.

In her piece, readers are introduced to anthropology as a discipline that helps us to explain and recognize the ways that individual women negotiate their identity *as* statistics, because women are *more* than statistics. By divulging her own experiences, she brings to light the ways that women situate their experiences within webs of statistics and frameworks. And in telling her story, she calls upon students, colleagues, and friends to use their own experiences to dismantle racist, classist, and sexist ideologies of “the way things are supposed to be.” Women are positioned to call upon their own experiences because the statistics that are written on the bodies of women and girls influence our experiences, and those experiences are shaped by the political economy of our time. As di Leonardo says, “All of these “statistical patterns” and “economic forces” are the results of hundreds of thousands of *intentional* decision over time” (di Leonardo 1992:33). She leverages her own experience with sexual violence to illustrate the structural violence, “the public policy” that “coddles whites and squeezes minorities” (di Leonardo 1992:36).

Since 2001, feminist anthropologists have engaged the public with increased frequency and in exciting new ways. For example, responding to public accusations that the

dismissal of California's Proposition 8<sup>2</sup> furthers "unnatural marriage," Srimati Basu's 2010 article at the Ms. Magazine website entitled "Marriage: Unnatural in Every Way" argues adamantly for the deconstruction of the word "unnatural" by pointing out the diversity of cultural trends related to marriage. Marriage, she argues, is a "cultural phenomenon," situated in "particular times and places" that is found in a variety of forms across cultures and through time. Focusing on cultural systems of economics, politics, and kinship, Basu challenges readers: "Let's not dispute that "unnatural" might just describe every sort of marriage, not just same-gender ones." Basu brings the ideas of Edmund Leach and Claude Levi-Strauss to the readers of Ms. Magazine in a way that connects the discipline with the issues that are important to women and girls- marriage equality. Reminiscent of Parsons' *The Family* in content and Mead's approach of meeting the public in informal, popular venues, Basu's piece is an excellent example of how feminist anthropologists are blending the theoretical history of anthropology with contemporary, high-profile issues.

### Tidemarks, Legacies, and Futures

Taking a historical perspective, these tidemarks illustrate that feminist anthropology has been an anthropology inspired by and shared with the public. Using selected examples, I have considered the ideologies of gender and women that feminist anthropologists have delivered to the public and the sociopolitical context influencing these works. In addition, this piece has highlighted the variety of delivery mechanisms that feminist anthropologists have selected for reaching out to the public.

One influential legacy is the reminder that we have opportunities to advance agendas for social equality in public venues. Speaking directly to a public audience, in Clews Parson's case, the women who she is both speaking of and to are incorporated in her writings. She imagines a more gender equitable world and speaks directly to the women around her who she identifies as change agents. Taking a radically different approach, the Benedict and Weltfish cartoon reminds us that we have the opportunity to be deliberate in our choices of how we present culture by inserting a gendered message into an otherwise race-centered pamphlet.

A second legacy in this history is the revelation that we are cultural objects with our own human experiences. Both Mead and di Leonardo draw upon the experiences of women living in a distinct sociopolitical context. By incorporating, rather than condemning, the lifeways of the majority of her readers, Mead's humanity is revealed in her acceptance of the public and private dichotomous spheres. In di Leonardo's piece, she confronts her own enculturation with regards to race, class, and gender when she analyzes her reactions, fears, and worldview in the aftermath of her victimization. In her analysis, she recognizes the ease with which we can be influenced by our culture of bigotry and "isms." Importantly, di Leonardo shows how we can engage anthropology to deter people- even ourselves- from using erroneous cultural scripts to explain injustice and wrongdoings.

New technologies of dissemination create venues for

access to feminist anthropology as well as allow feminist anthropologists to creatively present our interpretations of the world to various publics through diverse formats. As Basu's piece shows, this trend has the possibility of expanding our public audiences and prompts us to demonstrate the anthropological intersections of our quotidian worlds.

I believe that feminist anthropology has been consistently created as an anthropology by the public and for the public. Encouraged by the feminist anthropology tidemarks here, we are charged with shaping the future of feminist anthropology as publicly useful and available. Indeed, as we draw our inspirations from our publics, it is our efforts to make the tidemarks and legacies a part of our future that create new tidemarks and serves as our legacy for feminist anthropology.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Parsons was primarily concerned with education of young, middle-class white women.

<sup>2</sup> Proposition 8 is a reference to the 2008 ballot initiative title, Eliminates Rights of Same-Sex Couples to Marry. The ballot proposition and constitutional amendment passed and added a new provision to the California Constitution that legally recognized marriage could only occur between a man and woman.

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Figure 1: "Susie Brown knows all the answers."