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Matrix: a Journal for Matricultural Studies

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March of defenders of Ukraine on Independence Day, 24 August 2020.

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About *Matrix*

Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies (Matrix) is an open-access, peer-reviewed and refereed scholarly journal published by the International Network for Training, Education, and Research on Culture (Network on Culture), Canada. *Matrix* is published online twice yearly (Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer).

Matrix is a new journal in the humanities and social sciences, founded to provide an interdisciplinary forum for those who are working from the theoretical stance of matriculture as a Geertzian cultural system. Matriculture refers to the cultural system that brings together all cultural aspects informing the lives of mothers, usually women, of a given society, and by extension, the lives of women. Talking about matricultural systems allows us to consider as primary the cultural context of a given society as perceived, constructed, and lived by its women.

Similar to other cultural systems such as art, religion, or mathematics, employing the heuristic of matriculture allows for, among other things: cross-cultural comparisons; fresh insights into the social roles of women, men, otherwise identified, children, and the entire community of humans, animals, and the environment; and/or renewed understandings of historically mis-labelled cultures. With Guédon's work in mind, then, and based on Geertzian principles, the concept of matriculture is both a model of reality by rendering the structure of matricultures apprehensible and a model for reality, where psychological relationships are organized under its guidance.

We encourage submissions from scholars around the world who are ready to take a new look at the ways in which people - historically and currently - have organized meaningful relationships amongst themselves and with the natural environment, the myths, customs, and laws which support these relationships, and the ways in which researchers have documented and perhaps mis-labeled the matricultures they have encountered.

For more information about *Matrix*, visit our website at <https://www.networkonculture.ca/activities/matrix>

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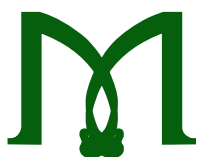
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Introduction

(English)

LINNÉA ROWLATT, PhD

“War,” says Éomer to his sister Éowyn in the blockbuster film *The Return of the King*, “is the province of men.” Éowyn’s subsequent trajectory as killer of the Witch-King of Angmar contradicts his assertion, but since Éowyn is the only woman fighting on the Fields of Pellenor (and she fights disguised as a man), Éomer’s assertion bears investigation. While it is a frivolous example from Western popular culture, Éomer’s gendered stereotyping of war-making men and (by implication) peace-making women nevertheless has deep cultural roots in societies around the world and extends beyond warfare and peacemaking to touch upon the very nature of femininity and masculinity. This issue of *Matrix* pushes beyond gendered stereotyping into a challenging examination of the institutions and customs of matriculture by exploring a variety of situations in which the matricultural system either was weakened or became stronger as a consequence of warfare, and one in which a strong matriculture has contributed towards building peace.

So deeply entrenched are gender stereotypes, however, that societies where women also go to war or men provide childcare are held to be aberrations, if not unrealistic fantasies. For many, somehow, the very meaning of *woman* incorporates peacefulness, even passivity and submission, and the essential meaning of *man* has come to incorporate war, violence, and aggression. The significance of these stereotypes extends beyond social behaviour into intangible culture, where they anchor root principles whereby masculinity and femininity are identified through aggression and passivity, respectively.



Proponents of biological determinism accept these gender stereotypes without contention, arguing that biology is destiny and that men are physically built – brain and body -- to be violent and warlike, while women are physically built to be peaceful nurturers. Whether the differing gender-based characteristics are attributed to male genes, hormones (testosterone in particular), greater average size and muscle mass, or brain structure, or to women's role in reproduction and childcare, women participating in warfare (or men caring for children) is considered to be odd, if not unnatural. Whether support is claimed from Scripture, Confucianism, tradition, or elsewhere, the strength of these opinions is considerable and persistent.

It is worth noting that biological determinist views are not restricted to proponents of patriarchal social systems. This type of gender essentialism is supported by many people of both sexes, including those espousing feminist philosophies such as *difference feminism*. This last posits that women's greater experience with birthgiving and related activities such as childcare, interpersonal nurturing, and social connections is the basis of what they regard as women's more peaceful natures. Those who accept this analysis turn to women to bring peace, to bring peace, on the assumption that our womanly nature gives us an advantage over men's efforts.

The social consequences of aggression being defined as masculine and passivity as feminine are many; aggressors need victims. Statistics concerning domestic violence or incidence of rape reveal the vast and regular extent to which masculine aggression is enacted on women's bodies, to the detriment of all. The social implications of promoting aggression and warfare as central to masculine identity go far beyond violence towards women, however. They may include an idealization of competition (with corresponding degrees of insecurity, because only one man can be at the top), higher levels of intra-male violence and death, and, collectively, an acceptance of warfare as meaningful.

Women also suffer as a result of believing that our bodies mean we are essentially more peaceful, passive humans. Whether it is accepted voluntarily or practised as a survival strategy, behaviour that is excessively docile, submissive, or cooperative may indicate an inner repression of identity and/or agency, as well as a silent acceptance of masculine violence and aggression. Women who adopt hyper-femininity, or strict adherence to stereotypically feminine behaviour, may be inclined to go further, policing the femininity of other women or sabotaging them in order to gain masculine attention and recognition. A limited, stereotypical definition of womanliness often explicitly corresponds to a definition of manhood as inherently aggressive and violent, no matter how toxic, dysfunctional, or destructive of individual growth such a definition may prove.

Observing through a matricultural heuristic, however, we begin to notice a different rubric ordering gender relationships in warfare and peacemaking. That is, women's regular access to a wide range of social roles is correlated with a breakdown of the

culturally accepted link between passivity, nurturing, and biologically female bodies, as well as the link between aggression, warfare, and biologically male bodies. In societies with strong matricultures, both women and men are generally freer to explore the fullness of human experience, regardless of their gender. As well as offering men more opportunities to display cooperative, nurturing behaviour, this freedom may include women exercising military and political authority over men.¹

Daniel Iweze and Umasom Amos introduce two precolonial African queens, both of whom won renown and respect for their military capacities. In their article 'Matriarchs in African Societies: Examining the Roles of Queen Amina of Zazzau and Queen Idia in State and Empire Building in Precolonial Nigeria,' Iweze and Amos include mention of several economic and political leadership positions available to women, such as market leader or member of the council of kingmakers. Women's access to military, economic, and politically powerful social roles was sharply curtailed by colonialism; the character of the resulting patriarchal colonial society persists until today, despite Nigeria's achievement of independence from the British in 1960. Iweze and Amos demonstrate that social opportunities available to women-- and, consequently, their status-- may be eroded in any society when cultural constraints are laid upon women's gender roles and the very meaning of *womanhood*.

This is not to say that military aggression by an external power inevitably results in the suppression of a matriculture. Tigray's strong matriculture has been under attack since 2020, when armed forces from southern Ethiopia and Eritrea to the north attempted to occupy the area. As Francesca Baldwin recounts, many war crimes were committed, including a failed attempt to destroy Tigray culture using rape, sexual slavery, gang rape, mutilation, deliberate HIV infections, forced pregnancy and sexual assault as weapons of war. To quote directly from her article, "Although Tigrayan society largely adheres to fixed gender norms and expectations of female behaviour, Tigrayan women are integral to social cohesion as community leaders and upholding standards of morality, representing the essence of being Tigrayan."² Baldwin relates how, with a powerful matriculture grounding their action, women in the Tigray diaspora are leading collective organizing not only against the war but also against sexual and gender-based violence in their community. Although Tigrayan matriculture has been under assault in the homelands, the focused attack on them *as women* inspired women refugees and emigrants living outside those territories to exercise political leadership in ways which traditional expectations had held in check. Tigrayan men have been vocally and visibly supportive of Tigrayan women's activism, which inspires hope that the Tigrayan matriculture, although attacked, will develop even more powerfully in that society.

1 See Frederique Darragon, 'Contemporary Husband-less Societies and Ancient Queendoms in the Sino-Tibetan Marches,' *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 1:1 (2021), 118-51. Available online at <https://www.networkonculture.ca/activities/matrix/issues/vol2_iss1>.

2 See Baldwin, this issue, 32-59.

It is clear, then, that as women challenge restrictive gender roles and exercise greater agency in a society, the cultural meaning of *woman* grows to embrace a wider range of human experience than allowed for by biological determinism. Matthew Cerjak's research note 'This Must Be Done By Mothers Alone: Research Notes on the Expansion of Women's Agency During the Croatian Homeland War' provides some preliminary explorations which illuminate this process in late twentieth-century Croatia. In an organic manner, Croatian women organized collectively in an attempt to prevent the war; when those efforts failed, they joined the national defence as soldiers (meanwhile suffering rape and other sex-based war crimes). After the war, they leveraged the social capital they had gained from serving in the military and enduring criminal attacks to achieve greater political representation. Croatian women's initial organizing efforts won approval and widespread engagement thanks to a grounding in traditionally feminine gender roles of caring for the family. When – despite opposition – some women entered military service, their participation eventually was recognized as essential to the successful defence of their country. Working with the networks and associations formed before war was inflicted, women effectively parlayed this recognition and the suffering they had endured into a significantly higher participation of women in the Croatian Parliament.

Leveraging military service to achieve greater political consequence has not been a strategy unique to Croatian women. A well-known example is that of the British suffragettes, whose service to their country won a limited franchise for women after World War I. Less well known is the story of Nanyehi, a Cherokee *Ghigau*, or Beloved Woman, whose military valour was recognized with a position in negotiations with Euro-American settlers. Matthew Cerjak's article "'The Women Must Hear Our Words: Nanyehi's Negotiations' explores the cultural contexts of two very different societies, one with a strict patriarchy and one with a flourishing matriculture. His description of the gender balance at the heart of the Cherokee worldview is a startling contrast with the patriarchal hierarchy found among the Euro-American settlers.

A similar gender balance is displayed in the Tlingit worldview. *Matrix* is pleased to reprint John Swanton's ethnographic work on the Tlingit sacred peace dance, accompanied by some introductory remarks from Marie-Françoise Guédon. Guédon draws on ethnography from Frederica de Laguna to contextualize Swanton's descriptive work, noting that cultural divisions among the Tlingit relate more powerfully to one's position as an aristocrat or a commoner, rather than to distinctions between women and men. That is, the social roles which someone is entitled to occupy are allotted primarily according to social status, not gender; in the ceremonies which establish peace after warfare, noble women and noble men act with equal authority and occupy equivalent roles.

In her contribution 'The New Ideology of 'Eternal War' in Archaeology. Critical Reflections on Early History,' Heide Goettner-Abendroth declares that contemporary archaeologists

are severely hampered in their ability to interpret findings accurately, as a result of their enculturation to patriarchal biological determinism and the related extrapolation that, since men are inherently violent and warlike today, men have always been warlike, and stable, peaceful societies have never existed. This intellectual bias, writes Goettner-Abendroth, leads archaeologists to assume that warfare is the only explanation for several sites with multiple graves, when there is stronger evidence that these mass graves are sites of reburial ceremonies conducted by peaceful communities.

The fact that the stereotypes of male aggressor / female victim are not integral to 'human nature' was confirmed more than forty years ago when, in 1981, Peggy Reeves Sanday discovered that societies where men are enculturated to respect women and the sanctity of life – in other words, societies with strong matricultures - have a much lower incidence of rape than those societies under the sway of an ideology of male dominance.³ As well as offering men greater opportunities to show their cooperative and peaceful natures, societies with strong matriculture also do not define women exclusively as subordinates or victims. As long as lethal intergroup violence (as Joshua Goldstein defines war) continues to exist, it is worth remembering that there are and have been societies where women are not excluded from participating in war (both in defence and offensively) nor from the opportunities and social status such participation brings.

We're pleased to include two book reviews in this issue: the first, Aubrey Lauersdorf's review of Alejandra Dubcovsky's *Talking Back: Native Women and the Making of the Early South* (Yale University Press, 2023), focuses on Dubcovsky's skill at navigating an unsympathetic archive to identify and describe Indigenous women's lives in the context of their own societies as these societies faced Spanish colonization. As Lauersdorf notes, Dubcovsky incorporates not only material from a Spanish archive but also the results of archaeological research, Indigenous myths and stories, and Timucua language materials to develop a clear portrait of Timucua women's lives during a tumultuous period.

Our second book review is Marie-Françoise Guédon's extensive review of *The Darker Angels of Our Nature: Refuting the Pinker Theory of History and Violence* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), an anthology of seventeen chapters edited by Philip Dwyer and Marc Micale which is itself a response to Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* (Viking Books, 2011). Why review a book which is essentially a review of another book? Guédon reasons that "social violence is an essential theme in women's lives and we need to know how violence is perceived, explained, and engaged in our world..."⁴ Three of Guédon's conclusions are of specific interest to the study of matriculture: (1) that *The Darker Angels* emphasizes the need to base research in the

3 See Peggy Reeves Sanday, 'The Socio-Cultural Context of Rape: A Cross-Cultural Study,' reprinted in *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 1:1 (2020), 31-46. Available online at https://www.networkonculture.ca/activities/matrix/issues/vol1_iss1.

4 See Guédon, this issue, 139-73.

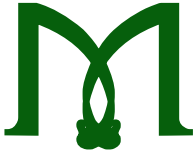
human sciences on observation rather than theoretical assumptions; (2) that interpreting violence as a process rather than an event promotes consideration of context and consequences; and, most importantly, (3) that the invisibility of violence, and even more of systemic violence, should warn us that progress in social well-being depends in large part on making violence visible.

These articles, book reviews, and the research note all contribute towards making the context and consequences of warfare and violence visible to readers. Several authors in this issue acknowledge women's active participation in the processes of warfare and peacemaking, highlighting the agency of women in historical and contemporary societies when a strong matriculture permits it. This creates knowledge about conflict and the resolution thereof which is more reliable because it includes the changing developments of cultural systems. By explicitly moving beyond biological determinism when considering warfare and peacemaking among matricultures, these articles, indeed this journal, contributes to developing stronger matricultures in the global context.

Many thanks for the contributions of Thomas Lips and Nicole Lacroix to translations in this issue. Thank you also to Stanislav Nepochatov for his photograph of a Defender of Ukraine on the Independence Day March of 2020, placed on the cover of this issue.

Enjoy the issue!

Linnéa Rowlatt
April 2024



Introduction

(français)

LINNÉA ROWLATT, PhD

« La guerre », dit Éomer à sa sœur Éowyn dans le film à succès *Le Retour du roi*, « est le domaine des hommes. » La trajectoire ultérieure d'Éowyn en tant que tueuse du Roi-Sorcier d'Angmar contredit son affirmation, mais comme Éowyn est la seule femme à combattre sur les Champs de Pellenor (et qu'elle se bat déguisée en homme), l'affirmation d'Éomer mérite d'être examinée. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'un exemple frivole tiré de la culture populaire occidentale, les stéréotypes sexistes d'Éomer sur les hommes qui font la guerre et (implicitement) les femmes qui font la paix ont néanmoins des racines culturelles profondes dans les sociétés du monde entier et vont au-delà de la guerre et du rétablissement de la paix pour toucher à la nature même de la féminité et de la masculinité. Ce numéro de *Matrix* va au-delà des stéréotypes sexistes et propose un examen stimulant des institutions et des coutumes de la matriculture, en explorant diverses situations dans lesquelles le système culturel a été affaibli ou s'est renforcé à la suite d'une guerre, ainsi qu'une situation dans laquelle une matriculture forte a contribué à la construction de la paix.

Cependant, les stéréotypes de genre sont si profondément ancrés que les sociétés dans lesquelles les femmes partent également à la guerre ou où les hommes s'occupent des enfants sont considérées comme des aberrations, voire des fantasmes irréalistes. Pour beaucoup, d'une manière ou d'une autre, le sens même de la femme intègre la paix, voire la passivité et la soumission, et le sens essentiel de l'homme en est venu à incorporer la guerre, la violence et l'agression. L'importance de ces stéréotypes s'étend au-delà du comportement social jusqu'à la culture immatériel, où ils ancrent les principes



fondamentaux selon lesquels la masculinité et la féminité sont identifiées respectivement par l'agressivité et la passivité.

Les partisans du déterminisme biologique acceptent ces stéréotypes de genre sans contester, arguant que la biologie est le destin et que les hommes sont physiquement construits - cerveau et corps - pour être violents et guerriers, tandis que les femmes sont physiquement construites pour être des nourricières pacifiques. Que les différentes caractéristiques fondées sur le sexe sont attribuées aux gènes masculins, aux hormones (la testostérone en particulier), à une taille moyenne et une masse musculaire supérieures, à la structure du cerveau ou au rôle des femmes dans la reproduction et l'éducation des enfants, la participation des femmes à la guerre (ou des hommes à l'éducation des enfants) est considérée comme étrange, voire contre-nature. Qu'elles s'appuient sur les Écritures, le confucianisme, la tradition ou d'autres sources, ces opinions ont une force considérable et persistante.

Il convient de noter que les opinions déterministes biologiques ne se limitent pas aux partisans des systèmes sociaux patriarcaux. Ce type d'essentialisme de genre est soutenu par de nombreuses personnes des deux sexes, y compris celles qui épousent des philosophies féministes telles que le féminisme de la différence. Ce dernier postule que la plus grande expérience des femmes en matière d'accouchement et d'activités connexes telles que les soins aux enfants, l'éducation interpersonnelle et les liens sociaux est à la base de ce qu'ils considèrent comme la nature plus paisible des femmes. Ceux qui acceptent cette analyse se tournent vers les femmes pour qu'elles apportent la paix, en partant du principe que notre nature féminine nous donne un avantage par rapport aux efforts des hommes.

Les conséquences sociales de la définition de l'agressivité comme masculine et de la passivité comme féminine sont nombreuses ; les agresseurs ont besoin de victimes. Les statistiques relatives à la violence domestique ou à l'incidence des viols révèlent l'ampleur et la régularité de l'agression masculine sur le corps des femmes, au détriment de tous. Les implications sociales de la promotion de l'agression et de la guerre comme éléments centraux de l'identité masculine vont toutefois bien au-delà de la violence à l'égard des femmes. Elles peuvent inclure une idéalisation de la compétition (avec les degrés d'insécurité correspondants, car seul un homme peut être au sommet), des niveaux plus élevés de violence et de mort entre hommes et, collectivement, une acceptation de la guerre comme ayant un sens.

Les femmes souffrent également de la croyance selon laquelle notre corps signifie que nous sommes essentiellement des êtres humains plus pacifiques et passifs. Qu'il soit accepté volontairement ou pratiqué comme une stratégie de survie, un comportement excessivement docile, soumis ou coopératif peut indiquer une répression intérieure de l'identité et/ou de l'action et une acceptation silencieuse de la violence et de l'agression

masculines. Les femmes qui adoptent une hyperféminité, ou une adhésion stricte à un comportement stéréotypé féminin, peuvent être enclines à aller plus loin, en contrôlant la féminité d'autres femmes ou en les sabotant afin d'obtenir l'attention et la reconnaissance masculines. Une définition limitée et stéréotypée de la féminité correspond souvent explicitement à une définition de la virilité comme étant intrinsèquement agressive et violente, même si cette définition s'avère toxique, dysfonctionnelle ou destructrice pour l'épanouissement de l'individu.

En observant à travers une heuristique matriculturelle, cependant, nous commençons à remarquer une rubrique différente ordonnant les relations entre les sexes dans la guerre et le rétablissement de la paix. En d'autres termes, l'accès régulier des femmes à un large éventail de rôles sociaux est corrélé à la rupture du lien culturellement accepté entre la passivité, le rôle nourricier et le corps biologiquement féminin, ainsi qu'au lien entre l'agression, la guerre et le corps biologiquement masculin. Dans les sociétés dotées d'une forte matriculture, les femmes et les hommes sont généralement plus libres d'explorer la plénitude de l'expérience humaine, quel que soit leur sexe. En plus d'offrir aux hommes davantage d'occasions de faire preuve d'un comportement coopératif et nourricier, cette liberté peut amener les femmes à exercer une autorité politique et militaire sur les hommes.¹

Daniel Iweze et Umasom Amos présentent deux reines africaines précoloniales, qui ont toutes deux acquis renommée et respect pour leurs capacités militaires. Dans leur article intitulé « Les matriarches dans les sociétés africaines : examen des rôles de la reine Amina de Zazzau et de la reine Idia dans la construction de l'État et de l'empire au Nigeria précolonial, » Iweze et Amos mentionnent plusieurs postes de leadership économique et politique accessibles aux femmes, tels que chef de marché ou membre du conseil des faiseurs de rois. L'accès des femmes à des rôles sociaux militaires, économiques et politiques puissants a été fortement limité par le colonialisme ; le caractère de la société coloniale patriarcale qui en a résulté persiste jusqu'à aujourd'hui, malgré l'indépendance du Nigeria par rapport aux Britanniques en 1960. Iweze et Amos démontrent que les opportunités sociales offertes aux femmes - et, par conséquent, leur statut - peuvent être érodées dans n'importe quelle société lorsque des contraintes culturelles pèsent sur les rôles de genre des femmes et sur la signification même de la féminité.

Cela ne veut pas dire que l'agression militaire par une puissance extérieure entraîne inévitablement la suppression d'une matriculture. La forte matriculture du Tigré est attaquée depuis 2020, lorsque des forces armées du sud de l'Éthiopie et de l'Érythrée, au nord, ont tenté d'occuper la région. Comme le raconte Francesca Baldwin, de nombreux

1 Voir Frédérique Darragon, 'Contemporary Husband-less Societies and Ancient Queendoms in the Sino-Tibetan Marches,' (Sociétés contemporaines sans mari et sociétés des reines anciennes des marches sino-tibétaines), *Matrix : A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 1 : 1 (2021), 118-51. Disponible en ligne à <https://www.networkonculture.ca/activities/matrix/issues/vol2_iss1>.

crimes de guerre ont été commis, notamment une tentative ratée de détruire la culture du Tigré en utilisant le viol, l'esclavage sexuel, le viol collectif, la mutilation, l'infection délibérée par le VIH, la grossesse forcée et l'agression sexuelle comme armes de guerre. Pour citer directement son article, « Bien que la société tigréenne adhère largement à des normes de genre fixes et à des attentes en matière de comportement féminin, les femmes tigréennes font partie intégrante de la cohésion sociale en tant que leaders communautaires et gardiennes des normes de moralité, représentant l'essence même de l'identité tigréenne. »² Baldwin raconte comment, grâce à une puissante matriculture qui a fondé leur action, les femmes de la diaspora tigréenne mènent une organisation collective non seulement contre la guerre, mais aussi contre la violence sexuelle et sexiste au sein de leur communauté. Bien que la matriculture tigréenne ait été attaquée dans les pays d'origine, l'attaque ciblée contre elles en tant que femmes a incité les réfugiées et les émigrées vivant en dehors de ces territoires à exercer un leadership politique d'une manière que les attentes traditionnelles avaient jusqu'à présent empêchée. Les hommes tigréens ont soutenu vocalement et visiblement l'activisme des femmes tigréennes, ce qui permet d'espérer que la matriculture tigréenne, bien qu'attaquée, se développera encore plus puissamment dans cette société.

Il est donc évident qu'à mesure que les femmes remettent en question les rôles de genre restrictifs et exercent une plus grande influence dans la société, la signification culturelle de la femme s'élargit pour englober un éventail plus large d'expériences humaines que ne le permet le déterminisme biologique. La note de recherche de Matthew Cerjak intitulée "This Must Be Done By Mothers Alone : Research Notes on the Expansion of Women's Agency During the Croatian Homeland War" ("Cela doit être fait par les mères seules : notes de recherche sur l'expansion de l'action des femmes pendant la guerre pour la patrie croate") présente quelques explorations préliminaires qui éclairent ce processus dans la Croatie de la fin du XXe siècle. De manière organique, les femmes croates se sont organisées collectivement pour tenter d'empêcher la guerre ; lorsque ces efforts ont échoué, elles ont participé à l'effort de guerre en tant que soldats (tout en subissant des viols et d'autres crimes de guerre basés sur le sexe). Après la guerre, elles ont mis à profit le capital social qu'elles avaient acquis en servant dans l'armée et en subissant des attaques criminelles pour obtenir une plus grande représentation politique. Les premiers efforts d'organisation des femmes croates ont été approuvés et largement soutenus grâce à un ancrage dans les rôles traditionnellement féminins de soins à la famille. Lorsque, malgré l'opposition, certaines femmes se sont engagées dans le service militaire, leur participation a fini par être reconnue comme essentielle à la bonne défense de leur pays. En s'appuyant sur les réseaux et les associations constitués avant la guerre, les femmes ont réussi à tirer parti de cette reconnaissance et des souffrances qu'elles avaient endurées pour augmenter de manière significative la participation des femmes au Parlement croate.

2 Voir Baldwin, ce numéro, 32-59.

L'utilisation du service militaire pour acquérir une plus grande influence politique n'est pas une stratégie propre aux femmes croates. Un exemple bien connu est celui des suffragettes britanniques, dont le service pour leur pays a permis aux femmes d'obtenir un droit de vote limité après la Première Guerre mondiale. Moins connue est l'histoire de Nanyehi, une Cherokee Ghigau, ou femme bien-aimée, qui, en reconnaissance de sa bravoure militaire, s'est vu confier un rôle dans les négociations avec les colons euro-américains. L'article de Matthew Cerjak intitulé "The Women Must Hear Our Words : " Nanyehi's Negotiations" (Les femmes doivent entendre nos paroles : les négociations de Nanyehi) explore les contextes culturels de deux sociétés très différentes, l'une caractérisée par un patriarcat strict et l'autre par une matriculture florissante. Sa description de l'équilibre entre les sexes au cœur de la vision du monde des Cherokee offre un contraste saisissant avec la hiérarchie patriarcale que l'on trouve chez les colons euro-américains.

La vision du monde des Tlingit présente un équilibre similaire entre les sexes. Matrix a le plaisir de rééditer le travail ethnographique de John Swanton sur la danse sacrée de la paix des Tlingit, accompagné de quelques remarques introductives de Marie-Françoise Guédon. Guédon s'appuie sur l'ethnographie de Frederica de Laguna pour contextualiser le travail descriptif de Swanton, en notant que les divisions culturelles chez les Tlingit sont davantage liées à la position de chacun en tant qu'aristocrate ou roturier, plutôt qu'aux distinctions entre les femmes et les hommes. En d'autres termes, les rôles sociaux qu'une personne est en droit d'occuper sont attribués principalement en fonction de son statut social et non de son sexe ; lors des cérémonies qui établissent la paix après une guerre, les femmes et les hommes nobles agissent avec la même autorité et occupent des rôles équivalents.

Dans sa contribution intitulée "La nouvelle idéologie de la "guerre éternelle" en archéologie. Réflexions critiques sur l'histoire ancienne", Heide Goettner-Abendroth déclare que les archéologues contemporains sont sérieusement entravés dans leur capacité à interpréter les découvertes avec précision, en raison de leur enculturation au déterminisme biologique patriarcal et à l'extrapolation connexe selon laquelle, puisque les hommes sont intrinsèquement violents et belliqueux aujourd'hui, les hommes ont toujours été belliqueux, et les sociétés stables et pacifiques n'ont jamais existé. Ce biais intellectuel, écrit Goettner-Abendroth, conduit les archéologues à supposer que la guerre est la seule explication pour plusieurs sites présentant des tombes multiples, alors qu'il existe des preuves plus solides que ces fosses communes sont des sites de cérémonies de ré-inhumation menées par des communautés pacifiques.

Le fait que les stéréotypes de l'homme agresseur et de la femme victime ne font pas partie intégrante de la "nature humaine" a été confirmé il y a plus de quarante ans lorsque, en 1981, Peggy Reeves Sanday a découvert que les sociétés où les hommes sont incultures à respecter les femmes et le caractère sacré de la vie - en d'autres termes, les

sociétés dotées d'une forte matriculture - ont une incidence beaucoup plus faible de viols que les sociétés sous l'emprise d'une idéologie de domination masculine.³ En plus d'offrir aux hommes de plus grandes possibilités de montrer leur nature coopérative et pacifique, les sociétés à forte matriculture ne définissent pas non plus les femmes exclusivement comme des subordonnées ou des victimes. Tant que la violence mortelle entre groupes (telle que Joshua Goldstein définit la guerre) continuera d'exister, il convient de se rappeler qu'il existe et qu'il a existé des sociétés où les femmes ne sont pas exclues de la participation à la guerre (à la fois pour la défense et l'offensive) ni des opportunités et du statut social qu'une telle participation apporte.

Nous avons le plaisir d'inclure deux critiques de livres dans ce numéro : la première, celle d'Aubrey Lauersdorf sur l'ouvrage d'Alejandra Dubcovsky *Talking Back : Native Women and the Making of the Early South* (Yale University Press, 2023), se concentre sur l'habileté de Dubcovsky à naviguer dans des archives peu sympathiques pour identifier et décrire la vie des femmes indigènes dans le contexte de leurs propres sociétés, alors que celles-ci étaient confrontées à la colonisation espagnole. Comme le note Lauersdorf, Dubcovsky incorpore non seulement des documents provenant d'archives espagnoles, mais aussi les résultats de recherches archéologiques, des mythes et des récits indigènes, ainsi que des documents en langue timucua, afin de dresser un portrait clair de la vie des femmes timucua au cours d'une période tumultueuse.

Notre deuxième critique de livre est la critique approfondie de Marie-Françoise Guédon sur *The Darker Angels of Our Nature : Refuting the Pinker theory of history and violence* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), une anthologie de dix-sept chapitres édités par Philip Dwyer et Marc Micale qui est elle-même une réponse à *The Better Angels of Our Nature : Why violence has declined* (Stephen Pinker, Viking Books, 2011). Pourquoi critiquer un livre qui est essentiellement une critique d'un autre livre ? Guédon explique que "la violence sociale est un thème essentiel dans la vie des femmes et nous devons savoir comment la violence est perçue, expliquée et engagée dans notre monde...."⁴ Trois des conclusions de Guédon présentent un intérêt particulier pour l'étude de la matriculture : (1) *The Darker Angels* souligne la nécessité de fonder la recherche en sciences humaines sur l'observation plutôt que sur des hypothèses théoriques ; (2) interpréter la violence comme un processus plutôt que comme un événement favorise la prise en compte du contexte et des conséquences ; et, surtout, (3) l'invisibilité de la violence, et plus encore de la violence systémique, devrait nous avertir que les progrès en matière de bien-être social dépendent dans une large mesure de la possibilité de rendre la violence visible.

3 Voir Peggy Reeves Sanday, « The Socio-Cultural Context of Rape : A Cross-Cultural Study » (Le contexte socioculturel du viol : une étude interculturelle), réimprimé dans *Matrix : A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 1:1 (2020), 31-46. Disponible en ligne à https://www.networkonculture.ca/activities/matrix/issues/vol1_iss1.

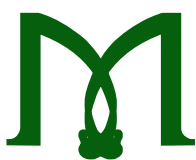
4 Voir Guédon, ce numéro, 139-73.

Ces articles, les critiques de livres et la note de recherche contribuent tous à rendre le contexte et les conséquences de la guerre et de la violence visibles pour les lecteurs. Plusieurs auteurs de ce numéro reconnaissent la participation active des femmes aux processus de guerre et de rétablissement de la paix, soulignant l'action des femmes dans les sociétés historiques et contemporaines lorsqu'une matriculture forte le permet. Cela crée des connaissances sur les conflits et leur résolution qui sont plus fiables car elles incluent l'évolution changeante des systèmes culturels. En allant explicitement au-delà du déterminisme biologique lorsqu'ils envisagent la guerre et le rétablissement de la paix parmi les matricultures, ces articles, et en fait cette revue, contribuent au développement de matricultures plus fortes dans le contexte mondial.

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Nous espérons que ce numéro vous plaira!

Linnéa Rowlatt
avril 2024



Matriarchs in African Societies: Examining the Roles of Queen Amina of Zazzau and Queen Idia in State and Empire Building in Pre-Colonial Nigeria

DANIEL IWEZE, PhD, and UMASOM AMOS

Abstract

In precolonial African societies, women played an active role in politics, mostly through the position of either queen mother or queen. Queen mothers regularly served as stabilizing factors in the reign of their sons. Equally, women who became queens in precolonial African societies demonstrated wit and valour in the exercise of authority, especially during periods of warfare and crisis. This paper introduces two prominent matriarchs, Queen Amina of Zazzau in Northern Nigeria and Queen Idia of the ancient Benin kingdom in Southern Nigeria, and explores matriarchal roles they played in the administration of, respectively, their state and kingdom. Using qualitative research methodology and close reading of available data, the paper investigates their military leadership, the type of warfare in which they engaged, and the strategies they deployed in restoring peace and order to their societies. The paper further scrutinizes narratives that project only men as warriors; they lead to a false absence of women in the history of warfare and the empire/ kingdom or state-



building process in precolonial Africa. The overarching argument of the paper is that women were accepted in positions of political and military leadership, including prosecuting wars, and wielded great power and influence in Africa's precolonial period.

Keywords: Matriarchy, Queen Amina, Queen Idia, precolonial kingdoms, Nigeria

Résumé

Dans les sociétés africaines précoloniales, les femmes jouaient un rôle actif en politique, principalement en exerçant le rôle de reine mère ou de reine. Les reines mères servaient régulièrement de facteurs de stabilisation dans le règne de leurs fils. De même, les femmes qui sont devenues reines dans les sociétés africaines précoloniales ont fait preuve d'intelligence et de courage dans l'exercice de l'autorité, notamment pendant les périodes de guerre et de crise. Cet article présente deux matriarches éminentes, la reine Amina de Zazzau au nord du Nigeria et la reine Idia de l'ancien royaume du Bénin au sud du Nigeria, en explorant les rôles matriarcaux qu'elles ont joués dans l'administration de leur États. À l'aide d'une méthodologie de recherche qualitative et d'une lecture attentive des données, l'article explore leurs contextes personnels, leur leadership militaire et le type de guerre dans laquelle elles se sont engagées. L'article étudie en outre le changement dans les récits qui présentent uniquement les hommes comme des guerriers, ce qui conduit à une absence de femmes dans l'histoire de la guerre et dans le processus de construction d'empire/royaume ou d'État dans les sociétés africaines précoloniales. L'argument principal de l'article est que les femmes matriarches occupaient des postes de direction politique et exerçaient de grands pouvoirs et influences, y compris la poursuite de la guerre, au cours de la période précoloniale.

Mots clés : Matriarcat, reine Amina, reine Idia, royaumes précolonial, Nigeria

Introduction

Since women have been perceived by men as 'weaker vessels' and patriarchy presumed to have dominated the political sphere, discovering the existence of matriarchs in the precolonial era of Nigeria changed the historical narrative. Extant literature shows that women were not excluded from the political sphere, but rather, that they featured prominently in the political evolution of their societies. The overarching argument of this paper is that despite the patriarchal nature of political institutions in most African societies, some roles were assigned to and/or reserved for women. This enabled them to play significant roles in the traditional political institutions of governance in these precolonial societies. We contend that although women's political roles in precolonial African societies were not equal to those of men, they played complementary roles in the

administration of their states. These roles enabled them to occupy leadership positions in political institutions, such as Queens or Queen Mothers.

The paper is divided into six sections. This first section introduces the subject matter, with comments identifying Zazzau and Benin Kingdoms, the two polities features here, and a brief look at matriarchs and women's roles from a variety of African societies. The second and third sections present our research methodology and literature review. The fourth section examines the emergence and the role played by Queen Amina in the development of Zazzau in Hausaland. The fifth section focuses on *Iyoba* Idia in Benin Kingdom and her contributions to the kingdom during the reign of her son, *Oba* Esigie; the sixth section is the conclusion.

Zazzau Kingdom is the southernmost state of the first seven Hausa Bakwai (Seven True Hausa States) founded by King Gunguma between 1000 and 1200 CE in the savanna area of present-day Northern Nigeria. The city of Zazzau was founded during the first half of the sixteenth century by King Nikatau Nohir. On his demise, circa. 1566, his wife Queen Bakwa Turuku, mother of Queen Amina, assumed the throne of the city-state. Her reign is known as one of peace and prosperity; war was absent to such an extent that the warriors complained that their blades had become blunt. Nevertheless, Zazzau Kingdom reached the height of its influence under Bakwa Turuku's daughter, Queen Amina (see below). She established Zazzau city as the capital of Zazzau Kingdom and changed the name of the city-state to Zaria, after her younger sister and successor to the throne. By the end of the century, Zaria military might diminished and it came under the control of the Jukun Kingdom; during the eighteenth century, it became a tributary state of the Bornu Kingdom. The Zazzau Kingdom still exist today, albeit in a sharply diminished form and subject to the state of Nigeria; the ruler of the modern-day Zazzau Emirate is called *Sarkin* or *Emir* Zazzau, that is, king of Zazzau (Zaria).

Benin Kingdom was one of the earliest and most prominent kingdoms in the southern forest region of Nigeria; it was ruled by the *Oba* from his capital, Benin City. *Oba* is the title of a position equivalent to that of king; during his reign, *Oba* Esigie created the title of *Iyoba* (*Iya Oba*, Queen Mother) for his mother Idia. Benin Kingdom flourished between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; during this period, the *Oba* of Benin was the political, temporal and spiritual head of the kingdom.¹ Today, Benin Kingdom is confined to the boundaries of Benin City and subject to the state of Nigeria; it is not related to the current Republic of Benin. Nevertheless, the kingdom remains the seat of its current ruler, *Oba* Ewuare 11.

¹ S. E. Orobator, "Trade of Imperial Benin with the Portuguese and the Dutch," in Onwuka N. Njoku (ed.), *Pre-Colonial Economic History of Nigeria*, Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 2002, 109.

The people of Benin Kingdom engaged in the trade of slaves, palm oil, palm kernel, ivory, and other products. The kingdom was rich in tree species, such as Obeche, Iroko, and rubber, and thanks to these, lumber and timber processing allowed a major centre of bronze casting to thrive along with woodworking products. Fertile soil made farming activities to be one of the mainstays of the economy. Agricultural production, trade, and handicrafts were foundations of the stature and influence of the kingdom.

Some royal women were actively involved in politics and held decision-making roles in the governance of their states in different West African states.² Examples of African women who occupied positions of power and influence in their societies – along with Queen Amina and *Iyoba* Idia – include Queen Yaanial in Ghana, Queen Ndaté of the Waalo Kingdom in the present Republic of Senegal, Queen Nzinga of the Ndongo and Matamba kingdoms in present-day Luanda in Angola, Empress Zewditu of Ethiopia, Queen Edimini Kambasa in the Bonny Kingdom, Queen Yaa Asantewaa of the Asante Kingdom, Pharaoh Hatshepsut, Pharaoh Nefertiti, Queen Moremi, a courageous and brave leader of Ile-Ife who saved her kingdom from attacks by the neighbouring Ugbo Kingdom, Fatim Beye, Ndoye Demba and Nadate Yalla Mbodji in Senegal, Yennenga of Burkina Faso, Hangbe of Benin, Makeda and Embet Ilen of Ethiopia and Eritrea, Nandi of South Africa, and the female chiefs among the Mende and Serbo of Sierra Leone.³

Although the traditional political institutions were largely patriarchal, political power was diffused and some political roles were reserved for and/or assigned to women. Examples of powerful roles for non-royal women in precolonial Yoruba society were *Iyalode* or *Madam Tinubu* (market leader), *Iya Afin* (mother nature), and *Erelu*, a women member of the council of kingmakers. These roles have been preserved and are still occupied by women in contemporary Yoruba society. In Igbo society, there was the *Umu Ada*, the 'daughters of the clan' who were married either within or outside the community; they played well-defined and significant social and political roles in the socio-political institutions of Igboland. These roles suggest that women played significant complementary roles in the political administration of their community despite the predominance of patriarchy in African societies.

It is not confirmed whether or not matriarchal political institutions ever existed in African societies, but at one time or another, there existed prominent women who wielded enormous power and authority. They left indelible impacts on their societies, such as

² Adedayo Oluwaseun Adefemi and Ayodehi Temitope Agunbiade, 'Women's Political Participation and Representation in State Legislatures, Southwest, Nigeria,' *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs*, vol.7 (2019), 2.

³ Justus Nnemeka, 'Position of Women in Pre-colonial Africa,' Ikpe, E.B. (ed.), *Women and Power in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2009, 33-4; see Emmanuel Akyeampong and Fredrick Hippolyte, 'The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth and Development: Historical perspectives and Policy Implications, Part 1: The Pre-colonial and Colonial Periods,' *Policy Research Working Paper*, 2012, 2-3.

Queen Amina of Zazzau, who was pivotal to the growth and development of an empire. She embarked on an expansionist programme of conquest, subjugation, dominion and the incorporation of vassal states into her kingdom.

In some situations, the matriarchs were not even direct leaders themselves but exerted a strong influence because of the relationship they had with the male rulers, as evidenced in the existence of queen mothers in precolonial African kingdoms, empires and states. The term 'Queen Mother' had a variety of meanings. For example, in the Benin Kingdom, she was the mother of the king, while in Ghana, the queen mother was selected from the royal family of each town. In Asaba, Onitsha, and Osamala of Igboland, they were *Omu*. Their duties and responsibilities also differed in each society.

Scholarship has shown that women were actively involved in all stages of empire-building as warriors, peacemakers and suppliers of wartime materials. Women's role in empire-building could go beyond serving as political advisers, as, occasionally, they were the main political and military leaders of their societies and states. The extent of most women's participation in politics and governance was dependent on the organizational structure of the political institutions of such societies. Some states practiced centralized or monarchical political systems, such as the Benin Kingdom, Bornu Empire, Ashanti Kingdom and so on, while others evolved a decentralized or republican system, such as the Igbo in present-day southeastern Nigeria and the Tiv ethnic group in north-central Nigeria.⁴

The Zazzau state in present-day northwestern Nigeria practiced a centralized political system. In the Benin Kingdom, *Iyoba* Idia played the role of Queen Mother during the reign of her son, *Oba* Esigie and successive kings that ruled after *Oba* Esigie had *Iyoba*. In southwestern Nigeria, paramount rulers such as the *Alaafin* of Oyo and *Ooni* of Ile-Ife reigned without a Queen Mother. The complementarity role of Queen Mother was non-existent in some West African societies, excluding even some women from positions of authority.

Against this background, this paper examines two matriarchs: Queen Amina of Zazzau and *Iya Oba* Idia of the Benin Kingdom in what would later become the present Northern and Southern Nigeria. It explores the trajectory of the two matriarchs by assessing their contributions to the local political development of their states, highlighting their experiences, and showing how they wielded enormous political power and influence.

Research Methodology

This paper employs a historical research methodology in which the data was collected mainly through secondary sources. This involved a close reading of extant literature on

⁴ Adefemi and Agunbiade, 2.

kingdoms, empires and state-building for matriarchy in Nigeria and the wider African continent. The data comprised articles in journals, chapters in edited volumes, and dissertations (see footnotes 7 and 8). Contemporary publications by scholars on matriarchy were vital sources of data. These secondary sources were critically analysed for women's roles in historical narratives. The works of Okonjo, Achebe, Amadiume and Oyewumi were particularly significant for examining the dual-sex political institutions in Igbo and Yoruba societies in southern Nigeria in which women possessed political power and authority in the administration of their societies.

In African historiography, there is a preponderance of works that focus on the empires, kingdoms, and state-building of male kings, while the matriarchs who occupied prominent positions in political institutions and the governance of their societies were forgotten, fictionalized, or believed not to have existed. They are seen as impossible because of the patriarchal nature of contemporary society: it has become unimaginable to have a female ruler to whom men will be subordinate or answerable. The pervasiveness and popularity of patriarchy tends to rule out the earlier existence of women's leadership.

The historical process of women losing the opportunities that were available to them began with the colonial era. During the period, women lost power and influence as their traditional political structures were either ignored or undermined and replaced with male-occupied structures and positions. Colonialism alienated women from the political space in African societies and reinforced the ideologies of patriarchy,⁵ and it privileged the political institutions headed by men against those held by women. Colonialism further oversaw the decline of the fortunes of African women by eroding the complementary dual-sex political system that was practiced in the precolonial period that empowered and accorded women higher status in society than they can achieve today. In the post-independence era, African governments have solidified and entrenched gender discrimination and failed to restore the traditional powers and influence of women that were swept away by colonialism.

Literature Review

Historically, women warriors who possessed political power and authority in West African societies have been studied and documented in the works of Clarke (1984), Farrar (1997), Achebe (2011), and Bouilly (2016), among others.⁶ The extant literature has tended to focus

⁵ Fredoline O. Anunobi, 'Women and Development in Africa: From Marginalization to Gender Inequality,' *Africa Social Science Review*, Vol. 2 (1), 2002, 49-50.

⁶ John Hendrik Clarke, 'African Warrior Queens' in Ivan van Sertima (ed.), *Black Women in Antiquity*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984; Tarikhu Farrar, 'The Queen-mother, Matriarchy and the Question of Female Political Authority in Pre-colonial West African Monarch' in *Journal of Black Studies*, Sage Publications, Vol. 27, No. 5 (May 1997), 579-80; Nwandu Achebe, *Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe*. Indiana University Press, 2011; Emmanuel Bouilly, 'African Women's

on the men, while the women - who played immense roles in their societies – generally have been marginalized in historical scholarship. This is seen in publications such as those by Okonjo (1997/2002), Amadiume (1993/1997), Achebe (2011), Oyewumi (1997, 2002), Okome (2002), Ikpe (2004), Okonkwo (2013), Esogbue (2016), and Mfon (2017), among others.⁷

Matriarchy in ancient and precolonial Africa has attracted the attention of scholars from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, as evident in the works of Clarke, Cohen, Cheikh Anta Diop, and Marvin Harris, among others. An Afrocentric scholar (scholars whose studies focus on African history), Clarke (1984) traces the origin of matriarchy to the primordial family form found during the ancient times of Africa and maintains that it is older in Africa than anywhere else in the world.⁸ Meanwhile, Cohen's work focuses on the phenomenon of the African queen mother. He argues that there was a prevalence of these female title-holders who occupied the highest levels of political institutions in ancient and precolonial African societies. Cohen contends further that the office of queen mother was generally a ceremonial one which served as a fulcrum around which potential opposition to the king could be safely and non-divisively collected. He states that this is because the queen's mother did not possess real political authority; rather, true political power was held by the king.⁹

Cheikh Anta Diop argues that the origin of matriarchy in African cultures began in the earliest times and was created by women. He posits that patriarchy replaced matriarchy in Africa as a result of external influences such as the advent of religion (Islam, Christianity), and colonialism.¹⁰ However, Marvin Harris dismisses the historicity of matriarchal societies in Africa and claims that there is no evidence to prove their existence. Rather he asserts

Struggle in Gender Perspective,' *Journal Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2016), 338-49.

⁷ Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed Books Ltd, 1993; Ifi Amadiume, *Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations: The Case of the Igbo Societies*. London: Karnak House, 1995; Mojbol Olnk Okome, 'Domestic, Regional, and International Protection of Nigerian Women Against Discrimination: Constraints and Possibilities,' *African Studies Quarterly*, 6:3 (2002); Eno Blankson Ikpe, 'The Historical Legacy of Gender Inequality in Nigeria' in Solomon Akinboye (ed.), *Paradox of Gender Equality in Nigeria Politics*. Lagos: Concept Publications Ltd., 2004; Okonkwo (2013); Emeka Esogbue, *A Short History of Omu: An Account of a Female Traditional Institution in Anioma*. Ibadan: Carophen Communications Ltd., 2016; Etim Ekpenyong Mfon, 'The Marginalization of Women in Governance in Edo State Nigeria, with a Focus on the Coronation Ceremony of an Oba in the Benin Kingdom,' *International Journal of Research*, 4:10 (2017), 947-55.

⁸ Clarke, 123-34.

⁹ Ronald Cohen, 'Oedipus Rex and Regina: The queen mother in Africa,' *Africa*, 47:1 (1977), 14-30, as cited in Farrar, 579-80.

¹⁰ Cheik Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, Chicago: Third World Press, 1978 (Original work published 1959); Cheik Anta Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press 1987 (Original work published 1960); Cheik Anta Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*. Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill, 1991 (Original work published 1981).

that matriarchy is based on myth and legend and is, therefore, a mere figment of feminist imaginations.¹¹

Refuting the dismissal of historical matriarchy, Tarikhu Farrar (1997) and others affirm the existence of matriarchy and posit that scholars such as Diop, Harris, and others are confusing matriarchy with matrilineality. Matriarchy refers to governance by women over family and society in the early stages of society; it is a social order, where women are in charge and the oldest females are recognized as the heads of families, with power, lineage and inheritance passing, where possible, from mothers to daughters.¹² A matriarchal society is based on mother rights and features a political system in which women dominate the political institutions of their societies. It entails female domination, where women have authority over men. Matrilineality, however, refers only to lineage and denotes societies in which descent is traced through the female rather than the male line; property is often (but not always) inherited in the same way.¹³ In other words, it is the tracing of kinship through the female lineage.

Farrar's work aims at understanding the nature of women's political power in ancient and precolonial African societies. He looks at the early history of queen-motherhood and other female political titles, and female political hierarchies, as well as the prevalence of these phenomena in ancient and pre-colonial African political institutions.¹⁴

Queen Amina of Zazzau

Historical records of the ancient Zazzau Kingdom reveal popular reverence for a single woman: Queen Amina. There is little historical documentation about her life, though, with much of which follows speculative. Thought to have been born circa. 1533 to Queen Bakwa Turuku, whose other children were a boy (Karama) and a girl (Zaria), Amina succeeded her brother Karama as ruler and was followed by Zaria on the throne. As a child, Amina became interested in the activities of the palace court, crawling to meet her grandfather, King Zazzau Nohir, in the palace court. As a result of his love for her, he would carry her and allow her to sit with him all through many important meetings with chiefs. She grew to love politics and hanging out in the court since important decisions were made there. Although her mother, Queen Bakwa Turuku, tried to focus her attention

¹¹ Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*. New York: Random House, 1974.

¹² Peggy Reeves Sanday, 'Matriarchy.' *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*. (Electronic version). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 1.

¹³ Camilla Nelson, 'Friday Essay: Matrilineal Societies exist around the World – It's Time to Look Beyond the Patriarchy,' *The Conversation*, 23 March 2023. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-matrilineal-societies-exist-around-the-world-its-time-to-look-beyond-the-patriarchy-200825>, Accessed on 20 July 2023.

¹⁴ Farrar, 579-580.

on learning the responsibilities and roles of womanhood, Amina simply had a flair for politics. Amina loved the sword as a young girl and later trained with the soldiers, which sharpened her military skills.¹⁵

At the age of sixteen, when her mother ascended the throne of Zazzau, Amina was made the *Magajiya* (heir apparent) and was given forty slaves to serve her. Queen Bakwa died circa. 1566 and was succeeded by her son, Karama. Though her eldest daughter was *Magajiya*, the people demanded that primogeniture be followed and that Karama rule. However, during her brother's reign, Amina distinguished herself as a soldier. For example, when a neighbouring Hausa king named Kamajeji attacked and defeated Zazzau due to the innovation of using metal to make helmets, Amina participated in the war and took this innovation home, ensuring that helmets and metal suits were made for her warriors. As a result, her army emerged victorious in their own wars of conquest against neighbouring states such as Nupe, Kwararafa, Katsina, Narasarawa and others. Also thanks to importing this innovative technology, Amina became referred to as *Yar Bakwa Ta San Rama*, which, translated literally, means 'a woman even more capable than a man.' Karama's reign lasted for ten years. When he died, it was obvious that Amina would be the best fit for the throne because with her mastery of political administration and military command; she had proven herself to be capable.¹⁶

Amina was crowned the *Zaruniya* (Queen) of Zaria in 1576 and was credited with establishing the first formal political institution in Hausaland. During her reign, products of the western Sudan, such as salt, were brought to Hausaland in exchange for slaves and grains.¹⁷ Any city she conquered, she ordered the construction of a surrounding wall. With the trans-Saharan caravan trade thriving, she built *Ganuwar Amina* ('Amina's Walls'): extensive walls (including a fortress) around Zazzau, the remnants of which still stand today around Zaria. Politically, walls were considered a measure of a ruler's capacity to command his or her subjects. The ruins of her walls remain today in other cities, standing as proof of Queen Amina's glorious reign. Amina died after 34 years of rule. Her place of death is not certain; some say she died at Atagara, while others believe she died at Dekina in a 1610 battle.¹⁸

¹⁵ Abubakar Sa'ad, 'Queen Amina of Zaria,' in *Women in Historical Perspective*, edited by Bolanle Awe, Lagos: Sankore Publishers; Ibadan: Bookcraft, 1992, 13-23.

¹⁶ Wardah Abbas, 'The Importance of Documenting Muslim Women in History and Now: Honouring the Leadership Legacy of Queen Amina of Zaria,' *Amaliah*, April 2021. www.amaliah.co..post.muslim.... Accessed on 26 July 2023.

¹⁷ Richard Palmer, 'The Kano Chronicle,' *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 38 (January-June 1908), 58-98 (75). Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2843130>. Accessed on 5 May 2021.

¹⁸ Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, *Historical Dictionary of Nigeria*, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2009, 34.

Queen Amina's Contribution to Empire Building

Amina contributed greatly to the building of the Zazzau in several ways, the greatest of which was territorial expansion brought by military conquest. She was known to be a great and powerful warrior who went often to war and returned victorious. As Queen, she established a standing army of 20,000 soldiers; with them, she conquered the Hausa states of Katsina, Kano, Bauchi, Rano, Gobir, and Katsina, as well as the non-Hausaland states of Kwararafa, Nupe, Bauchi and Yauri. The tribute they sent to her was substantial, including forty eunuchs and ten thousand kola nuts from the *Sarkin* (king) of Nupe – the first of either in Hausaland. Slaves, whether among the conquered or sent for tribute, became part of her army or Zazzau's labour force.¹⁹ The improved economic activities of Zazzau under her rule were primarily linked to the benefits of military conquest; Amina exerted control over the trade routes around the Saharan region as a result of her victories.

Thanks to their stronger economy, Zazzau became a trading centre in Southern Hausaland; the main trade took place in metals, salt, kola nuts, clothes, and imported leather from the East. Perhaps inspired by the *Sarkin's* tribute, Amina was also responsible for introducing the kola nut trade in Hausaland. It later became a primary trade commodity of the Hausa people, who had a monopoly in the kola nut trade.²⁰

Queen Amina developed a well-trained, equipped and formidable military, allowing her to embark on wars of expansion; these resulted in the military conquests and territorial expansion of Zazzau. She introduced the use of metal helmets and armour for her soldiers which shielded them from the swords of their enemies and enhanced their victory in the battles. Leading by example, this well-trained warrior inspired an army of soldiers who were brave, disciplined, and fearless. Amina also introduced the idea of military encampment behind the fortress walls and constructing camps as a way of securing the military against potential enemies. These tactics helped her win every battle during her long reign of thirty-four years. Her commitment to Islam also led her to encourage Muslim scholars and religious leaders from Kano and Timbuktu to visit Zazzau. Queen Amina's legacy to Zazzau was an expanded territorial empire, a strong economy, and intellectual & spiritual vigour.

¹⁹ Palmer, 75.

²⁰ Paul Lovejoy, 'The Hausa Kolanut Trade 1700-1900. A Commercial System in the Continental Exchange of West Africa.' Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1973.

Queen Idia of Benin Kingdom

Queen Idia was a wife of *Oba* Ozulua, whose reign of the Benin Kingdom took place in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; Queen Idia became the first *Iyoba* (queen mother) of the polity. She stands out among the other queens and queen mothers of West Africa because of her great exploits on behalf of the kingdom, playing a very significant role in the rise and reign of her son, *Oba* Esigie. *Iyoba* Idia was a famous warrior who became even more popular after the Benin-Idah War because she led the victorious army.²¹ As well as being renowned as a warrior queen, *Iyoba* Idia was a skilful and astute administrator.²²

Idia's title as the first *Iyoba* was bestowed upon her when her son created the position as gratitude to her for securing his position as the sixteenth *Oba* of the Old Benin Kingdom. This son, Prince Osawe, who later became *Oba* Esigie, was given birth a few hours after another prince had been born. One of her co-wives had given birth to the giant prince, Prince Arhuanhuan, but did not notify the palace on time because the baby did not cry. It was a tradition that when a child was born, the palace would be notified immediately; this was for record-keeping, because the *Oba*'s pregnant wives were usually taken out of the palace, even the capital, to villages where they received care until the baby's birth. Queen Idia reported the birth of her son first and he thereby became heir to the throne.²³ As a result of this, Prince Arhuanhuan and his mother engaged in a series of disputes which eventually led to a war for the crown. *Iyoba* Idia ensured that her son won the war by raising an army for him and rumoured to have wielded unusual supernatural powers to defeat her enemies.

Before *Oba* Esigie ascended the throne, it was forbidden by tradition for the mother of the *Oba* to be alive while her son became a king. It was believed that the queen mother would command the same authority as the *Oba*, so she was murdered in order to prevent any competition. However, *Oba* Esigie abolished the tradition for his mother's sake and because of the sacrifices she had made for him.²⁴ Instead, he built a palace for her at Uselu and bestowed upon her the first-class chieftaincy title of *Iyoba* (Queen Mother). She was the first woman to be given this title. She enjoyed the exclusive privileges of recommending her choice of chiefs to the *Oba*, who conferred a title on them thereafter. She had the right to a throne, the right to wear special ornaments and coral beads, the right to adorn herself with a distinctive dress made of a special cloth and the right to bear

²¹ Ingyoroko, M. *et al*, 'The Nigerian Women and the Reformation of The Political System: A Historical Perspective,' *Journal of Socialomics*, 6 (2017), 2.

²² Monica O. Aneni, 'Politics and Power in the Courts of Two Queens: Cleopatra of Egypt and Idia of the Old Benin Kingdom,' *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4:6 (2016), 23-4.

²³ *Ibid*.

²⁴ Mfon, 947.

a sword of office. Since then, other queen mothers have enjoyed the same privileges. These rights were previously ascribed to only men who were chiefs in society.

In the military sphere, *Iyoba* Idia led her troops in the Benin-Idah War of 1515-1516, said to have been caused by the unfaithfulness of a woman influenced by beads. On one faithful day, the *Oliha*, the leader of the seven councillors or kingmakers, bragged to the king that he had the most beautiful and faithful wife in the kingdom. *Oba* Esigie, wishing to prove her unworthiness, asked one of his messengers to entice her with agate and coral beads. She fell for it and had a relationship with him for weeks. The message was related to the *Oliha* and his wife confirmed it. Out of anger, he ordered her to be strangled. To revenge himself on *Oba* Esigie, the *Oliha* sent a servant to the Igala king at Idah, the capital city of Igala Kingdom, with the message that *Oba* Esigie was preparing to invade Idah. He also sent another servant to inform the *Oba* that the Igala warriors were marching to Benin. War ensued.

Disguised as a man, *Iyoba* Idia bravely fought alongside her son. During this war, she is said to have employed the mystical tactic of making dummies look like real Benin soldiers. When the Igala soldiers attacked them, the pseudo-warriors of Benin responded, leading to some Igala soldiers fleeing out of fear. Amid the confusion, Benin soldiers came out of their hiding spots and opened fire on the confused Igala soldiers, defeating them. *Iyoba* Idia also killed the chief native doctor of Igala Kingdom, who had been sent to spy on the Benin kingdom.²⁵

As well as supporting her society militarily, *Iyoba* Idia introduced artistic features to the Benin culture. For example, she created the *Ukpe Okhue* or the Parrot's Beak *Iyoba*'s cap. It was curved, conical and covered with a network of beads. She also introduced the *Ekasa*, a special dance which forms part of the royal ceremonies to date. After her demise, her son instructed brass casters and ivory carvers to produce an ivory mask in memory of his mother (see Image 1). The Nigerian government also used her face as the emblem for the Second Black Festival of Arts and Culture, FESTAC'77, hosted in Lagos in 1977. Her tomb is located at Egua *Iyoba*, Uselu, Benin City.²⁶

²⁵ Ila Pelky Pokornowski, *Social Significance of African Beads: Case Studies of the Yoruba and Bini Peoples*, M.A Thesis, Michigan State University, 1974, 98; Benson Osadolor, *The Military System of Benin Kingdom, 1440-1897*, PhD Thesis, University of Hamburg, Germany, 2001, 99.

²⁶ Farrar, 580-581.



Image 1: Commemorative Head of *Iyoba* Idia. Commemorative head of Queen Mother; lost-wax cast in brass. Naturalistic, almost life-size female head with curving conical hairstyle covered with openwork coral bead net; long strings of coral beads at sides and back. Wears high coral bead collar. Two vertical marks on forehead originally inset with iron; four scarification marks above each eye. Pupils inlaid with iron. © Trustees of the British Museum.

***Iyoba* Idia's Contributions to the Development of Benin Kingdom**

Iyoba Idia's love for her son, *Oba* Esigie, enabled him to ascend the throne of the Benin Kingdom and remain there. Apart from assisting her son to be victorious in his accession to the throne, she made giant strides in the development of the kingdom during her son's reign. Firstly, she helped to consolidate the power and influence of Benin Kingdom as one of the most powerful kingdoms in the rainforest region of West Africa. Secondly, she participated in the Benin-Idah war by raising an army for her son, leading her own regiment and employing supernatural powers to ensure her son's victory.²⁷ It is believed that war was won spiritually before it even began physically.²⁸ The victory over Igala not only eliminated a potential threat but enabled the Benin kingdom to consolidate its imperial power in the north-south Niger river trade, which stretched as far as the Songhai empire and the Atlantic Ocean.

After Idia, other women began to accompany their husbands to the battlefield. For example, *Iyoba* Idia was said to have tutored Queen Elaba, the wife of *Oba* Esigie, on military strategy and magical powers, supporting Elaba's accompaniment of the *Oba* to the battlefield.²⁹

²⁷ Osadolor, 9.

²⁸ Anthonia Makwemoise Yakubu, 'Against Her Kind: The Phenomenon of Women Against Women in Ovia Cult Worship,' *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 5:5 (2014),135-36.

²⁹ Oludamola Adebawale, 'The Untold Tale Between *Oba* Esigie and *Iyoba* Idia of Benin,' *The Guardian Nigeria News-Nigeria and World News*, 4th June, 2019. Available at <https://guardian.ng/life/the-untold-tale-between-oba-esigie-and-iyoba-idia-of-benin/>; accessed 17 April 2024.

In addition, Idia's life ended the age-long tradition of killing the mother of an *Oba* before his coronation. This was a huge victory for royal women, as they now had the right to live and enjoy their sons' reigns. She also brought respect to the title Queen Mother. After Idia, Queen Mothers came to be considered as instrumental for the protection, well-being, and survival of the *Oba* and his kingdom.³⁰ This belief and the title *Iyoba* has continued to the present time in Benin's political institutions.

Image 2: Queen Mother pendant mask: *Iyoba*. The pendant mask is believed to have been produced in the early sixteenth century for *Oba* Esigie, the king of Benin, to honor his mother, Idia. The *oba* may have worn it at rites commemorating his mother, although today such pendants are worn at annual ceremonies of spiritual renewal and purification.

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Iyoba Idia and Queen Amina contributed greatly to the political, economic, and military development of their societies. Their stories support a growing awareness that in the pre-colonial political history of Nigerian societies, women were not excluded from the political sphere. Rather, they featured prominently in the political evolution and development of their societies. This paper presents a narrative of the two matriarchs who made outstanding legacies to their kingdoms, thereby laying the foundation for the enthronement of women into positions of political authority in the contemporary time. There emerged some women heroines who were appointed to prominent positions to represent their people in the modern political system.

Conclusion

This work contributes to our understanding of the dynamics of state formation in West African history, and in particular, the study of the women warriors in Benin Kingdom and Zazzau state. In precolonial Nigerian societies, not only kings were responsible for creating political institutions; we have shown here that women were also actively involved in the kingdom or empire-building as warriors, political leaders and advisors to leaders.

It is obvious from the evidence that Queen Amina of Zazzau and *Iyoba* Idia of Benin Kingdom share some similarities as queens, although located in different geographical locations. Queen Amina learned the art of politics and governance at an early age and

³⁰ Giorgio Danese, *Matrilineality and Matriarchy in Africa: An Advancement for Gender Equality or Utopia for Western Democracies?*, Unpublished thesis at LUISS University, Spain, Department of Political Science, 2020, 7-9.

adopted them when she ascended the throne of Zazzau; *Iyoba* Idia played a significant role in the Benin Kingdom during the reigns of her husband, *Oba* Ozuola, and son, *Oba* Esigie, by influencing administrative decisions and inspiring reverence for the position of queen mother.

Both women were warriors who personally fought in wars and led men to war, which was vital in the consolidation of their kingdoms. Queen Amina built a formidable state by expanding the territories of Zazzau through her military conquests, establishing it as one of the great early states of Hausaland. She transformed Zaria into a powerful and prominent centre of trade and commerce. In recognition of her power, influence, and military prowess, the neighbouring Hausa states of Kano, Katsina and far as Bauchi, Nupe and other parts of Northern Nigeria paid tribute to her. *Iyoba* Idia defended her kingdom from attack, using both military and, reputedly, magical tactics to defeat the invaders.

It is true that achievements of women from the royal families cannot be used as a yardstick to measure the contributions of women to the development of their societies. The role of ordinary women should not be ignored. Nevertheless, *Iyoba* Idia and Queen Amina stand out as examples of prominent women who left lasting impacts on the administration and governance of their states despite the prevalence of patriarchy in African societies.

The existence of these two historical matriarchs, among others, supports the voice of modern women in the process of nation-building and decolonization, and the development of their societies. The striking similarity between the two is their bravery and successful tactics during warfare. They were highly trained and had good military skills, though *Iyoba* Idia also deployed her supernatural and medicinal powers on the battlefield of the Benin-Idah war. Perhaps most importantly, the *Oba*'s mother is no longer killed as a tradition today in Benin; instead, she is highly respected, with her own office and roles at the *Oba*'s palace. That people of Zazzau and Benin Kingdom are still held in high esteem today is partially due to the impact of these two warrior women.

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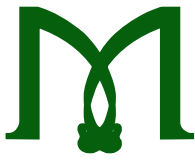
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Reigniting the Embers: Sexual Violence and the Mobilisation of Diasporic Tigrayan Women during the Tigray War, 2020-2023

FRANCESCA BALDWIN, PhD

Abstract

This article examines how far weaponised sexual violence in the Tigray War mobilised diasporic Tigrayan women for war work. It explores intersections between rape as a weapon of war with other forms of gendered violence through the testimonies of activist women in the diaspora, arguing that transnational actors positioned themselves as 'fighters' through and in response to widespread sexual violence in the region. It explores the extent to which Tigrayan women identified with the collective threat of sexual assault, challenging existing frameworks of gendered conflict participation by paying greater attention to the emotional experience of war for militarised actors beyond the physical conflict zone.

Keywords: Gender, conflict, sexual violence, Tigray, diaspora

Résumé

Cet article explore dans quelle mesure la violence sexuelle utilisée à des fins militaires pendant la guerre du Tigré a mobilisé les femmes de la diaspora



tigréenne dans le travail contre le guerre. Il explore les intersections du viol comme arme de guerre avec d'autres formes de violence genrée à travers les témoignages de femmes militantes de la diaspora du Tigré et ces implications pour une réforme transformatrice du genre dans la région. Il examine dans quelle mesure les femmes tigréennes s'identifient à ceux qui sont confrontés à la menace collective d'agression sexuelle et s'organisent pour un changement à long terme en réponse à un continuum plus large de violence contre les femmes.

Mots clés : Genre, conflits, violences sexuelles, Tigré, diaspora

Introduction

*'We as women are under attack, so we as women must respond.'*¹

On 4 November 2020, the federal government of Ethiopia launched an attack on the northernmost state of Tigray following political disputes with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Tigray's regional political representative. In the following two years, the Tigray War devastated the entire region through mass displacement, famine and an unprecedented blockade of communication, aid and essential services. By the time of signing the Pretoria Peace Accord in November 2022, Ethiopian federal troops, Eritrean soldiers and local militia from the neighbouring region of Amhara had perpetrated sexual violence against 120,000 Tigrayan women, girls, and some men, with thousands more lives affected indirectly by the indiscriminate weaponisation of sexual attack. Humanitarian reports uncovered systematic campaigns to rape and violate Tigrayans, including through sexual slavery, gang rape, mutilation, deliberate HIV infections, forced pregnancy and sexual assault.² The extreme brutality of the weaponised sexual violence dominated national and international discourse on the war, although healing, justice and reconciliation initiatives remain critically slim. This focus has in turn rendered to the periphery other, less extreme experiences of gendered violence affecting Tigrayan women within and beyond the battlefield. This article attends to this concern, foregrounding for the first time the emotional experiences of Tigrayan women participating in war from alternative spaces. It challenges existing perspectives on how diasporic women take part in war, arguing that non-militant actors define for themselves if, where, why and how they contribute transnational war work.

¹ Interview with Laila.

² Amnesty International Report, 'I don't know if they realized I was a person': Rape and Sexual violence in the Conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia', *Index No. AFR 25/4569/2021* (2021): 1-39; 'Sexual Violence in Tigray region, Ethiopia.xlsx', *Humanitarian Data Exchange* (2021); Human Rights Watch Report, 'I Always Remember That Day': Access the Services for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Ethiopia's Tigray Region', ISBN: 978-1-62313-949-0 (2021): 1-102.

This article builds on Anne-Kathrin Kreft's pivotal observation that there is a 'robust', under-explored relationship between conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and women's political mobilisation in war.³ The research draws on evidence of diasporic women's activism during the Tigray War in support of Kreft's findings, arguing that the collective threat of sexual violence in Tigray mobilised Tigrayan women around the world for social and political labour, framed by participants as a valuable site of war work. 'War work' in this context was defined by participants' beliefs that their physical and emotional labour in diasporic civil society organisations explicitly aligns with the agenda of the Tigray Defence Force (TDF) as the paramilitary wing of the TPLF.⁴ Through sustained engagement in a transnational militarised community, diaspora participants saw themselves as 'fighting' the Ethiopian federal government for regional political autonomy, demanding perpetrator accountability, reparations, independent investigation, and even regime change. Participant association with the resistance aims of the armed insurgency therefore encompassed their activities within the domain of 'war work', as opposed to 'peace work', through civil society action. This differentiation matters as feminist scholars across disciplines move to reconceptualise women's participation in contemporary digital warfare, recognising the value of the emotional, cultural, social and gendered auxiliary labour that underpins militarised movements worldwide.⁵

This study centres six life-history testimonies from Tigrayan women, collected through participant-led, dialogical methods with an emphasis on storytelling. This original qualitative research is supported by ethnographic observations and analysis of nineteen diasporic activist organisational materials carried out between November 2020 and August 2023. The article begins by bringing together literature on weaponised sexual violence with a diaspora's roles in peace and conflict to provide an interdisciplinary framework for the study of women's international mobilisation for war. It then examines the work of key diasporic organisations active in the Tigray War, arguing that the widespread perpetration of weaponised sexual violence shaped the parameters of *tegaru* (Tigrayan) civil society action. Finally, it examines in turn and at length the testimonies collected from prominent Tigrayan activists working in Europe, the US and South Africa.

³ Anne-Kathrin Kreft, 'Responding to Sexual Violence: Women's Mobilization in War', *Journal of Peace Research*, 56, 2 (2019): 220-233.

⁴ For 'war work', see also: Bruce Scates, 'The Unknown Sock Knitter: Voluntary Work, Emotional Labour, Bereavement and the Great War', *Labour History*, 81 (2001): 29-49; Liz Byrski, 'Emotional Labour as War Work: women up close and personal with McIndoe's Guinea Pigs', *Women's History Review*, 21, 3 (2012): 341-361.

⁵ Meredith Loken and Hilary Matfess, 'Introducing the Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion (WAAR) Project, 1946-2015', *Journal of Peace Research* (2023); Megan Mackenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Katherine Bruce-Lockhart, 'Reconsidering Women's Roles in the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya, 1952-60', in *Decolonization and Conflict: Colonial Comparisons and Legacies*, (eds) Martin Thomas and Gareth Curless (London, 2017).

This structure is designed to address the methodological tension of this research; it duly attempts to analyse the *collective* experiences of Tigrayan women whilst foregrounding their individuality and unique perspectives. This author recognises the deeply problematic practice of scholars and practitioners who continue to subsume African women into a faceless, generalised body, perpetuating the post-colonial humanitarian trope of ‘womenandchildren’ without due attention to the complexity, depth and range of experiences.⁶ This author therefore chose to set women’s testimonies apart from their own words in order to allow participants’ raw voices to speak for themselves, unimpeded by analysis. This approach enabled participants’ words to be examined contiguously, highlighting both the patterns and contradictions that emerge in each unique testimony.

Weaponised Sexual Violence in Tigray

Whenever a girl or a woman comes and shares her story, she is speaking for 6, 8, or even 10 other women who were raped in the place she comes from. She is the only one who was able to come and get treatment.⁷

In the Tigray War, as in many others, the enduring social stigma of sexual violence means the number of those reported will remain only a partial reflection of its scope, compounded in this context by the deliberate destruction of health services, silencing of internet and telephones, closure of transport networks and essential support systems.⁸ The limited evidence collected by grassroots community organisations, human rights groups, journalists and diaspora activists themselves revealed that sexual violence was perpetrated indiscriminately in Tigray, threatening all age groups, social classes, religious affiliations, marital statuses, and sexualities.⁹ Children as young as eight to elders in their eighties are amongst the survivors, with most accounts describing extreme physical violence accompanying sexual attack. Although the violence was predominately carried

⁶ Esther Möller et al., ‘Gendering Twentieth-Century Humanitarianism: An Introduction’, in *Gendering Global Humanitarianism in the Twentieth Century: Practice, Politics and the Power of Representation*, (eds) Esther Möller, Johannes Paulmann and Katharina Stornig (London, 2020), 17-78; Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (North Carolina, 1999); D.L. Hodgson and S. McCurdy, *‘Wicked’ Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa* (Portsmouth, 2001).

⁷ Romina Istratii, ‘War and domestic violence: A rapid scoping of the international literature to understand the relationship and to inform current responses in the Tigray humanitarian crisis’ (Unpublished Working Paper II, 2021), 8.

⁸ Amnesty International Report, 1-39.

⁹ Rita Kahsay, Rowena Kahsay and Sally Keeble (eds.), *In Plain Sight: Sexual Violence in the Tigray Conflict* (London: Eleanor Press, 2023); Human Rights Watch Report, ‘I Always Remember That Day’: Access the Services for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region’, ISBN: 978-1-62313-949-0 (2021): 1-102.

out against women and girls, some Tigrayan men also came forward as survivors of rape and sexual violence.¹⁰

The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war has been well established in scholarship which recognises it is a strategic choice by military groups, neither inevitable nor universal, but essential information about the conflict in which it takes place.¹¹ Its perpetration is specific, requiring considered analysis of the particular functions, intentions, and effectuations of sexual attack in each context. In Tigray, scholars and human rights organisations differentiated between the sexual violence carried out by each of the three perpetrating groups present in the region; they found higher rates of gang rape and sexual slavery by Eritrean troops, and increased risk of ethnic violence alongside sexual violence by Amhara militia.¹² In these instances, perpetrators claimed to be able to remove their victim's capacity to produce Tigrayan children through genital mutilation, or by forced impregnation by a non-ethnically-Tigrayan male. This violence was premised on the idea that the female body is a vessel for preserving and disrupting ethnic identity, whereby a male perpetrator can either prevent a woman from producing children in her ethnic image through damaging her reproductive capacities or force her through rape and impregnation to have a child of his ethnic distinction as she is used as a boundary-marker: as a vessel for legitimising (male) collective ethnicity. As such, the female body is exploited as a political space for negotiating identity and meaning. Decisions about boundaries of the 'other' and definitions of the 'self' are defined through and within the female body by shaping its relationship to identity politics. Lori Handrahan coined the phrase 'patriarchy of ethnicity' in reference to the passing of male ethnic identity through rape and impregnation.¹³ It is also a useful concept in this context to reflect on the ways in which ethnicity and ethnic hierarchies buttress conditions of gender domination.

Survivors of sexual violence do not endure their experience in isolation, however. Other scholars have evidenced how an attack on one woman impacts her entire community; this research is situated within an emerging body of literature identifying that there is also an

¹⁰ Amnesty International Report: 1-39; Insecurity Insight, 'Sexual Violence in Ethiopia's Tigray region, 20 March 2021', Geneva: Insecurity Insight, 2020; available online at <https://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Sexual-Violence-in-Ethiopia-Tigray-Region-30-March-2021.pdf>, accessed 20 April 2024.

¹¹ Catherine A Mackinnon, 'Genocide's Sexuality', *Nomos*, 46 (2005): 313-356; Sara Meger, *Rape Loot Pillage: The Political Economy of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict* (Oxford Scholarship Online: 2016); Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War? Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond* (London: Zed Books, 2013); Elisabeth J. Wood, 'Variation in sexual violence during war', *Politics and Society*, 34, 3 (2006):307-42.

¹² Tghat Forum, 'Tghat Forum 3: Women's Experiences in the Tigray War', online video recording, YouTube (2021). For analysis of the differing aims of perpetrating groups in Tigray, see: Hilary Matfess, 'Sexual Violence and the War in Tigray', *Lawfare Institute: Horn of Africa* (2021).

¹³ Lori Handrahan, 'Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction', *Security Dialogue*, 35, 4 (2003): 429-455, 438.

indirect experience of sexual violence lived by those who do not endure physical attack.¹⁴ When sexual violence was weaponised indiscriminately in Tigray, this study posits that a shared identification emerged for Tigrayan women connected by the violation of Tigrayan women's bodies as a *collective*, as well as solidarity with those suffering in reality. The meanings attached to Tigrayan women's bodies created a continuum of SGBV in the Tigray War, in which those who were not themselves literal survivors of sexual violence internalised and endured the indirect experience of bodily violation, sharing in an emotional experience of war that transcended boundaries of the conflict zone. In other words, violence perpetrated against women in Tigray was simultaneously lived as an attack on all Tigrayan women as a conceptual body. This phenomenon is by no means unique to Tigray, but it was heightened by the cultural emphasis on the maternalist position of women as gatekeepers of the 'essence' of Tigray, as later testimonies examined in this article will detail.¹⁵

Mobilising Tigrayan Diasporic Women for War Work

Firstly, it must be noted that Tigrayan women have a significant history of political and military engagement. In the 1974-1991 Ethiopian civil war, Tigrayan women comprised up to one-third of combatants in the regional armed resistance, with thousands more contributing auxiliary labour to sustain the insurgent group.¹⁶ During this seventeen-year liberation struggle, women's involvement in mass associations known as *baitos* resulted in radical legal reform for issues pertaining to women's rights in land ownership, marriage, and divorce.¹⁷ Although pushed back into familiar restrictive gender roles after the end of civil war in 1991, the precedent for women's participation in revolution in Tigray was set, reflected in the substantial number of women taking up arms in the Tigray Defence Force in 2020 – 2022.¹⁸ The title of this article, 'Reigniting the Embers' connects this research with the labour of the previous generation of Tigrayan women, whose contributions were documented in Jenny Hammond's influential monograph *Fire From*

¹⁴ See Kreft; Shesterinina Anastasia, 'Collective threat framing and mobilization in civil war', *American Political Science Review*, 110, 3 (2016): 411 – 427; See also: Sara E Davis and Jacqui True, 'Reframing conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence: bringing gender analysis back in', *Security Dialogue*, 46, 6 (2015): 495 – 512; Patricia A. Weitsman, 'The Politics of Identity and Sexual Violence: A Review of Bosnia and Rwanda', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 3 (2008): 561-578, 562.

¹⁵ For 'mothers of the nation', see: Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Oxford: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁶ Tsegay Berhe, *The Tigrean women in the liberation struggle and aftermath, 1975- 1996* (OSSREA: 1999); Thera Mjaaland, 'At the frontiers of change: Women and girls' pursuit of education in north-western Tigray, Ethiopia' (doctoral thesis, submitted to the University of Bergen, 2013), 33.

¹⁷ Jenny Hammond and Nell Druce (eds.), *Sweeter than Honey* (London: Links, 1989); Jenny Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes: A Chronicle of the Revolution in Tigray* (London: Red Sea Pr, 1998).

¹⁸ Fighter A Interview; See Also: 'We don't have a limit': Yasuyoshi Chiba – agency photographer of 2021', *Guardian*, 23 December 2021, [theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/dec/23/we-dont-have-a-limit-yasuyoshi-chiba-agency-photographer-of-2021](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/dec/23/we-dont-have-a-limit-yasuyoshi-chiba-agency-photographer-of-2021), [accessed 07/12/2022].

the Ashes: A Chronicle of Revolution in Tigray.¹⁹ In this study, the 'fire' of Hammond's participants has been reignited by a new generation, taking up the baton of women's empowerment to advocate for critical social and political reform in the region.

Existing literature predominately considers sexual violence to be a consequence of war, with only a few scholars explicitly recognising its potential link to conflict escalation.²⁰ In a case study of Colombia, Kreft identified the increased political mobilisation of women affected by conflict-related sexual violence and rape, connecting women's actions with a collective threat to gender equality through gender-based violence.²¹ Adopting Charles Tilly's framework on collective action to trace the threat versus opportunity dichotomy which has since characterised much of the literature on social movements, Kreft took note of Tilly's observation that a danger to group interest is more likely to mobilise contentious political action as potential opportunities for that group.²² Kreft found:

First, the threat does not necessarily have to be to women's own, immediate safety to elicit a mobilization response as long as there is a perception of collective threat and women identify with the collective. Second, women establish a link between sexual violence and other ways in which women's rights and interests are violated or undermined.²³

This article applies these observations to the Tigray War and builds further upon them by considering the specific ways in which diaspora women experienced sexual violence indirectly and performed war work in response to the collective threat to their gendered ethnic body. This approach provides a compelling lens through which to address the development of a transnational 'warscape', a term first introduced by Carolyn Nordstrom, capturing the internationalisation and digitisation conflict participation in the contemporary world.²⁴

As evidenced by Jennifer Brinkerhoff and others, diasporas have critically influenced the course and outcome of conflicts in their place of origin through economic remittance, philanthropy, human capital and policy reform, intensified by the surge of digital activism

¹⁹ Hammond, *Fire from the Ashes*.

²⁰ Elizabeth D., Heineman, *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones: From the Ancient World to the Era of Human Rights* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 10.

²¹ Kreft, 220-233.

²² Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1978) 135; Heike Schmidt, 'Love and Healing in Forced Communities: Borderlands in Zimbabwe's War of Liberation', in *African Boundaries*, (eds) Paul Nugent and A. I. Asiwaju (New York: Bloomsbury, 1996).

²³ Kreft, 222.

²⁴ Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century* (California: University of California Press, 2004); Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (eds), *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Culture* (California: University of California Press, 1996).

that has positioned transnational actors as a substantial force in global politics.²⁵ From Haiti, to Croatia, to Ireland, to present-day Palestine, diasporas worldwide have engaged heavily in war and peace. In Tigray, however, the two-year communication blackout positioned *tegaru* diaspora uniquely in world history. While other conflicts have actively limited the accessibility of internet and social media to affected peoples, including Algeria, Zimbabwe, Gabon, and Uganda, the sustained, region-wide silence defining the experience of Tigrayan residents during the war is the longest internet shutdown to date. Comparisons are frequently drawn between Tigray and Ukraine, as the two wars ran concurrently for nine months in 2022, but the latter conflict is itself defined by the visibility of the ‘war feed,’ where those in conflict zones could share in real time videos, images, and commentaries of the violence.²⁶ The Tigray War, in turn, occurred within a carefully curated culture of silence.

The Tigray diaspora’s role emerged within this vacuum of information and the resulting limited response by the international community. Mobilising globally into national and transnational organisations representing Tigray’s interests on an international stage, engagement with the diaspora movement swept through the Tigrayan community in the days and weeks after the onset of war in 2020. Their roles ranged from acting as intermediaries for evidence of war crimes, lobbying for legal action and economic sanctions, raising global awareness through activism, and as direct financiers for the civilian and military efforts in Tigray. They were able to mobilise networks across the region to share information, in one instance passing recordings of attacked women from person to person until they reached an intermediary in Sudan, who in turn shared the evidence with diasporic representatives.²⁷ By February of 2022, there were thirty-eight diaspora groups operating transnationally, claiming a combined membership of roughly 120,000. Select groups rose to prominent positions in the global community, namely Omna Tigray, Global Society of Tigray Scholars (GSTS), Tigray Youth Network (TYN), Mekete Tigray, TGHAT, and the Tigray Relief Fund.²⁸

Importantly, diaspora activists identified themselves as *woyane*, a Tigrinya term referencing the armed struggle of ordinary Tigrayans in regional history. The ‘digital *woyane*’ or ‘digital junta,’ as they became known, characterised their activism as war work through explicit support of the militarised aims of the TDF: protection of Tigray’s

²⁵ Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, ‘Diasporas and conflict societies: conflict entrepreneurs, competing interests or contributors to stability and development?’, *Conflict, Security & Development*, 11, 2 (2011): 115-143; B. Baser, *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: A Comparative Perspective* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

²⁶ A. Hoskins and P. Shchelin, ‘The War Feed: Digital War in Plain Sight’, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 67, 3 (2023): 449-463.

²⁷ Bisrat Interview.

²⁸ Including: running campaigns, fundraising, legal consultancy, documentation work, organising protests, lobbying, mobilising resources, hosting debates, arranging events, designing policy, and representing Tigray in international forums.

borders from external aggressors, perpetrator accountability, and for some, Tigray's independence. These aims were differentiated from those of the TPLF as the regional political party, which sought a difficult treaty with the Ethiopian federal government. Many participants were explicit about their support of the TDF, distancing themselves from association with the TPLF. Their testimonies reveal how they framed their efforts as a 'fight', identifying strongly with the TDF as a people's struggle, in which individuals could contribute their own forms of resistance.

Within the *tegaru* diasporic mobilisation, women occupied a notably significant majority, rallying the community for war through actions that challenged normative discourse about women's special responsibility for peace.²⁹ Omna Tigray is one of the largest global diaspora groups and a proudly majority-woman-led organisation, with 87% of senior management roles held by women, while one of the leading organisations based in the UK, TYN, boasts 89% female leadership.³⁰ From high-profile advocacy to fundraising and administration, diaspora networks have taken visible pride in their majority-female gender imbalance and reference the 'special responsibility' of Tigrayan women for action and resilience.³¹

This article further posits that the widespread sexual violence dominating women's experiences of war in Tigray opened the floor for high-profile discussions in the community about the damaging gender norms underpinning the perpetration of SGBV in war, spotlighting women's rights in conflict and beyond in diasporic discourse. Of the nineteen diaspora activist groups reviewed, selected based on their size and contributions, sixteen explicitly prioritised combatting the weaponisation of sexual violence in the Tigray War through campaigns, donations, legal consultancy, awareness-raising and efforts to document the crimes.³² Every organisation reviewed indicated their commitment to long-term visions regarding gender-based issues, particularly through representation, diversity and inclusion within their organisational structures and through highlighting the centrality of female empowerment in their activities. As one example, the Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals acknowledged the gendered challenges presented by the war beyond sexual violence in their 'Family to Family' campaign, which invests in the long-term educational and professional future of women

²⁹ See: Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'On beautiful souls, just warriors and feminist consciousness', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 5, 3-4 (1982): 341-348.

³⁰ TYN Leadership Interview; Omna Tigray Leadership Interview.

³¹ See: Omna Tigray, Tigray Youth Network, Mekete Tigray UK, Yikono.

³² Groups reviewed include: Omna Tigray, Tigray Youth Network, Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals, Art for Tigray, Security and Justice for Tigray, Health Professionals Network for Tigray, Union of Tigrayans in North America, Stand with Tigray, Alliance of Tigrayan Associations in Australia and New Zealand, Tegar Professionals Network, United Teagru Canada, United Tegar Australia, Tigray Youth Movement Switzerland, Tigray Youth Holland, Tigray Relief Sweden, IROB Anina Civil Society, Mekete Tigray UK, Tghat Media.

and girls in Tigray who missed opportunities during the conflict.³³ Substantial gender reforms were consistently prioritised by such groups through foregrounding the needs of survivors of weaponised sexual violence in organisational materials and the commitment to investment (financial and personal) in women and girls in Tigray's future.³⁴

The rise of discourse on women's rights and bodily autonomy during conflict is a familiar phenomenon elsewhere in history; war, according to Victoria Hesford, has 'often been the scene of political possibilities for feminist claims on the nation-state'.³⁵ Breakdown of cohesion and order can provide an opportunity for those who occupy peripheral roles in the social hierarchy to make their claims for movement and inclusion. In Hesford's words, women's participation in war as 'an effective illustration of...[their] ability to be active citizens is not a new tactic for feminism'.³⁶ For those in the diaspora, complex and competing gender relations frameworks provide a unique operative space. Gender roles in their country of origin inform the expectations around their behaviour and presentations as diasporic members, but their country of residence simultaneously affects the spaces available for them to subvert or reproduce existing gender ideologies. African and global north feminisms interact in the creation of a new reform discourse; in this context, Tigrayan women in the diaspora navigated hegemonic gender hierarchies pervasive in Tigray from international locations, with the resources and inter-cultural influences available to them. In doing so, this article claims they were able to deploy familiar narratives about the role and behaviours of a Tigrayan women to renegotiate their positions and gain access to critical political reform spaces. This argument draws on interventions in discourse on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, where Marjaana Jauhola has argued that the 'symbolic value of women during [war]... focuses on their contribution as reproducers of the nation and their role in embodying cultural and national borders'.³⁷ Jauhola posits that women's access to peace and security depends on their presentation as a 'good woman'... either a peacebuilder or a victim of violence'.³⁸ Such dichotomies are invariably false, but that does not mean they are not useful for women seeking to move within existing structures to demand transformative gender reforms.

It must be acknowledged that the work of diasporic activists did not happen against a backdrop of silence. In the years before the war, significant progress was already being made in Tigray to combat violence against women and girls by women's groups, social

³³ Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals, 'F2F Initiative Rationale' (2021).

³⁴ See: Omna Tigray, 'Weaponized SGBV in the War on Tigray – Explained' (2021).

³⁵ Victoria Hesford, 'Securing a Future: Feminist Futures in a Time of War' in *Feminist Time Against Nation Time: Gender, Politics, and the Nation-State in an Age of Permanent War*, (eds) Victoria Hesford and Lisa Diedrich (Lexington Books: Plymouth, 2010), 169.

³⁶ Hesford, 169.

³⁷ Marjaana Jauhola, 'Decolonizing branded peacebuilding: abjected woman talk back to the Finish Women, Peace and Security agenda', *International Affairs*, 92, 2 (2016): 333-35, 333.

³⁸ Jauhola, 334.

workers, women's groups and local NGOs.³⁹ Prominent women's associations have existed in Tigray since the early days of civil war in 1975, growing in number and influence in the subsequent decades. In 2019, anti-rape campaign group Yikono sparked public debate as they took to the streets in Tigray's capital city of Mekelle to protest violence against women. Their influential social media campaign was named *aytiteqilelen*, meaning 'she cannot be taken', as a play on the Tigrinya word *teqlila* in reference to the practice of marrying a survivor to their rapist.⁴⁰ Significantly, the public demonstration and subsequent discourse online heavily involved young Tigrayan men, who rallied to break down the notion that rape was a 'woman's issue'. It can be said, therefore, that the process for gender reform had begun before the outbreak of the Tigray War, but that the locus of this work was largely in Tigray, conducted in Tigrinya, and focused on a regional scope.

The Tigray War reinforced the existing efforts and indeed altered the direction, agenda and reach of reform discourse. Yikono moved its operations largely online, re-designed as a diasporic led, trans-boundary campaign group focusing on the weaponisation of SGBV and serving as a solidarity network for Tigrayan women worldwide. They also have reached a much broader audience since 2020, including elder male generations and social conservatives who had previously been largely silent on 'feminist debates' about women's bodily autonomy, the need for female contraception and protection against SGBV. Before the war, it was possible to observe disparity in the views of diasporic males and men in Tigray; however, in recent months it has become clear that many men in Tigray have also placed women's rights firmly centre stage in public discourse, demonstrated in communications from TDF soldiers who cited the abuse of women as a motivating factor for their own enlistment and in religious elder's explicit condemnation of SGBV.⁴¹ Abroad, Tigrayan diaspora men have been vocal in their focus on the abuse of women in the war, and the discourse has expanded from this to explore wider limitations to women's rights in Tigray. Both men and women across generations have joined social media platforms, many for the first time, as a way to overcome a sense of powerlessness and dedicate their accounts exclusively to activism.⁴² Notably, diasporic men have recognised the 'special' responsibility that Tigrayan women have assumed for transnational war work, as described by one male participant in northern Europe:

It's just their [women's] time. You know, Tigrayan women are so special.
Unlike any other women anywhere in the world. They are doing everything,

³⁹ Romina Istratii, *Adapting Gender and Development to Local Religious Contexts: A Decolonial Approach to Domestic Violence in Ethiopia* (London: Routledge, 2020).

⁴⁰ Mehret Berehe, '#Yikono Campaign Gives Ethiopian Women the Language to Challenge Violence', *African Feminism* (2019).

⁴¹ Fighter A Interview; Cara Anna, 'Abune Mathias accuses Ethiopian government of genocide in Tigray – "The taboo of taboos, the despicable of despicable, is being committed"', *Eritrea Hub* (2021).

⁴² Amlakawit Interview.

everything. They work so hard, tell us what to do [*laughs*]. The young women especially, they rose to the task and [are] leading the way. They organise the protests, events, fundraising. They are honouring Tigray.⁴³

In the remainder of this article, six activist women's stories are examined in turn to unpack the reasoning behind this gendered division of labour in the Tigrayan diaspora. The testimonies below are but a window into the complex, diverse perspectives of Tigrayan women worldwide, but as a body of experience they reveal the deep internalisation of SGBV by diasporic women and their engagement in a self-defined 'fight' as non-militant actors.

Activist Women of the Tigray War

Laila's story

A mother of two in her mid-thirties, Laila was born and raised in Tigray, moving to the US as a teenager. She currently resides in South Africa, where she participates in advocacy initiatives and political lobbying. Of all the participants in this study, Laila has the most intimate family connections with the TDF as her 'baby' sister and two brothers enlisted at the start of the war. Her testimony provided a layered insight into both her own relationship with the Tigray resistance movement and that of her sister, as a young woman serving as an armed combatant at the time of interview.

Laila: The day I found out that she [my sister] joined the TDF... that was the real turning point for me. She was my baby sister!... One time she was speaking on the phone with me, and when the network doesn't work they have to go outside of the house beyond the yard, and she saw a soldier. And she told me, 'Oh my God, there is a soldier.' And I'm here [the phone], and I'm shouting, 'Hello? Hello?'-- and probably she was running, and I hear her heavy breathing, and then it hung up. The network did not come back on for weeks. Imagine at that time what I was thinking. With all the news that's coming - I don't know if the soldier got her, what he did to her. I hold it in myself, and I live for weeks thinking this has happened. When she calls and she tells me it was OK, she got inside and hid, nothing changes for me. Because it wasn't my sister, OK, but it is my other sisters. It wasn't her, but it was this other girl. Does that make sense?...

It's better that she is on the mountain freely. Defending with her friends. At least she is happy and free. I was talking to her - my confident, very proud sister on the mountains. Maybe she's going hungry from the picture she sent

⁴³ Goitom Interview.

me. She doesn't look the same. [cries] I'm sorry. I'm very emotional right now. But I think this story matters. To make sense of all of it or this madness...

Tigrayan women have risen up, all of us, young and old. We are doing everything, make no mistake. This is our fight. We as women are under attack, so we as women must respond. I will fight for them until the day I die, for every mother who died and every child who cried.

Laila's words were selected to open this article because they embody the key finding of this research: the SGBV perpetrated in Tigray has mobilised Tigrayan women transnationally for a gendered articulation of war work. Laila framed her 'fight' through a gendered lens, presenting women's engagement in activism, political reform and violence as a movement of women in direct response to the threat against their group. Her description of the sexual violence she feared had been perpetrated against her sister depicted just how far Laila viewed SGBV as a collective experience, shared amongst 'sisters' she had never known but with whom she felt intense solidarity. There are a great many Tigrayan men involved in activism, and a great many more in the TDF, but Laila captured in her testimony how the broader resistance movement has been underpinned by women, directing and sustaining diasporic labour.

Importantly, Laila did not just mobilise in response to the threat of SGBV. Her promise to fight 'for every mother... every child' resonates with the findings of Kreft and others who have mapped the complementary motivations for women engaging in war, including a strong maternalist trend to 'protect' children suffering in conflict.⁴⁴ What is significant is that while Laila did not mobilise *exclusively* in response to SGBV, her contention that 'nothing changed' after she discovered her sister was physically unharmed reveals how far she identified with a collective experience, transcending individual victims, but representing the essence of Tigrayan women as a group.

Maria's Story

Maria is in her early 30s, living in Europe at the time of interview. She was born in Addis Ababa to prominent Tigrayan politicians. Following her father's instruction, she fled Ethiopia before the war broke out. When this interview was conducted, Maria's family in Addis Ababa had been evicted from their home by the Ethiopian federal government and their possessions sold on the streets. Preserving her parent's safety prevented Maria from taking on a public role but as a professional social worker and writer, Maria had been

⁴⁴ See Kreft; Marie Berry, 'From violence to mobilization: Women, war, and the threat in Rwanda', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 20, 2 (2015): 135-156; Kim Miller, 'Moms with Guns: Women's Political Agency in Anti-Apartheid Visual Culture', *African Arts*, 42, 2 (2009):68-75; Judith Stevenson 'The Mamas Were Ripe': Ideologies of Motherhood and Public Resistance in a South African Township', *Feminist Formations*, 23, 2 (2011): 132-163.

heavily involved in what she calls 'radical work' behind the scenes. Maria's testimony provided a valuable insight into sexual violence as a continuum, tied closely to other forms of GBV:⁴⁵

Maria: Tigrayan women are very religious. Some of them -- they almost think that it's a punishment for something, you know... I think rape in the way that it's been used as a humiliation tool, as depraved as it has been, is something that I don't think any of us have ever even seen, to even read about. I cannot imagine how they must feel...

I can even tell you from my own experience, I haven't had proper sex in a very long time. I am so trauma[tised], to be intimate with my partner, with the person I love and trust 100% and have no question over, and my body just feels like it shouldn't be touched by a man. I feel it, you know, and I don't know how they could feel.

I want them to be safe. I want them to feel their strength and to say I did this and I can build myself up, but it's hard... in Tigray it's hard... if you walk down the street with a man your mom will know about it before you get home, you know?

This is how people know you there, so I don't know. Even if their community might not shame them, it might just be pitying them, if nothing else. The pity -- like what does the future look like for a lot of these women? Because I think that a lot of them would want to build families, and that also means a husband who's willing to understand what happened to you and that they're willing to create a family with you. I don't know if our men are strong enough for that as well. They might not openly shame them, but are they willing to build a life with a woman who's gone through something like that? I don't know...

I think even with a lot of feminist movements, or even female-centred work... this is one of the things that I always had a problem with. The conversation around empowering women was very much on the shoulders of the women. They're telling them, 'You can be strong' [but] none of us are born thinking we're not strong, we're weak, we're inadequate. It's a society that makes it so... I'm worried that when they go back... how do we overcome sexual trauma and all of these things? I'm afraid that it's just going to be focused on the women and they're still going to feel it -- it's another form of subjugating them in a way.

⁴⁵ Interviewer prompt: How do you feel about what is happening to women in Tigray?

(...) FB: And are you feeling like that is a good thing for you to have a community purpose and somewhere that you can put the energy and put the organization?

M: Yeah, 100%. I have to do something. It's very important [to advocate] ... this is the way I show love, you know?... This feels big.

One of the encounters that inspired this scholarship was the moment in this interview when Maria observed that stories of rape in Tigray affected her physically, explaining that she did not want to engage in sex because of the transcendent 'trauma' of Tigrayan women. Her application of 'trauma' in this context resonated with Graham Dawson's description of 'contagious... emotion' in social groups undergoing a shared difficult experience.⁴⁶ Maria composed a shared gendered experience of the war that she internalised and lived, despite no physical threat to her own person. As she later clarified, she has never been a victim of sexual abuse, but intimately, viscerally identified with the collective experience of Tigrayan women, transferring the pain of survivors to herself. Her response was based on the imagined community of Tigrayan women facing violence and instability, again creating profound solidarity with those in the literal conflict zone.

Maria also identified an important connection between the aftermath of sexual attack and other discriminatory gendered structures pervasive in Ethiopia, as elsewhere. Her observation that the responsibility for healing cannot exclusively be the prerogative of women in the community is a critical reflection on the ways in which heteronormative gender roles intersect with this violence. Her description of potential responses from the community post-conflict as 'focused on the women' and 'another form of' subjugation was potent; she recognised the competing gendered hierarchies and social norms that compound the impact of conflict-related gender-based violence after war, and the difficulties in moving away from discourse defining SGBV as a 'woman's' issue. In this way, Maria linked weaponised sexual violence with other kinds of violence against women – social ostracisation, structural violence, trauma suppression, to name a few – grounded in the dangerous potential of spatially located gender norms and enduring usage of the female body as a site of identity politics.

Harinet's Story

At the time of interview, Harinet was twenty-four years old, living in the United Kingdom. She is a founding member of the Tigray Youth Network (TYN). Harinet became involved in activism when the war began and has since been a pivotal figure in the community, speaking on widely broadcasted television programmes, liaising with other professional networks and recording evidence of atrocities in Sudan and Tigray. Her testimony reveals

⁴⁶ Graham Dawson, 'The Meaning of 'Moving On': From Trauma to the History and Memory of Emotions in 'Post-Conflict' Northern Ireland, *Irish University Review*, 27, 1 (2017): 82-102.

a great deal about the influence of sexual violence on her work, and her deep association with the 'fight' of the people of Tigray at home and abroad:⁴⁷

Harinet: The nature of the sexual violence is so damaging and something these people have to deal with forever, being infertile, having HIV...having your wife, or child, or mother raped in front of you... sometimes I thought what are we fighting for? It makes you feel hopeless, like I am going to go back to a Tigray that's really damaged. And that is scary.

On the other hand, the fact that sexual violence is allowed to happen and we are so ok with sexism day to day... It makes me feel like that has contributed to it. Especially when the Prime Minister [Abiy Ahmed] was able to say that rape is very normal in war and it be not very alarming to Ethiopian society. It makes you feel a bit like, 'What am I doing, what am I advocating for if that's the kind of country they're going to live in anyway?' But it pushed me to want to fight for these things...

I cannot explain how much I think about it [violence against women]. It is every day. It is a part of me. Even when I'm tired, I think 'I must carry on because of what they went through'. This movement has to be enough...

In our meetings [in TYN], we tried to aim for gender parity. It made me want to push more for feminism and include these women [survivors]. Some of these women [survivors] in TDF are fighting now and the Tigray they are fighting for is not going to be a sexist Tigray. I want them on the ground to go and claim what they fought for. I don't want them to be subjugated once this war is over... so a massive part of me wants to continue feminist activism going forward after the war. We're fighting for something that we maybe never had.

Harinet connected sexual abuse with other forms of gender-based violence and discrimination that existed before the war, referencing the broader approach to SGBV in Ethiopia as a 'woman's issue', or an inevitable part of society. There has been an attempt at a smear campaign by federal government supporters to discredit survivors of rape in the Tigray War by pointing out that regional anti-rape groups existed before the war, and thus claiming the violence is a continuance of practice endorsed by Tigrayan civil society. Although this is a poor attempt to deflect attention from the specific, strategic weaponisation of sexual violence in the war, the observation that GBV is a continuum grounded in peacetime gender normativity is relevant.

⁴⁷ Interviewer prompt: How do you feel about what is happening to women in Tigray?

Harinet explicitly connected the sexual violence perpetrated against Tigrayan women with the activities of women's movements in the country and her own personal work. Her easy use of the term 'feminism' is notable; it remains a contested concept for women in Ethiopia, largely due to the perception that it is a separatist term reliant on stressing differences between men and woman rather than endorsing equality, as well as its reputation for being a white-led, Western term for sexual topics rather than issues of social or economic justice.⁴⁸ Harinet's language, however, reflects the increased usage of the term in wartime *tegaru* discourse. The alliances forged between transnational actors has provided a framework for approaching women's rights through a new, cross-cultural lens in post-war Tigray, shaped by the diverse resources and backgrounds of diasporic influencers.

Critically, Harinet claimed the mobilisation of women as armed combatants in the TDF was related to the threat sexual violence constituted to women as a group. Weaponised sexual violence stands in Harinet's testimony as explicit motivation for women's war work, both in Tigray and elsewhere.

Nayna's Story

Nayna is in her late 20s, living in the United Kingdom at the time of interview. When the Tigray War broke out in November 2020, Nayana was in Mekelle visiting friends and family. She spent ten days living under siege, witnessing first-hand the destruction caused by drone and air strikes before being allowed onto a United Nations bus for foreign nationals. Since returning home, Nayna has been a leading member of TYN, gathering testimonies from Tigrayan refugee women and working to raise awareness of atrocities in Tigray. In her words, her activism has characterised her life since November 2020:

Nayna: I feel like for so long we have been hearing about these mad, beyond what the mind can conceive, levels of sexual violence. Seeing and hearing the stories coming out of Tigray has undoubtedly intensified our campaign efforts.

The violence experienced by women and girls... I don't think you need to centre yourself in this tragedy with sayings like, 'It could have been me', 'This person speaks my language, or is from the same town as me'... for me to feel empathy for the survivors. The violence and sinister intentions are to strip future generations of their Tigrayan heritage, and I don't think there has been anything as intentional or thought out as that, and that has fuelled me.

⁴⁸ Jenny Hammond, "'My revolution is like honey': Women in revolutionary Tigray", *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1: 56-59 (2008), 57-58; Carole McCain and Seung-Kyung Kim, (eds), *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 24.

I would say [Tigray] is a matriarchal society in the case that women are often the ones who pass down tradition and protect community, are caregivers, are heads of family, and in doing that it makes this already inconceivable violence much more painful because it intends to break that tradition. Because it is so 'bad'... because of these intentions, it is enough to sustain rage and from that rage comes motivation and [I] feel a responsibility to challenge that...

When it comes to any sustained, longer-term work, you're more likely to find women at the forefront of that. The women are the backbone of everything. They're our protectors, not just as physical individuals, but of our culture, of our existence, our identity. As a movement, it's our women dominating [it], of course.

As in Harinet's testimony, Nayna explicitly connected the weaponisation of sexual violence to the intensity of her activist work. Her explanation that she did not need to identify as a victim in order to relate to the experiences of other Tigrayan women was telling; Nayna, unlike Maria, was able to distance the imagined danger to her own body but retain a close solidarity with affected Tigrayan women. This perspective adds nuance to this article's argument. For Nayna, weaponised sexual violence was narrated as constituting a threat to women as a group, but this threat was explicitly not Nayna's own. Her relationship to the violence was thus not channelled through her physical body, but a wider allyship.

Nayna referred to her community as 'matriarchal' and the intentions of perpetrating groups to target women on such grounds. Although Tigrayan society largely adheres to fixed gender norms and expectations of female behaviour, Tigrayan women are integral to social cohesion as community leaders and upholding standards of morality, representing the essence of being Tigrayan.⁴⁹ For Nayna, sexual violence was not just perpetrated against women's bodies, but against all they represent in Tigray. Her personal mobilisation and motivations were sustained through the resulting 'rage' and responsibility to all women in her community to deny perpetrators the outcome intended.

By presenting Tigrayan women as natural 'protectors', Nayna's words spark association with Jauhola's aforementioned concept of a 'good woman' as a malleable identity called upon by women to subvert gender roles and access restricted spaces.⁵⁰ In this context, activist women navigated the transnational warscape through the narrative of 'mothers of the nation', positioning themselves as the necessary leaders for sustainable peace.

⁴⁹ Thera Mjaaland, 'Beyond the Coffee Ceremony: Women's Agency in Western Tigray, Northern Ethiopia', *Betwixt and Between: Sosialantropologstudentenes Årbok: Master og Hovedfag*, 14:171-187.

⁵⁰ Jauhola, 334.

At the end of her testimony, Nayna drew poignant association between the political and military operations in Tigray and those abroad, stating:

Nayna: Us, TPLF, TDF – Tigray comes first. We're Tigray first.

The use of the collective pronoun in this context depicted how far Nayna saw her role as part of the broader war effort, all working towards a shared imagining of 'Tigray'.

Saba's Story

Saba, a woman in her early twenties, was born to Tigrayan parents but was fostered in her early years by an Eritrean mother and Ethiopian father, describing herself as a 'by-product of Ethiopian nationalism'. She explicitly named the day she became interested in politics as November 4th, the day the war broke out in 2020. Since then, she has been one of the most prominent public faces of the movement. As a passionate speaker with a high-profile social media presence, Saba was at the forefront of the youth movement and has assumed leadership responsibilities over the past year, including as an interlocuter receiving news from Tigray and sharing reports with media outlets.⁵¹

Saba: There was a video going round a couple of months ago of a woman who had been raped by Eritrean soldiers and they had inserted stuff into her private parts. When that video came out, they sent it to me and a couple of people first. This was a couple of days before it came out. I was really traumatised by that. I think that's probably the worst video I've seen. I've seen a lot of the videos of the executions, and really horrible stuff, but I think that that's one of the worst videos I've seen...

You know, there are a lot of implications behind rape. It's not just rape [which] happens one day and it's over, it's something that will stay with you for the rest of your life. And as a woman – I'm a woman myself so I know how I feel ... Because society is really built on Tigrayan woman. The women are the ones that really hold the social structure of Tigray together... the idea of breaking their spirit is literally breaking the heart of the social structure that Tigray has... To feel like these women have been attacked, and not only attacked but left with a scar – a scar so deep, where it's really going to affect not just our generation but the next generation...

For me, I think the more pain I feel, the more passionate and motivated I become to do something about it. I hate just feeling like a victim. That's the worst thing for me to feel. I think the best thing I can do is to give my time.

⁵¹ Interviewer prompt: How are you dealing with the information you receive from Tigray?

That's the best thing I can do. It's who I am. I can do what I can from where I am, and then at least I feel like I'm doing something.

Saba was clear that the exposure to gender-based violence affected her more than exposure to other forms of violence in the war. She identified with the experience of sexual violence as a Tigrayan woman, confirming that attack on one Tigrayan woman was also experienced as an attack on Tigrayan women as a group. Importantly, Saba projected that the legacy of the gender-based violence would leave an indelible mark on the future generations of Tigrayan women, suggesting their identities are bound together and inextricable from this group experience.

Saba's personal motivation was directly linked to her pain in this testimony as she described her mobilisation as a choice to perform resilience and reject narratives of victimhood. In doing so, Saba embodied the narrative concept of Tigrayan female resilience that she admired from previous generations, in turn strengthening the idea of *belonging* as a Tigrayan woman to a community offering physical and emotional labour as war work.

Mel's Story

The final participant included in this study is Mel, a Tigrayan woman in her mid-thirties, born and raised in the United States before moving to Tigray in 2019 to take over the family business. She was in Tigray when the war broke out and, as her words will detail, narrowly escaped sexual violence whilst in detention. Mel's story presents an additional layer to the other participants'; after working as an activist during our interview, she returned to Tigray a few months later to serve as an armed combatant in the TDF. Her words in this testimony provide a unique insight into her mobilisation, connecting the range of gender-based violence she observed in Tigray with her militant action.

Her testimony here begins with her detention by Ethiopian federal forces, during which time she was taken to a former school turned into a military camp. In this camp, Mel was rigorously interrogated but eventually allowed to leave; a grace she puts down to her US citizenship and the fact she had told her captors that her family in the US knew where she was and were expecting her to contact them. When we spoke, she was reconciling her experiences with her life as an activist, struggling to navigate the value of her international voice with the need to help the resistance in Tigray:

Mel [speaking of her detention]: I just remember constantly making myself appear fearless. And I'm kind of used to that, I do have a very dominant personality. I'm a business owner, a hustler, I'm used to being in very male dominated areas, so that quality that I have was very present in those moments, and I think it confused them [the soldiers] even, right? I'm sure

they've had interactions with other women who are not [like me] because of their background... But it was so scary, really the scariest time. I knew they could do anything to me right now. I can disappear right here and no one would know where to find me. I had that thought in my head constantly.... I was also the only woman [in the detention camp], and that was really terrifying because I had already been hearing about rape. I really think my American passport had a lot to do with it...

[On her life in the US] I can't stop. I won't stop. I wake every day and think of Tigray before anything else. I work all day until I fall asleep for Tigray, but even then, I often lie awake and I remember. I think of my friends [left behind] and I cry, and then the sun comes up and it is time to start again... I know what I do here is important. The people need a voice. My story, what I saw – it matters that I can be here and tell the world. But it's hard, you know, when I think of the other women who joined up. To be in the mountains with them and serve Tigray...

Mel's account of her time in detention resonated with the idea of cognitive agentival capacity discussed by Saba Mahmood.⁵² Mel chose to position herself in a way that presented as 'fearless', closer to the cultural expectation of masculinity in Tigray, and thus protect herself as far as possible against gender-based violence. When the interview ended, we agreed her story could have ended very differently.

Throughout her interview, Mel referenced the gendered violence levied against women in diverse forms:

Mel: One of things about this being a genocide is intentionally creating impediments just for us to be able to feed ourselves, and that really starts with burning our crops and turning off the electricity. Because the women feed everyone, you know?... The purpose of turning off the electricity was so that the women wouldn't be able to grind grain to make *injera* to feed [their families]...

The women are travelling with their children [to Sudan as refugees]. So they're vulnerable. Banks are closed, travel stops. Even my small rural village town, people were fleeing to more rural areas. Because you don't know what to do! You don't know where to go. So they went to their town called Bora, and the Eritrean army came there – this is nowhere near Eritrean border. Eritrean army came in and one of them [her friends] was raped, and she was pregnant, and she was only 19 years old. And there's another one, she barely

⁵² Saba Mahmood, 'Agency, Performativity, And the Feminist Subject', *Pieties and Gender*, 9 (2009): 11-45.

speaks when I talk to her, she's just always so emotional. I haven't even learned her story yet. And I can only imagine what they'll be saying when they can say something.

Mel articulated poignantly the continuum of gendered violence facing women in war. In Tigray, the inaccessibility of money and safe transport forced women to flee on foot. As many such women had young children, the speed of their movement was limited and their visibility to occupying troops increased; so, too, did the danger of sexual violence.

Mel did not explicitly link her war work with the threat of sexual violence, but it is insightful to take in the gendered colouring of her narrated story. Mel consistently foregrounded the suffering of women and framed her own activism as a service to the female characters she felt she represented on an international stage. Reflecting, then, on her subsequent enlistment as an armed member of the TDF, this testimony is a powerful window into her motivations, layered with the stories of the women and men she witnessed suffering in the war, but firmly positioned alongside the 'other women who joined up', thus situating her participation in the struggle as an explicitly gendered site of resistance.

Conclusions and Reflections: Sexual Violence in Post-War Tigray

For each participant in this study, the relationship between sexual violence and their mobilisation for war work was personal and unique. None of participants can be said to have been mobilised exclusively in response to sexual violence, nor should their relationship with the communal threat of SGBV obscure other complementary motivations, not least the suffering of loved ones, lack of communication and massacre of civilians. Nonetheless, these testimonies as a body lend strong support to the notion that women have identified with the collective threat of sexual violence to Tigrayan women and mobilised directly as a gendered cohort. Aligning with the findings of Kreft, the women in this study connected the relationship between sexual and other forms of violence against women, framing SGBV as a manifestation of gender inequality and the dangers of a pervasive patriarchal culture.⁵³ Where this research departs from Kreft is in its contention that women's engagement in transnational activism and political work is a manifestation of *war work*. This article evidenced how Tigrayan activists narrated their physical and emotional labour as part of the broader resistance effort, positioning their work as a 'fight' contributing to the militarised aims of the armed Tigray Defence Force. Coming to understand women's transnational non-militant labour as an important domain of civil war in the digital age challenges scholars' existing frameworks for examining gendered conflict participation, reorienting the narrative to encompass the

⁵³ See Kreft.

emotional experience of those consistently peripherised in policy, in discourse and in memory.

Foregrounding the diverse, complex experiences of Tigrayan women navigating the realities of life after war is all the more timely and relevant as the region settles into a fragile post-conflict era. But, for women, peace does not necessarily begin with the cessation of armed conflict. Feminist scholars of global history have evidenced the rise of GBV in post-war states through the rise in domestic violence, police violence against women, increased risk of trafficking, exploitation, and vulnerability to poverty and sex work.⁵⁴ In Tigray, the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) signed in Pretoria in November 2022 failed to make any provision for the hundreds of thousands of survivors of weaponised SGBV; in fact, the palpable absence of justice proceedings or female-centred reconciliation initiatives has created a permissive environment for further GBV to be perpetrated in post-war Tigray.⁵⁵ A report by Physicians for Human Rights and the Organization for Justice and Accountability in the Horn of Africa documented 304 medical records of CRSV in August 2023, nine months *after* the CoHA was signed, including 123 accounts of rape.⁵⁶ In the August 2023 Ashenda festival, the annual Tigrayan celebration devoted to womanhood and female joy, Tigrayan woman Zewdu Haftu was brutally, publicly murdered in Mekelle after refusing the sexual advances of an unidentified group of men.⁵⁷ A witness to this violence, Zewdu's friend Semhal Gebregziabihier, was arrested by Tigrayan police and held without due cause, where she remains at the time of writing, four months later. In the words of a Tigrayan woman writing about the August violence: 'Trauma begets trauma... Women have been harassed, molested, raped, robbed & killed during Ashenda. When there's no accountability, what do we expect?'.⁵⁸ In these words, the continuum of sexual and gendered violence continuing to face Tigrayan women is made painfully clear.

* All names have been changed to preserve participant anonymity.

⁵⁴ Helen Scanlon, ' Militarization, Gender and Transitional Justice in Africa', *Feminist Africa*, 10 (2008): 31-48, 46; R. Istratii, 'War and domestic violence: A rapid scoping of the international literature to understand the relationship and to inform current responses in the Tigray humanitarian crisis' (Working Paper II, 2021); Samantha Bradley, 'Domestic and Family Violence in Post-Conflict Communities', *Health and Human Rights Journal*, 20, 2 (2018): 123-136; J. P. Kaufman et al. *Women, gender equality and post-conflict transformation: Lessons learned, implications for the future* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 3; Donna Pankhurst, *Gendered Peace: Women's struggles for post-war justice and reconciliation* (New York, Routledge), 7.

⁵⁵ Weitsman.

⁵⁶ Organization for Justice and Accountability in the Horn of Africa. 'Report: Broken Promises: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Before and After Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Tigray, Ethiopia', *Physicians for Human Rights* (24 August 2023).

⁵⁷ Omna Tigray, 'Justice for Zewdu, Protection for Semhal' (September 2023) < [Justice for Zewdu. Protection for Semhal - Omna Tigray](#)>, [accessed 03/11/2023].

⁵⁸ Maebel Gebremedhin, writing on X, 25/08/2023.

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Abbreviations

CoHA – Cessation of Hostilities Agreement

GBV – gender-based violence

GSTS – Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals

SGBV – sexual and gender-based violence

TDF – Tigray Defence Force

TPLF – Tigray People's Liberation Front

TYN – Tigray Youth Network

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“Let Your Women Hear Our Words:” Nanyehi’s Negotiations

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Abstract

Over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Cherokee Beloved Woman Nanyehi attempted to negotiate multiple treaties with Euro-American officials on the behalf of her people. This paper, through an ethnohistorical approach that interweaves contemporaneous reports and transcriptions of her negotiations with oral histories, argues that: (i) the Cherokee and Euro-Americans held opposing worldviews, especially with regards to gender, (ii) that their conceptions of gender came to head during their negotiations and that they were a driving cause of conflict despite Nanyehi's hopes of fostering coexistence, and (iii) that Nanyehi's call for the Americans to 'let your women hear our words' resulted in the Cherokee matriculture being deemed a subversive threat by American men and subsequently motivated an explicit settler colonial mission to 'domesticate' Cherokee women. In closing, however, this paper reflects on the survivance of Cherokee women and emphasizes the resilience of the Cherokee matriculture despite oppressive forces. In doing so, this paper underscores the ongoing struggles for recognition faced by Indigenous women, offering insights into

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the broader challenges confronting Indigenous communities today.

Keywords: Indigenous Feminist Studies, Settler Colonialism, Ethnohistory, Cherokee, Matricultural Traditions

Résumé

Au cours de la fin du XVIIIe et du début du XIXe siècle, la femme bien-aimée Cherokee Nanyehi a tenté de négocier plusieurs traités avec des responsables euro-américains au nom de son peuple. Cet article, à travers une approche ethnohistorique qui tisse ensemble des rapports contemporains et des transcriptions de ses négociations avec des histoires orales, soutient que : (i) les Cherokee et les Euro-Américains avaient des visions du monde opposées, notamment en ce qui concerne le genre ; (ii) que leurs désaccords sur les conceptions du genre ont atteint leur paroxysme au cours de leurs négociations et ont été une cause majeure de conflit, malgré les espoirs de Nanyehi de favoriser la coexistence ; et (iii) que l'appel de Nanyehi aux Américains de « laisser vos femmes entendre nos paroles » a conduit à ce que la matriculture Cherokee soit considérée comme une menace subversive par les hommes américains, et a par la suite motivé une mission coloniale explicite de « domestiquer » les femmes Cherokee. Cependant, en conclusion, cet article réfléchit à la survie des femmes Cherokee et souligne la résilience de la matriculture Cherokee malgré les forces oppressives. Ce faisant, cet article souligne les luttes continues pour la reconnaissance auxquelles sont confrontées les femmes autochtones, offrant un aperçu des défis plus larges auxquels sont confrontées les communautés autochtones de nos jours.

Mots clés : Études féministes autochtones, colonialisme de peuplement, ethnohistoire, Cherokee, traditions matriculturelles

Introduction

In the heat of the summer and with the Revolutionary War raging on, a Cherokee delegation met with treaty commissioners from the newly-established United States in Tennessee during July of 1781. The Cherokee, who had fought with the British on numerous occasions against the rebellious colonists, must have been concerned about the future of their people. Since first contact in 1540, the Cherokee's way of life—their very existence even—had been under threat by Euro-American settlers. While the British themselves were not innocent of such transgressions, they had, by royal proclamation in 1763, forbade the American colonists from settling further in Indigenous lands beyond the Appalachian Mountains. However, this decree would soon become moot if the Americans won their independence. In either case, this site of negotiation proved to be just as contentious as the war—not simply because of contested lands or questions of

sovereignty, but rather due to the presence of a woman among the Cherokee and the absence of any in the American delegation. This Cherokee woman—Nanyehi—was a *Ghigau* of her people, a 'Beloved Woman,' who sought to preserve peace and find a way for both societies to coexist.¹

When addressing the American delegation, who were apparently shocked that the Cherokee allowed a woman to speak for them, Nanyehi made an eloquent appeal: "You know that women are always looked upon as nothing; but we are your mothers; you are our sons. Our cry is all for peace; let it continue. This peace must last forever. Let your women's sons be ours; our sons be yours. Let your women hear our words."²

Although Nanyehi's call for peace and unity moved some of the men in the American delegation, her words, in the long run, proved to be insufficient protection; the Cherokee suffered setback after setback before their eventual removal to the West along the infamous Trail of Tears. While some could therefore read Nanyehi's negotiations as an insignificant or frivolous campaign, such an account would be remiss as this brief vignette is part of a much larger story of the Cherokee matriculture and its conflict with Euro-American settlers.

This paper seeks to explore the aforementioned conflict by asking: how did the Cherokee matriculture respond to the settler colonial ventures of Euro-Americans over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? As this is admittedly a broad question, one that is certainly beyond the scope of a single article, I intend to focus on the Cherokee's negotiations—Nanyehi's negotiations—with Euro-American treaty commissioners. These negotiations, specifically those surrounding the 1757 Treaty of

¹ Audra Simpson, a Mohawk scholar of Indigeneity and Settler Colonialism, makes the same argument with regards to Indigenous women in Canada. Simpson argues that Indigenous women like Theresa Spence and Loretta Saunders "embodied and signaled something radically different to Euro-Canadian governance" and, as such, they "had to be killed, or, at the very least subjected." See Audra Simpson, "The State Is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty," *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (2016), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/633280>. Lorenzo Veracini and Lisa Ford make a similar point, though one that does not necessarily place the catalyst of eliminatory efforts solely on gendered differences. Veracini explains that settler states inherently fantasize about "cleansing the settler body politics of its (Indigenous and exogenous) alterities[;]" see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 35. Lisa Ford, meanwhile, focuses on the settler state's desire to assert "a perfect territorial sovereignty" or "perfect settler sovereignty," by categorically "purging itself of Indian lands and Indian polities;" see Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788–1836*, Harvard Historical Studies (Harvard University Press, 2010), 25. While Veracini and Ford do not explicitly address gender in their analyses; their respective arguments, when combined with feminist theories of Indigeneity and Settler Colonialism, reveal that elimination was a multifaceted phenomenon. At its most simplistic level then, this paper seeks to intervene in the aforementioned dialogue by further positing the role of gender, ensuring it does not fall to the wayside in favor of more popular modes of analysis.

² Margaret Jacobs, "Reproducing White Settlers and Eliminating Natives: Settler Colonialism, Gender, and Family History in the American West," *Journal of the West* 56, no. 4 (2017): 14.

Peace and Friendship, the 1781 Long Island Treaty, and the 1785 Treaty of Hopewell, are significant for a number of reasons. First and foremost, they capture the fundamental essence of the clash between the societies: the incompatibility of their worldviews. This incompatibility—between the Cherokee value of balance and the Euro-American emphasis on hierarchy—manifested itself in a variety of cultural practices, though I argue that the dueling conceptions of gender which spawned from these worldviews was one of the chief causes of animosity between the Cherokee and Euro-Americans. This is evidenced by numerous European and American sources ranging from travel narratives to personal records that consistently equate the Cherokee matriculture to a 'gynocracy' as well as several Cherokee oral histories that describe the misunderstanding and ignorance of white observers.

The Cherokee matriculture proved to be a source of constant ire for Euro-Americans. It represented an untenable Other—an inevitable obstacle to Euro-Americans in their pursuit of 'perfect settler sovereignty'—as, if the two cultures were to coexist, the Cherokee matriculture offered a realm of egalitarian possibilities to women and men that could transform Euro-American society by upending the status quo of women's political inferiority to men.³ Through their complaints, demands and concessions, the negotiations themselves offer a relatively comprehensive view of this conflict as both sides battled over this fundamental disjuncture while attempting to find a resolution. In doing so, however, the Cherokee matriculture—through the words and actions of women like Nanyehi—became a target for Euro-American 'civilizing' efforts and the story of Cherokee women's status and cultural role therefore became one of survivance.

Before delving into this narrative though, it should be noted that the story herein told is not an isolated instance of conflict between an Indigenous matriculture and a settler state. The scholars, activists, and writers that populate the fields of Native American and Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Feminist Studies, and Settler Colonial Studies have long grappled with questions of gender and this paper is indebted to the vast amount of work that has already been compiled in the aforementioned literatures. As such, I seek to build off of and contribute to a number of analyses, though, on the most fundamental level, I aim to join the ranks of others who have sought to problematize and revise the stories that have been told of Indigenous women by the Western academy.⁴

³ By emphasizing process here and throughout the paper, I am building on the work of Patrick Wolfe, who argued that settler colonialism should be understood as "a structure rather than an event." See Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 390.

⁴ For instance, Haunai-Kay Trask, a scholar and Indigenous Hawaiian activist, explained that she learned the history of her people twice; the first time from the stories her parents and relatives passed down to her, and the second time from her teachers at school who proclaimed that the Indigenous Hawaiians were nothing but "lustful cannibals." See H.K. Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii (Revised Edition)*, Latitude 20 Book (University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 147–60, especially 153–154. Denise Henning, a Cherokee scholar, authored a similar chapter about educating her daughters in the ways of Cherokee women; see Denise K. Henning, "Yes, My Daughters, We Are Cherokee

In addition to being dispossessed of their historic lands, Indigenous communities have been subjected to false representations that still support settler colonial processes.⁵ These representations, as Margaret Jacobs has shown, date back to the long eighteenth century and have “served as a key means of justifying the colonization of Indigenous lands” through their gendered messages.⁶ For instance, and as I will demonstrate was the case for the Cherokee, Euro-American texts resolutely equated the labor practices of Indigenous women to oppression and used such representations to justify Euro-American ‘civilizing’ efforts. This reprehensible theme of dispossession carried through to Indigenous epistemologies, as the Cherokee, like other Indigenous peoples, were told that their ways of knowing were inferior to Euro-American standards.⁷

Wilma Mankiller, the first female principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, made this point abundantly clear when she lamented that Western historians either “inaccurately depicted” Cherokee women as “drudges or ethereal Indian princesses” or simply dismissed the existence of the Women’s Council and the *Ghigau* as “merely myth” since knowledge of such practices was passed down through oral transmission as opposed to being written down.⁸ Mankiller, reflecting on the hypocrisy of privileging Euro-American written accounts, argued that “an entire body of knowledge can be dismissed because it was not written, while material written by obviously biased men is readily accepted as reality.”⁹

How can this narrative be ameliorated? How can we, as Mankiller herself yearned to, hear the voices of Cherokee women who have long been silenced? Regrettably, this question is not a new nor isolated one; scholars across the humanities and social sciences have long had to turn to alternative or creative strategies to access the voices of subaltern populations where little to no record of their perspectives exists. After all, as Leslie Harris succinctly argued, there is no such thing as a “perfect archive.”¹⁰ Rather, as Harris

Women,” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, ed. Joyce Green, 1st Edition (Nova Scotia & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2007).

⁵ Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis, *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 19, <https://archive.org/details/mankillerchiefhe00mankrich>.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷ This sentiment echoes throughout the aforementioned literatures. See, for example, Joanne Barker, ed., *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 2–3; Devon Abbott Mihesuah, *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*, Contemporary Indigenous Issues (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 8; Nancy Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 1–2.

⁸ Leslie Harris, “Imperfect Archives and the Historical Imagination,” *The Public Historian* 36, no. 1 (2014): 79.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁰ My emphasis on quilting here is inspired in a large part by Tiya Miles who described her writing process as creating a “quilted chronicle: a chronological but oftentimes broken account of important events that stitches together historical interpretation, context, and causes.” See Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of*

suggests, scholars must be willing to move beyond this idealized mirage by thinking through methodological issues with “grounded interpretation, imagination, and interdisciplinarity.”¹¹ In the following pages, I intend to model Harris’s proposition by quilting a number of fragmented sources from both Cherokee and Euro-American perspectives together in order to craft a compelling narrative.¹² The analysis I offer here is also informed, in a large part, by the ethnohistorical work of Theda Perdue, who assiduously researched the status and role of women in Cherokee society over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹³

By listening to Cherokee women like Nanyehi wherever they can be found—mainly in contemporary accounts but also through modern oral histories—I believe that we can assemble a more complete understanding of how the Cherokee matriculture responded to the eliminatory aims of Euro-American settlers. Still, I recognize that this venture will inevitably produce an incomplete story; no degree of historical interpretation can fully rectify the silence and erasure imposed upon the Cherokee and other Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, what follows is an attempt to do just that—to tell the story of Nanyehi, her negotiations, and the aspirations of the broader Cherokee matriculture in the hopes that it will inspire subsequent iterations and bring us closer to the truth.

To briefly outline the following argument then, I begin this exposition by clarifying the difference between Cherokee and Euro-American worldviews (namely, balance for the former and hierarchy for the latter) through the lens of gender. This is specifically accomplished through a comparative reading of origin stories, primarily that of Selu for the Cherokee and Eve for Euro-Americans. After establishing the fundamental incompatibility between the two worldviews, I shift my attention to demonstrating how this theoretical difference was actualized in practice when the two cultures interfaced. This section mostly relies upon evidence garnered from a careful reading of European and Euro-American travel narratives, though the Cherokee perspective is still maintained and juxtaposed through references to Perdue’s extensive ethnography. The subsequent section explores these differences in greater detail by focusing on the Cherokee negotiations with Euro-American treaty commissioners. Moreover, it sheds light on how Cherokee women like Nanyehi sought to coexist with Euro-Americans through a union of the two matricultures.

Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits (New Press, 2017), 15.

¹¹ Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). Nancy Shoemaker also commented on the benefits of ethnohistorical readings, noting that “under the rubric of ethnohistory, historians and anthropologists have developed creative and culturally sensitive approaches to mining the documentary record left by Euro-Americans[;]” see Shoemaker, 3.

¹² Perdue, 13. Mankiller also discusses the concept of balance, stating that the Cherokee believed that “the world existed in a precarious balance and that only right or correct actions kept it from tumbling.” See Mankiller and Wallis, 20.

¹³ Nanyehi is also known by her English name, Nancy Ward, but owing to her life as a Cherokee this paper will use her former name over the latter.

Unfortunately, however, I argue that this move was seen as a direct threat to Euro-American settlement and, as such, the Cherokee matriculture was deemed a subversive menace that had to be eliminated. The final section focuses on the eliminatory aims of Euro-Americans, explaining why and how Euro-Americans sought to dismantle the authority of Cherokee women. This account, therefore, ends on a bleak note with the knowledge that within the subsequent decades the Cherokee were to be forcibly moved to the West along the Trail of Tears and subjected to mandatory acculturation through a number of deplorable means. While all of this proved to be the case, the Cherokee matriculture still persisted; as the conclusion notes, the story of Cherokee women—of most Indigenous women—became one of survival and that story is still unfolding today.

Selu and Eve

In order to understand the conflict between Euro-American settlers and the Cherokee, one must start at the most fundamental level: the differences between their worldviews. As was previously mentioned, Euro-Americans often saw and explained the world through the concept of the natural order—a series of hierarchical relationships predicated on degrees of superiority and inferiority. Conversely, the Cherokee tended to view the world “as a system of categories that opposed and balanced one another” and they were beholden to maintain that balance.¹⁴ While these worldviews manifested themselves in a variety of cultural practices, this paper is predominantly concerned about how such views influenced conceptions of gender—and expectations of other cultures.

How do we know that our historical subjects like Nanyehi or her Euro-American counterparts indeed held these sentiments? For Euro-Americans, this is a relatively straightforward task as they consistently turned towards the story of Adam and Eve in the Genesis chapter of the King James Bible. Moreover, there is a corpus of didactic literature from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries that relied on theological arguments to justify their claims of female inferiority. For the Cherokee however, this is a bit more difficult since, as Wilma Mankiller noted, “we Cherokees have differing versions of our genesis story.”¹⁵ These different versions can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the story was orally transmitted for centuries before being written down first by Wahnenauhi, a Cherokee woman, in 1889 and then subsequently by many others in successive decades. This paper will compare a number of Euro-American and Cherokee texts, despite their having different times of origin. By doing so, I am relying on the integrity of the Indigenous oral tradition. It will become clear that a continuous thread emerges in both cultures: an emphasis on hierarchy in Euro-American didactic literature and a focus on balance in Cherokee oral histories. Moreover, both sets of origin stories

¹⁴ Quoted in Lisa L. Moore, Joanna Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton, *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Mankiller and Wallis, 16.

illustrate how gender differences are conceptualized by their respective cultures and, when compared, hint at why the two cultures would argue over gender expectations.

Beginning with stories that have been told of Eve's creation, a litany of Euro-American men have written of female inferiority in their works, mainly by citing the Genesis story; one author, Sir John Pettus, focused exclusively on this concept. In his 1647 treatise *Volatiles from the History of Adam and Eve*—which was penned long after biblical documents had been written in Hebrew, translated into English and then reworked by King James—Pettus scrutinizes biblical verses and offers a much deeper explanation as to why women were apparently subservient to men. Pettus begins by describing woman's creation; he explains that “to prevent that solitariness... God did make the Woman to be the Wife or Consort to Man.”¹⁶

While Pettus's choice to describe women as wives may seem obvious or insignificant, it speaks volumes of the expectations placed on Euro-American women – especially as compared to the Cherokee. After all, in Great Britain and her colonies, women were theoretically considered subjects, not citizens, within their marriages due to the common law doctrine of coverture. Under coverture, husbands retained their rights and liberties while “the very being or legal existence of a woman [was] suspended” upon marriage.¹⁷ An eighteenth century treatise book, *The Lady's Law*, justifies the doctrine of coverture by reasoning that a married woman, a so-called *feme-covert*, is “under the protection or influence of her husband, her baron, or lord.”¹⁸ Since she was under his ‘protection,’ she did not need to retain her legal rights; she was bound to her husband much like a medieval serf to their lord and was expected to remain obedient or servile lest she incur his wrath. Pettus expands on this description:

¹⁶ John Pettus, *Volatiles from the History of Adam and Eve Containing Many Unquestioned Truths and Allowable Notions of Several Natures...* (London, 1674), 69.

¹⁷ *The Laws Respecting Women: As They Regard Their Natural Rights or Their Connections and Conduct in Which Their Interests and Duties as Daughters, Wards, Heiresses, Spinsters, Sisters, Wives, Widows, Mothers, Legatees, Executrixes, &c. Are Obligations of Parent and Child and the Condition of Minors. The Whole Laid down According to the Principles of the Common and Statute Law...and the Substance of the Trial of Elizabeth, Duchess Dowager of Kingston on an Indictment for Bigamy before the House of Peers, April 1776. In Four Books.*, xxiii, [11], 449 [13] (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1777), 65, Accessed May 10, 2022, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001063626>. It is important to note that while Englishwomen were bound by the doctrine of coverture under common law, the necessities of daily life often overrode legal theory. Oftentimes too, women utilized other legal jurisdictions, mainly equity law, to circumvent the apparent harshness of common law. For more on this see: Matthew Cerjak, “Navigating the Courts: The Ingenuity and Resourceful Prowess of Female Litigants in Early Modern England” (University of Chicago, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.6082/uchicago.7232>. Still, in drawing this comparison between Euro-American and Cherokee women, I hope to demonstrate that while the former found ways to overcome obstacles like the doctrine of coverture, the latter were empowered in both personal and public relationships from the beginning.

¹⁸ *A Treatise of Feme Coverts: Or, the Lady's Law. Containing All the Laws and Statutes Relating to Women, ...* ([London]: In the Savoy: printed by E. and R. Nutt, and R. Gosling (assigns of E. Sayer, Esq;) for B. Lintot, and sold by H. Lintot, 1732), 78.

She is to be a meet Help, a Help meet, for him for whom she is made, & to whom she is conjoyned, and that is her duty; and to this end woman was made, to be a Help meet for him, (adjutorium) an helper, a delight and ease to Man, and that in the most meet, apt, fit, and agreeable manner.¹⁹

He refers to women as helpmates, mere beings whose sole purpose is to cater to the whims of their husbands. He makes it abundantly clear that the ultimate—or rather only—reason women were created was to serve the men in their lives, making them easier and more pleasant.

Later, Pettus shifts his attention to the intricacies of women's creation, expanding on his justifications for their inferiority. He refers to God putting Adam to sleep and taking one of his ribs to make Eve, writing that:

she shall be called Woman, saith he, Because she came out of man: And this was to teach her, her original, and also how she should demeane her self towards him. It shews Mans superiority to the Woman; because that which is derived cannot be equall to that from which it was derived.²⁰

Here, Pettus quotes Genesis 2:23, reasoning that a woman cannot be equal to a man because she was made from him and, therefore, not made directly in God's image and likeness. Moreover, in attempting to explain God's intention, Pettus insisted that Eve's creation from Adam's rib was to teach Eve her place as a subordinate and to ensure her behavior reflected her inferior place.

Pettus expands on this argument:

And it is here observable, that she was not said to be created as Man, in the Image of God, or after his likeness, nor formed, nor framed; but Made, a word of a lesser signification, relating to the temperament of her body only. Nor was she made of the dust or purer part of the Earth, but of a Bone, which is the hardest, driest, coldest, and most terrestrial part of Man, according to Physicks. Nor had she the Breath of Life breathed into her Nostrills, but that Life Eve had went with the Bone. Nor is it said she became a Living soul, her soul being as it were the same, or a Ray of his.²¹

In dissecting the details of Eve's creation, Pettus asserts her inferiority by pointing out the lexical significance of the word 'made' while describing the creation process itself as dark and joyless. His depiction suggests women were not made to compliment men, but rather that they were necessary evils, devoid of God's love.

¹⁹ Pettus, 57.

²⁰ Ibid., 69.

²¹ Ibid., 65.

Further, Pettus points out that God had not breathed life into Eve and that her soul was only a fraction of Adam's, meaning she was more animal than human. This illustrates her existential purpose as an object of man, much like the animals that he would hunt for sustenance or the earthly materials used for housing. Later, Pettus expands on the belief of a lack of female intellect, using Eve's consumption of the forbidden fruit as the primary justification for her subjugation. He describes her disobedience, pointing out that "when she strays from her husbands dictates (for she had none from God) we see what a curse she brought upon herself."²² Pettus clearly blames Eve for the curse of original sin, but absolves Adam of any wrongdoing, describing him as "her tender and complying husband."²³ Through this description, Pettus begs the question of why Eve simply did not listen to Adam and God. Moreover, he uses Eve's disobedience as a warning sign, illustrating the dangers of female autonomy and agency.

In all, Pettus' work exemplifies arguments for the hierarchical structure of Euro-American societies. He describes society in terms of obedience to one's superior, for example, "from a Servant to his Master [or] from a Wife to her Husband."²⁴ To justify these relationships, he illustrates Man, not Woman, as God's treasured creation and places men firmly above all of God's other creations. Consequently, Pettus represents women as objects, mere helpmates whose only purpose is to serve their husbands. If a woman resists this interpretation, he labels her as 'dangerous and deserving of punishment.' Moreover, Pettus points out that by rejecting the supposed natural order, 'she shall know more sorrow than Eve' since she beckons God's wrath.²⁵ He declares that the greatest sin "against God and Nature is disobedience" and cautions individuals "not to be intic'd or to go out of the Limits [imposed by] either."²⁶

While Euro-American authors emphasized hierarchical relationships through their creation stories, the Cherokee sought to maintain balance in theirs. This theme is continuously, albeit variously, depicted in Cherokee oral histories—from those first transcribed in the late nineteenth century to more recent renditions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Beginning in 1889, then, the first written version of a Cherokee creation story was, as mentioned earlier, authored by a Cherokee woman named Wahnenuhi.²⁷ She explained, "in telling of the Creation, the plural number 'They' is used for the Creator" and that "the story of how the world was made is this:"

²² Ibid., 97.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 105.

²⁵ Ibid., 58-9.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ I emphasize Wahnenuhi's Cherokee descent because some have falsely claimed that James Mooney, an American ethnographer who lived among the Cherokee in the late nineteenth century, was the first to transcribe oral histories but such a statement would be incorrect as Wahnenuhi's manuscript precedes Mooney's publication by eleven years.

It is said, They took a turtle and covered its back with mud. This grew larger and continued to increase until it became quite a large island. They then made a man and a woman, and led them around the edge of the island. On arriving at the starting place, They planted some corn and then told the man and the woman to go around in the way they had been led, this they did; returning, they found the corn up and growing nicely. They were then told to continue the circuit; each trip consumed more time, at last the corn was ripe and ready for use. Then fire was wanted.²⁸

In the first portion of the story, Wahnenuhi reveals several important details about the Cherokees' beliefs. First and foremost, she makes the point that their Creator is neither male nor female—a simple yet equally significant difference when compared to Euro-American claims about God's gender. Next, when discussing how men and women were created, Wahnenuhi makes no hierarchical distinction between the two sexes; rather, the two seem to work together to follow the Creator's instructions about growing corn. This is strikingly different to Euro-American texts, like Pettus' volume, that go to great lengths to justify female inferiority by Eve's physical creation and misdeeds in the Garden of Eden.

In the second part of the story, Wahnenuhi explains that the animals were called together to figure out who would bring fire to the humans. Interestingly, the animals that volunteer to do so—a possum, buzzard, and spider—are gendered. The possum and buzzard, both male, are sent by the Creator but fail and are burnt in the process. After their return, no other animal had the courage to make the dangerous journey until “a little spider... said, ‘I will go and get fire.’”²⁹ This female spider then “made a little bowl of mud and placing it on her back started, spinning a thread as she traced her way over the water... on arriving at the fire, she carefully placed some coals in her cup and returned.”³⁰

Wahnenuhi also told another story in the same manuscript— one that touches on the gendered division of labor in Cherokee culture and continues to develop the worldview of balance. In the second story she explains that, originally, “a man and woman brought up a large family of children in comfort and plenty, with very little trouble about providing food for them.”³¹ Every morning the father would go out and soon return with some sort of meat while the mother also went out and returned with a sizable amount of corn. While this simple story may seem insignificant, it explained real practices, since, as Perdue explained, “men hunted because the first man had been responsible for providing

²⁸ Wahnenuhi, “The Wahnenuhi Manuscript: Historical Sketches of the Cherokees, Together with Some of Their Customs, Traditions, and Superstitions,” ed. Jack Frederick Kilpatrick, *Bureau of American Ethnology (Smithsonian Institution)* 196, no. 77 (1966): 187, <https://repository.si.edu/handle/10088/22138>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

his family with meat [and] women farmed because Selu first gave birth to corn in the storehouse.”³² Moreover, in this labor configuration, men and women both shared equal yet opposite responsibilities for procuring sustenance. Overall, both of these stories demonstrate the fact that the Cherokee did not believe that women were neither inferior nor incapable of acting on their own—a sharp contrast to their Euro-American counterparts.

A century later, in 1993, another Cherokee woman, poet and author Marilou Awiakta, retold the story of Selu and Kanati, the first Woman and first Man respectively. Similar to Eve, Selu is created to be Kanati’s companion, though their relationship and interactions are markedly different from those of Adam and Eve. Awiakta begins her rendition by explaining Kanati’s loneliness and boredom, which led to him overhunting animals. In response to this overhunting, the animals gather themselves into a council and ask the Creator to intervene on their behalf. The Creator does just that, creating Selu:

[He] caused a corn plant to grow up beside [Kanati], near his heart. The stalk was tall and straight, the leaves curved and gleaming green. From the top of the stalk rose a beautiful brown, black-haired woman, the First Woman. From the top of the cornstalk she came—strong, ripe, tender. And singing... Respectfully, he asked Selu to come down and held up his hand to help her. She smiled, but signaled him to wait... Politely, Kanati waited while she reached behind her for an ear of corn... Then she gave Kanati her hand and stepped down. They went home together.³³

Unlike Adam and Eve, Selu and Kanati are depicted as equals that balance each other. At first, Selu is created since Kanati is lonely and missing a part of himself; this imbalance causes him to overhunt but Selu’s companionship fixes that. Moreover, Selu is not created from Kanati but rather from the Earth itself and by the Creator. Following her creation, the two act amicably towards each other, respecting boundaries and decisions while not asserting superiority. Awiakta offers her own interpretation of the significance surrounding Selu and Kanati’s harmony by pointing out that within the story, “woman and man represent cardinal balances in nature.”³⁴ Moreover, she asserts that the Cherokee focus on maintaining this balance in both historical and contemporary settings as well as on interpersonal and societal levels since “even a basic imbalance, a lack of respect, between genders disturbs the balance in the environment.”³⁵ Perdue makes a similar point about the emphasis of balance, noting that it “made hierarchy, which often serves to oppress women, unattainable.”³⁶

³² Perdue, 17.

³³ Marilou Awiakta, *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother’s Wisdom* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Pub., 1993), 24–25.

³⁴ Ibid., 25.

³⁵ Ibid., 25–26.

³⁶ Perdue, 13.

Some years later in 2007, Denise Henning, a Cherokee scholar and mother, also put her version of Selu's story into print. Similar to Awiakta and Wahnenuhi, Henning's version affirms the importance of balance and harmony between Selu and Kanati while also explaining the division of labor between men and women. Henning, hoping to start at the beginning, explained that:

Selu lived with her husband, Kanati, and two sons. Every day, she would go away from the house and return with a basket full of corn. The boys wondered where the corn came from, so they followed her one day. They saw her go into a storehouse, and they got where they could peek in and watch her. There they saw her place her basket and shake herself. The corn started falling from her body into the basket. They then thought that their mother must surely be a witch! Selu could read the boys' thoughts. She told them that after they put her to death, they would need to follow her instructions so that they would continue to have corn for nourishment.³⁷

Like the previous readings, Henning's adaptation illustrates why women were responsible for farming corn and how the story of Selu influenced historic and modern conceptions of gender. She touches on the personal reason she decided to author her chapter, writing that when her daughters asked her why girls cannot dance inside the circle with men during the Gourd Dance she believed that "the time had come to ensure that the teachings of the women who had gone before me were passed on to my daughters."³⁸ She explains that her daughters "needed to learn about the roles of Cherokee women, our place, where we fit within our society and our worldview."³⁹ Henning's reasoning here is dually significant: on one hand it demonstrates the survivance of such stories in spite of the eliminatory aims of Euro-Americans colonizers and, on the other, it is indicative of Cherokee oral tradition.. After all, it seems fair to say that Henning's justification here is illustrative of Cherokee women more broadly; Nanyehi and other Cherokee girls must have heard similar stories from their clan mothers growing up to learn about their responsibilities as women in Cherokee society. In any case, the fundamental worldviews of Euro-Americans and the Cherokee are clear; what follows is an exploration of how these views were actualized and contributed to the development of a discourse between the two societies.

The Cherokee Matriculture through the Eyes of White Men

Throughout the eighteenth century, a variety of settlers, missionaries, and explorers interacted with Cherokee communities, documenting their reactions and experiences

³⁷ Henning, 187-88.

³⁸ Henning, 187.

³⁹ Ibid.

regarding the matrilineal system. Their biased perspectives, especially flawed if considered as authentic sources of Cherokee life, still prove to be quite valuable as they reflect the attitudes and misconceptions of Euro-Americans quite broadly. As Perdue pointed out, these male authors were largely shut out of the private lives of Cherokee women and often focused on the perspectives of men even when they had the opportunity to interact with women.⁴⁰ Still, as Cherokee women were often very vocal in public, the authors were able to witness and document many practices, traditions, and conflicts, etc. While these male authors commented on a number of cultural practices, this paper is primarily concerned with their testimony on labor and familial dynamics as well as women's power in public - areas in which Cherokee women demonstrated significant authority much to the confusion, disgust, and angst of white observers.

Among the Euro-American individuals who interacted with the Cherokee and documented their experiences, most were taken aback by differences in the gendered division of labor as Cherokee women farmed and men hunted. These observers often recounted their initial shock when they noticed women were *solely* responsible for farming—a task which, in their culture, was considered to be the responsibility of men (though women often assisted).⁴¹ This attitude is perhaps best demonstrated through the writing of Bernard Romans, a Dutch explorer who encountered the Cherokee while traveling through parts of the southern colonies in the eighteenth century. He described the Cherokee agricultural system, lambasting the male “savages” for their “most determined resolution against labouring or tilling the ground” while pointing out that “the slave his wife must do [it.]”⁴²

While Romans may have initially seemed concerned for the women, equating their situation to slavery, he quickly proves otherwise by referring to them as a “she savage[s].”⁴³ Instead of espousing concern for women, Romans seems occupied with illustrating the Cherokee as uncivilized, as one page later, he asserts that “a savage man discharges his urine in a sitting posture, and a savage woman standing,” adding that “I need not tell how opposite this is to our common practice.”⁴⁴ While Romans clearly held little regard for the Cherokee, his analysis illustrates a common theme among white observers: the inability to look beyond the supposed backwardness of Indigenous peoples - especially when they acted contrary to the gendered expectations of European colonizers.

The alleged underdevelopment of the Cherokee continued to perplex some white observers like Gilbert Stuart, a traveling Scottish historian and writer. Stuart, who

⁴⁰ Perdue, 4–6.

⁴¹ Alice Kessler-Harris, “Household Labor,” in *Women Have Always Worked*, A Concise History (University of Illinois Press, 2018), 21–60.

⁴² Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida* (Pelican Publishing, 1776), 41.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 42.

described the 'issue' in gendered terms, explained that Cherokee women were "the chief, if not the only manufacturers."⁴⁵ Moreover, Stuart explained that "the [Cherokee] men judge that if they performed that office, it would exceedingly disgrace them."⁴⁶ Although Stuart chose to not expand on this point, he unknowingly touched on the Cherokee's worldview of balance. As Awiakta previously explained, the Cherokee division of labor—like every other aspect of their culture—revolved around maintaining the balance of nature.⁴⁷ Other white observers, like Daniel Butrick, however, picked up on the dichotomous relationship between Cherokee men and women and described Cherokee labor practices in a more accurate way:

But though custom attached the heaviest part of the labour to the women, yet they were cheerful and voluntary in performing it. What others may have discovered among the Indians I cannot tell, but though I have been about nineteen years among the Cherokee, I have perceived nothing of that slavish, servile fear on the part of women, so often spoken of.⁴⁸

Butrick, a missionary who lived among the Cherokee for thirty-three years, understood their division of labor and pointed out that women themselves did not feel oppressed within it. Unlike the writers who preceded him, and even most of his successors, Butrick was able to make an informed conclusion after actually interacting with Cherokee women over his lifetime among them. Unfortunately though, Butrick proved to be an exception; other Euro-American men continued down their path of ignorance and disbelief—one that perpetuated false and antagonistic representations of the Cherokee matriculture.

While many Euro-American observers were preoccupied with lambasting the Cherokee's division of labor, others sought to criticize their marriage practices. A telling example is provided by John Lawson, an English surveyor and explorer, who authored a travel narrative titled *A New Voyage to Carolina* in 1709. This book, the product of his eight-year expedition to explore the Carolinian interior, described a number of interactions with Indigenous peoples. Of these interactions, Lawson detailed many encounters with the Cherokee and overwhelmingly depicted them through an unsavory light, most obviously by referring to them and other Indigenous peoples as "savages" nearly seventy times.⁴⁹ Later, Lawson goes into greater detail and specifically describes Cherokee women as "of a

⁴⁵ Awiakta, 25.

⁴⁶ Gilbert Stuart, *A View of Society in Europe in Its Progress from Rudeness to Refinement: Or, Inquiries Concerning the History of Law, Government, and Manners* (Edinburgh: Printed for John Bell and J. Murray, 1778), 173.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ John Howard Payne and Daniel Sabin Butrick, *The Payne-Butrick Papers*, ed. William Anderson, Jane Brown, and Anne Rogers (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 21–22.

⁴⁹ John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina; Containing the Exact Description and Natural History of That Country: Together with the Present State Thereof. And A Journal of a Thousand Miles, Travel'd Thro' Several Nations of Indians. Giving a Particular Account of Their Customs, Manners, &c.:* (London, 1709), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/lawson/lawson.html>.

very hale Constitution; their Breaths are as sweet as the Air they breathe in,” insisting that “they were design'd rather for the Bed then Bondage.”⁵⁰

Beyond his sexual objectification of women, Lawson described Cherokee customs focusing on marriage and its implications. First, he attempted to explain Cherokee courting procedures, pointing out that a marriage proposal is considered by both the woman and her parents. Apparently disappointed by this, he noted that “these Savages never give their Children in Marriage, without their own Consent.”⁵¹ Lawson continues on this line of inquiry, disparaging the equality espoused in Cherokee marriage by asserting that “the Marriages of these Indians are no farther binding, than the Man and Woman agree together... either of them has Liberty to leave the other, upon any frivolous Excuse they can make.”⁵² This, of course, sharply contrasted an English marriage, in which a wife was considered the subject of her husband and her options for divorce were severely limited even in cases of physical and/or psychological abuse. Still, Lawson goes on to air his greatest grievance against the Cherokee matriculture:

But one great Misfortune which oftentimes attends those that converse with these Savage Women, is, that they get Children by them, which are seldom educated any otherwise than in a State of Infidelity; for it is a certain Rule and Custom, amongst all the Savages of America, that I was ever acquainted withal, to let the Children always fall to the Woman's Lot; for it often happens, that two Indians that have liv'd together, as Man and Wife, in which Time they have had several Children; if they part, and another Man possesses her, all the Children go along with the Mother, and none with the Father. And therefore, on this Score, it ever seems impossible for the Christians to get their Children (which they have by these Indian Women) away from them; whereby they might bring them up in the Knowledge of the Christian Principles.⁵³

Here, Lawson completely overlooks or disregards the matrilineal system of the Cherokee. He attributes their matrilineal kinship to “a certain Rule and Custom,” not paying any attention to the significance it holds for the Cherokee.⁵⁴ Instead, he focuses on its impact for the Euro-American men that have children with Cherokee women, pointing out the supposed injustice the white men face. Moreover, Lawson claims that it is not only the men who suffer, but also the children themselves since they will not be brought up according to the Christian faith.

Perhaps the most offensive aspect of Cherokee life for white male observers was the power women wielded. While authors like Lawson voiced their disgust with regards to the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 188.

⁵¹ Ibid., 186.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 185.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

interfamilial power of Cherokee women, they also made similar comments about their political acts as well. Many Euro-Americans, such as the Puritans and other Protestant sects, cited 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 to justify this political oppression.⁵⁵ Therefore, when these men encountered Cherokee women who acted contrary to their expectations, they deemed the women's behavior an affront to the so-called natural order. For instance, a North Carolinian trader named Alexander Long described a scene in which a Cherokee woman beat her husband, explaining that "the man will not resist their power if the woman was to beat his brains out."⁵⁶ Later, he concluded that "the women rules the roost and wears the breeches."⁵⁷ Long's metaphor, interestingly akin to the modern metaphor of 'wearing the pants,' illustrates his opinion, and that of Euro-American men quite broadly, that the Cherokee matriculture was a joke. Like his intellectual successor Bernard Romans, Long portrayed Cherokee men as uncivilized and weak since they allowed women to dominate their lives.

Other white observers, like the Irishman-trader James Adair, noted that "the Cheerake... have been a considerable while under petticoat-government, and allow their women full liberty to plant their brows with horns as oft as they please, without fear of punishment."⁵⁸ Here, like Long, Adair facetiously labels the Cherokee matriculture, this time as a "petticoat-government." In doing so, both he and Adair mockingly contrast the status of Cherokee women to her white counterpart, the helpmate. They equate the matriarch to the 'impervious woman' often found in Euro-American literature, suggesting that the Cherokee man is uncivilized since he has not yet "awakened to assert his right."⁵⁹ At this point though, their rhetoric does not move beyond just that—classifying the Cherokee as perverse, uncivilized, etc. It would take the 'subversive' alternative to the Euro-America's gender hierarchy offered by the Cherokee matriculture to change that.

The Cherokee Negotiations

While there are a multitude of documents illustrating Euro-American perspectives of the Cherokee matriculture, the same cannot be said of the inverse. As such, the majority of accounts that describe the Cherokee view of Euro-Americans come from records of their negotiations on warfare, peacemaking, and trade. These records reveal the same initial confusion that the Euro-Americans faced, though contrary in nature. For instance, while men like Adair or Romans were surprised to see women in positions of power, the

⁵⁵ The verse reads: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law."

⁵⁶ Alexander Long, "A Small Postscript on the Ways and Maners of the Nashon of Indians Called Charikees, the Contents of the Whole Soe That You May Find Everything by the Peages" (1725), 30, http://www.rla.unc.edu/Publications/NCArch/SIS_21.pdf.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ J. Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (E. & C. Dilly, 1775), 145–46.

⁵⁹ Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling* (Oxford: Printed at the Theater, 1673), 200.

Cherokee were equally surprised to note the absence of white women. This dissimilarity, one that boils down to the incompatibility between each side's conceptions of gender, is conspicuous through the negotiations in which both societies attempted to discern how they would interact despite their obvious differences. Although there are numerous treaties and negotiations between the Cherokee, British, and later Americans, this paper is specifically concerned with the 1757 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the 1781 Long Island Treaty, and the 1785 Treaty of Hopewell. Throughout the negotiation processes, the Cherokee hoped to stave off the encroaching Euro-American settlers and peacefully co-exist. While they may have been successful by some measures, especially at first, this paper seeks to use the negotiations as a means to understand how and why the Cherokee matriculture was deemed a threat as well as to contextualize the subsequent political decline of the Cherokee women.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Cherokee and Euro-American settlers had been engaged in skirmishes over land ownership and sovereignty, regularly taking each other's lives in cycles of reciprocal violence.⁶⁰ In 1757 though, Attakullakulla, the principal speaker of the Cherokee delegation, met in Charlestown with the South Carolinian council hoping to put an end to bloodshed.⁶¹ Upon his arrival, Attakullakulla was surprised by something; he asked the council, "since the white man as well as the red was born of woman, did not the white man admit women to their councils?"⁶² After all, within the Cherokee's culture, men and women solved their conflicts alongside each other and he had expected the same to be said of the Euro-Americans. The council, and specifically Governor William Henry Lyttelton, was allegedly taken aback by Attakullakulla's question, as Euro-American women were certainly not expected to speak on the behalf of the citizenry. Still, Lyttelton was pressed for a response, one that took several days to ponder. He later replied to Attakullakulla, assuring him that "the white men do place confidence in their women and

⁶⁰ For details on Cherokee conceptions of justice see Perdue; Rennard Strickland, *Fire and the Spirits: Cherokee Law from Clan to Court* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 10–35. Lisa Ford, in her account of the conflict between the state of Georgia and the Cherokee, also explores the contestation of legal jurisdictions between the aforementioned societies; see Ford, especially chapters one to five.

⁶¹ The historical record often refers to Attakullakulla in a variety of different spellings and names; for instance he is named as Atagulkalu, Attacullaculla, 'Little Carpenter,' and 'Leaning Wood.' Virginia Carney argues that his name should be spelled as Atagulkalu, which is better translated as 'Leaning Wood.' See Virginia Carney, "'Women Is the Mother of All': Nanye'hi and Kitteuha: War Women of the Cherokees," in *Native American Speakers of the Eastern Woodlands*, ed. Barbara Alice Mann (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2001). However, more recent scholarship, like Kelly Wisecup's monograph on Indigenous complications, spells Attakullakulla's name as such and so this paper will follow suit; see Kelly Wisecup, *Assembled for Use: Indigenous Compilation and the Archives of Early Native American Literatures*, The Henry Roe Cloud Series on American Indians and Modernity (Yale University Press, 2021).

⁶² Quoted in David H. Corkran, *The Cherokee Frontier: Conflict and Survival, 1740–62*, The Cherokee Frontier: Conflict and Survival, 1740-62 (University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 110. Corkran cites the South Carolina Council Journals, specifically entries from February 1, 2, 9, 12, and 17 of 1757.

share their councils with them when they know their hearts are good.”⁶³ While this lackluster response may have been accepted at face value, contemporary Cherokee scholars like Marilou Awiakta suggest that Attakullakulla’s question and Lyttelton’s response hold a deeper, implicit significance. Awiakta, for instance, argues:

To the Cherokee, however, reverence for women/Mother Earth/life/spirit is interconnected. Irreverence for one is likely to mean irreverence for all. Implicit in their chief’s question, “Where are your women?” the Cherokee hear, “Where is your balance? What is your intent?” They see that the balance is absent and are wary of the white men’s motives. They intuit the mentality of destruction.⁶⁴

Although the Cherokee may have felt uneasy with Lyttelton, and the Euro-Americans in general, they continued their negotiations, eventually concluding that there would be “firm peace and friendship between all His Majesty’s subjects of this province and the nation of Indians called the Cherokees.”⁶⁵ Though they had struck a deal this time, Attakullakulla’s negotiations had shed light on the role of women within the Euro-American society, offering the Cherokee a glimpse into their disregard for balance.

In subsequent decades, other Cherokee negotiators took Attakullakulla’s position in dealing with the Euro-Americans. One prominent leader, Nanyehi, Attakullakulla’s maternal niece, took the forefront. Nanyehi had emerged as an influential woman early in her life; she had been awarded the title of War Woman or *Ghigau* after avenging her husband’s death in battle and leading her fellow warriors to victory against the Creek.⁶⁶ Later, given her increased status, Nanyehi became particularly involved within the political world of the Cherokee. Her status as a *Ghigau* provided her with a seat alongside war and peace chiefs at Chota, the de facto capital or mother town’ of the Cherokee.⁶⁷ Nanyehi also headed the Women’s Council of Clan Representatives, one of the two main bodies that governed the Cherokee Nation, and could vote within the other, the Cherokee General Council.⁶⁸ With her political influence, Nanyehi continued the work of her uncle by seeking a peaceful co-existence with the ever-encroaching settlers.

⁶³ Ibid., 111.

⁶⁴ Marilou Awiakta, “Amazons in Appalachia,” *Sinister Wisdom A Gathering of Spirit*, no. North American Indian Women’s Issue (1983): 114.

⁶⁵ Issac Kimber and Edward Kimber, eds., *London Magazine, or, Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligencer*, vol. 29 (London, 1760), 144–45, https://www.google.com/books/edition/_/-NQWtwEACAAJ?hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwig1oDhgJr3AhWJVt8KHffZAusQre8FegQICxAl.

⁶⁶ Margaret Supplee Smith and Emily Herring Wilson, “Nanye’hi/Nancy Ward,” in *North Carolina Women: Making History* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 16–17.

⁶⁷ Gerald F. Schroedl, “Chota,” in *Tennessee Encyclopedia* (Tennessee Historical Society, October 8, 2017), <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/chota/>.

⁶⁸ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Nancy Ward” (Encyclopedia Britannica, January 1, 2022), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nancy-Ward>.

At first, the Euro-Americans recognized the influence of the *Ghigau*; one of these observers, Henry Timberlake, pointed out that “many of the Indian women, [are] as famous in war, as powerful in the council.”⁶⁹ This recognition offered Nanyehi some respect in the eyes of Euro-Americans, though she was likely just considered an ‘extraordinary woman,’ a term used to classify woman who supposedly acted beyond their sex (i.e. displaying so-called masculine qualities such as bravery or courage).⁷⁰ In any case though, Nanyehi used experience from both of her marriages - the first to a Cherokee and the latter to a white man - to bring the Cherokee and Euro-American settlers together during her speeches. As Perdue argues, Nanyehi believed “peace could be sustained... only if the Cherokees and their enemies became one people bound by the ties of kinship.”⁷¹ On 26 July 1781, she spoke to this end at the Long Island Treaty negotiations in Eastern Tennessee, one of the many peace processes that sought to settle land disputes between the Cherokee and Euro-Americans, addressing the United States commissioners:

You know that women are always looked upon as nothing; but we are your mothers; you are our sons. Our cry is all for peace; let it continue. This peace must last forever. Let your women’s sons be ours; our sons are yours. Let your women hear our words.⁷²

Here, Nanyehi directly calls out the Euro-Americans for their treatment of women, asserting that they are “looked upon as nothing” when they should be respected as mothers.⁷³ Concurrently, she asserts that the Cherokee and Euro-Americans should be considered one people, unified by the ways of their women, their mothers. Nanyehi’s rhetoric seemed effective at first; the leader of the American delegation, Colonel William Christian, apparently moved by her speech, answered: “Mothers, we have listened well to your talk... Our women shall hear your words... We will not quarrel with you, because you are our mothers.”⁷⁴ While Colonel Chirstian’s response certainly would have impressed Nanyehi, he did not have the capacity to alter his society’s viewpoint. He could not alter the supposedly divine order that made women helpmates or placed them under the

⁶⁹ Henry Timberlake and D.H. King, *The Memoirs of Lt. Henry Timberlake: The Story of a Soldier, Adventurer, and Emissary to the Cherokees, 1756-1765*, Distributed for the Museum of the Cherokee Indian Series (Museum of the Cherokee Indian Press, 2007), 36, <https://books.google.com/books?id=vHr-cf5j0AEC>.

⁷⁰ Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, New Approaches to European History (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 328.

⁷¹ Perdue, 101.

⁷² Quoted in Moore, Brooks, and Wigginton, 180, The authors explain this speech is located in the *Report of Proceedings of a Commission Appointed by General Nathaneal Green on 26 February 1781 to Conduct Talks with the Cherokees*, Nathaneal Greene Papers, 1775-1785, folder 5, Library of Congress.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Carney, 134. Also see the above chapter for an excellent rhetorical analysis of Nanyehi’s speeches.

subjugation of their husbands, much like the Americans hoped to do with the Cherokee. Moreover, his words clearly did little to stop the conflict since, only four years later, Nanyehi had to speak again.

At the Hopewell negotiations of 1785, Cherokee leaders sought to address the fabricated claims and subsequent illegal seizure of Cherokee land by the United States. Simultaneously, Nanyehi hoped to continue advocating for peace, again by connecting women from both sides. Nanyehi almost did not have the opportunity to do so; the United States commissioners had no interest in hearing her testimony this time, instead electing to finalize the talks despite the objections of the Cherokee men. Fortunately for Nanyehi, “prominent Cherokee men refused to continue... until Cherokee tradition was honored and the voice of their Beloved Woman was heard.”⁷⁵ As such, Nanyehi spoke directly to the commissioners:

I am fond of hearing that there is a peace, and I hope you have now taken us by the hand in real friendship. I have a pipe and a little tobacco to give the commissioners to smoke in friendship. I look on you and the red people as my children... I am old, but I hope yet to bear children, who will grow up and people our nation, as we are now to be under the protection of Congress, and shall have no more disturbance. The talk I have given is from the young warriors I have raised in my town, as well as myself. They rejoice that we have peace, and we hope the chain of friendship will never more be broke.⁷⁶

Once more, Nanyehi conjures up the image of unity through motherhood, this time through common children. Again though, this is predicated upon the belief that white women would be able to advocate for the same unity amongst their own children, an act much easier said than done. Still, Nanyehi remained hopeful that peace had actually been achieved although it had come at a large cost; the Cherokee had ceded even more land in exchange from another promise of protection from the American government.⁷⁷ In reality though, it had not. The Cherokee would be forcibly evicted from their land and forced to migrate west only a few decades later in the infamous Trail of Tears.

The Cherokee Matriculture’s ‘Threat’ and Turn Towards Survivance

The Cherokee negotiations of the eighteenth century acted as a turning point in the cultural conflict that had been ongoing since the Cherokees’ first interactions with Euro-Americans. While the journals of earlier observers like Henry Timberlake and Bernard Romans hinted at an inevitable conflict, these negotiations illustrated the direct ideological confrontation between the two opposing cultures. The Euro-American

⁷⁵ Ibid., 126.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

patriarchy had concluded that the Cherokee matriculture was a threat, a subversion by which white women could have stepped firmly into the political world. Nanyehi directly advocated for this; in fact, it was her mission to unite the Euro-Americans and Cherokee by engaging with their women. Unfortunately for her though, this was an impossible task. She may have been able to convince some men, like Colonel Christian, but she was by no means capable of enacting wide reaching social change, especially that expeditiously, and in a culture that was not hers. Moreover, the Euro-Americans had already been suspicious of the 'corrupting' influence of the Cherokee matriculture.

This suspicion manifested during the negotiations themselves; one of the points of contention revolved around the practice of Cherokee women adopting captives into their families. These captives were often freed in the resulting treaties—yet many chose to remain among the Cherokee. Christina Snyder, a historian of colonialism, race, and slavery, focused on this trend in her recent monograph, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America*. Snyder discusses the process behind the 'adoptions,' explaining that after a symbolic purging in which captives shed their Euro-American identity by taking Cherokee clothing, jewelry, etc., they would be raised and treated as if they were fellow kin.⁷⁸ Although the historical record contains many of such stories, one, described by Henry Timberlake, stands out. Timberlake recalls the story of a woman who refused to return after being freed by one of the aforementioned treaties, writing that "among those prisoners... was also a woman whose husband had been murdered and who had afterward married his murderer. The Indian, though reluctant, was disposed to comply with the terms of the treaty, but she absolutely refused to return with her countrymen."⁷⁹ Tom Hatley, a historian of colonial North America, wrote of this woman, arguing that her "betrayal in marrying her husband's killer was both familial and cultural... she had turned her back not only on her husband's memory but also on her society."⁸⁰

This sentiment - the belief that the Cherokee and other Indigenous peoples were capable of converting educated, pious, and/or 'civilized' women to their 'savage' ways - was rife throughout the colonies and demonstrated through the captivity narratives of adoptees. These stories, authored by individuals who had been captured and lived among Indigenous peoples, like the Cherokee, offered Euro-Americans an unparalleled perspective from which they could view what native life for women was like.⁸¹ After all,

⁷⁸ Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 105–7; see also Jennifer D. McDaid, "'Into a Strange Land': Women Captives among the Indians" (Williamsburg, VA, College of William and Mary, 1990), <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4581&context=etd>.

⁷⁹ Timberlake and King, 115.

⁸⁰ Tom Hatley, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Era of Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 149.

⁸¹ Despite these stories often being considered autobiographies, narratives that were written by women were often heavily edited by men who sought to portray female captivity through the lens of religion, an internal battle between civilization and 'savagery,' good versus evil. See Kathryn O'Hara, "Female

through the aforementioned adoption process that contemporary scholars like Christina Snyder have described, these women took on Indigenous identities and were considered kin within their native communities. Therefore, their lived experiences go far beyond the descriptions of eighteenth-century male observers, such as Bernard Romans or Gilbert Stuart, by depicting the aforementioned freedoms women practiced whilst living in Indigenous communities. Some of these narratives, like that of Susannah Willard Johnson, even went as far as contrasting their experiences among Indigenous peoples with their lives in colonial or Euro-American society. In her narrative, Johnson points out that:

In justice to the Indians, I ought to remark, that they never treated me with cruelty to a wanton degree; few people have survived a situation like mine, and few have fallen into the hands of savages disposed to more lenity and patience. Modesty has ever been a characteristic of every savage tribe; a truth which my whole family will join to corroborate, to the extent of their knowledge. As they are aptly called the children of nature, those who have profited by refinement and education, ought to abate part of the prejudice, which prompts them to look with an eye of censure on this untutored race. Can it be said of civilized conquerors, that they, in the main, are willing to share with their prisoners, the last ration of food, when famine stares them in the face? Do they ever adopt an enemy, and salute him by the tender name of brother? And I am justified in doubting, whether if I had fallen into the hands of French soldiery, so much assiduity would have been shewn to preserve my life.⁸²

Here, Jonson argues that despite their appearances, her adoptive family acted more civilized than Euro-Americans. In doing so, she illustrates a life in which women are treated better by the so-called 'savages' than members of their own society, therefore indirectly illustrating a sort of role-reversal in which Euro-Americans are the actual savages.

Other narratives, such as Mary Jemison's, further this end. Jemison herself had been captured, and adopted, at a young age and proceeded to live among her new kin for the rest of her life. In her narrative, Jemison recalled the moment she had been granted freedom to leave her adoptive family; she had contemplated leaving but reasoned that even if she found her white relatives they would "treat [Jemison and her Indian children] as enemies."⁸³ Jemison's account further contrasts Indigenous peoples and Euro-

Captivity Narratives in Colonial America," *The Gettysburg Historical Journal* 8 (2009): 33–52.

⁸² *A Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Johnson*, Indian Captivities Series (H.R. Huntting Company, 1907), 76–77, <https://books.google.com/books?id=UbbVAAAAMAAJ>.

⁸³ J.E. Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison, 1824*, Garland Library of Narratives of North American Indian Captivities (Garland Pub., 1824), 95, <https://books.google.com/books?id=zJDQHFtA5zsC>.

Americans; her adoptive kin, the alleged 'savages' of captivity narratives, treat her better than her biological family.

Other testimony - for instance from Benjamin Franklin - attests to the influence Indigenous societies had on adoptees. In a 1753 letter to Peter Collinson, a fellow Quaker and intellectual, Franklin argued that:

When white persons of either sex have been taken prisoners young by the Indians, and lived a while among them, tho' ransomed by their Friends, and treated with all imaginable tenderness to prevail with them to stay among the English, yet in a Short time they become disgusted with our manner of life, and the care and pains that are necessary to support it, and take the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them.⁸⁴

Franklin acknowledges the fact that many adoptees who had the option to return to Euro-American society chose not to even after numerous attempts at convincing them to stay. In effect, they had become just like the 'savages,' returning to their home in "the Woods" instead of 'civilization.'⁸⁵ This act clearly concerned Franklin and other Euro-Americans who believed that Indigenous peoples had effectively stolen and converted their women and children. This viewpoint is further demonstrated in the artwork of Benjamin West, a well-known British-American artist during the late eighteenth century who went on to be patronized by King George III. In one of his early prints, West depicts a scene (Figure 1) in which Indigenous people return children and other captives to British forces following treaty negotiations.

⁸⁴ Benjamin Franklin, "From Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson, 9 May 1753," May 9, 1753, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0173>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.



Figure 1: Canot, Pierre Charles, Engraver, and Benjamin West. *The Indians delivering up the English captives to Colonel Bouquet near his camp at the forks of Muskingum in North America in Novr./ B. West invt. ; Canot sculp. , 1766.*
[Philadelphia: William Smith]

In the foreground of the print, West depicts a young, white child who appears to be grabbing an Indigenous woman, likely the child's adoptive mother, while she attempts to push him towards the British officers. Simultaneously, the officers themselves seem upset and confused as the children do not run into their arms; the rescuers are portrayed more as captors-to-be.

In all, Indigenous communities like the Cherokee offered an alternative to Euro-American women. Many of the women who were able to experience its freedom chose not to return. These women, especially their stories, posed a direct threat to the status quo of the Euro-American patriarchy. As such, in the eyes of Euro-American men, the system that turned their wives or daughters into 'savages' could not be allowed to continue.

The 'corrupting' influence of the Cherokee and other Indigenous communities acted as a justification for the 'civilizing' efforts of the United States during the nineteenth century. As settlers continued seizing Cherokee land, an obvious question arose: what do we do with the Cherokee themselves? Although a multitude of voices shouted out answers, one interesting letter from an anonymous 'gentleman of Virginia' to Robert Walsh, dated 1 June 1817, directly addressed the Cherokee matriculture.⁸⁶ The gentleman began his tirade, explaining his objective:

In order to reform them, we must know what reformation is needed. I act the part of a candid, though not of a flattering physician, when I suggest that much, nay, that almost everything yet remains to be done... Civilization relates more to the moral qualities of *man*, and to *his* social institutions.⁸⁷

He portrays himself as a doctor, one that seeks to excise the problematic or 'uncivilized' aspects of the Cherokee (in his eyes nearly all of it). This gentleman specifically takes aim at the Cherokee matriculture, plainly pointing out that civilization is about men, not women. To cure this 'disease', the author proposes a variety of solutions, beginning with the institution of the Euro-American "order of nature."⁸⁸ He expands, arguing that "the first personal relation in the order of nature, and the nearest which individuals can have, is that of husband and wife." In his view, the Cherokee lack just that.⁸⁹ Instead of husband and wife, the gentleman explains that the "word in their language nearest to *husband* is *aus-te-kee*—(the man who lives with me)" and that this role is often occupied by multiple men.⁹⁰ As a result of this, he claims fathers do not know who their children are, meaning the "order of duties [that] connect[s] individuals, and families, and nations, and

⁸⁶ Anonymous, "Reflections on the Institutions of the Cherokee Indians," *The Analectic Magazine*, 1818, 36, https://books.google.com/books?id=U5REAQAIAAJ&dq=%22the+property+of+husband+and+wife%22+AND+%22is+as+distinct+as%22&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 46; emphasis added.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 45.

generations” does not exist.⁹¹ After detailing all of the perceived flaws of Cherokee marriage, the author asserts that all of this (the matrilineal kinship system) should be replaced with a “reformation [that] institut[es] marriage as a solemn and inviolable compact.”⁹² Should principles outlined by the anonymous gentleman of Virginia be pursued through legislation and practice, the Cherokee matriculture would be quelled and rendered ineffectual. The cosmic balance they sought to uphold would be replaced with a natural order that categorized women as subsidiary beings, ones whose ultimate, and arguably only, purpose would be to serve men. The ‘gentleman’ author concluded his letter by explaining that the eventual “euthanasias of the Cherokees... will be to lose every characteristic which distinguishes them from the European race,” especially their matriculture, in order “to be incorporated into the American republic.”⁹³

Only nine years later, in 1826, a letter from John Ridge, a Cherokee educated in a mission school in Cornwall, Connecticut, to the Honorable Albert Gallatin described the “success of civilizing the Cherokee.” Within it, Ridge, who was later executed for treason against the Cherokee, explained the ‘civilization process,’ dating back to the United States’ initial governmental plan in 1795.⁹⁴ He begins by recalling the arrival of Christian missionaries, as well as Col. Silas Dinsmore who “was appointed to the Agency of the Nation by Gen. Washington” and “laboured indefatigably to induce the Indians to lead a domestic life by distributing hoes and ploughs among the men, and cotton cards, spinning wheels and looms to the women.”⁹⁵ Ridge refers to the United States’ intent to *domesticate* the Cherokee and other Indigenous peoples, that is, to make them fall into place within the hierarchical structure of Euro-American society and its gendered-division of labor in which women were largely confined to household duties like spinning cotton.⁹⁶ He goes on to address this shift in ideology directly, pointing out that “the females were the first who

⁹¹ Ibid., 51.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 55.

⁹⁴ John Ridge, along with a small contingent of Cherokee men, signed the Treaty of New Echota in 1835 despite not being legally authorized to do so. The treaty relinquished all Cherokee land east of the Mississippi in exchange for land in the “Indian Territory,” modern day Oklahoma, as well as monetary compensation and other benefits and acted as the legal justification for Cherokee removal and the Trail of Tears. The Cherokee principle chief, John Ross, attempted to object to the treaty and gathered the signatures of about 16,000 Cherokee protesting the treaty but the Senate ultimately ratified the treaty. As such, many Cherokees considered Ridge to be a traitor and, in 1839, a large group hunted him down and summarily executed him for treason.

⁹⁵ John Ridge, “Success of the ‘Civilizing’ Project Among the Cherokee,” March 10, 1826, <https://www.teachushistory.org/indian-removal/resources/success-civilizing-project-among-choerokee>; George Washington, “From George Washington to the Commissioners to the Southern Indians,” August 29, 1789, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-03-02-0326>.

⁹⁶ Henry Knox, “To George Washington from Henry Knox,” July 7, 1789, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-03-02-0067>. This plan is discussed primarily between George Washington, the President, Henry Knox, the Secretary of War, and Thomas Jefferson, the Secretary of State and is evidenced through their correspondence, available through the Founders Online portal of the National Archives.

were induced to undertake domestic manufactures, and they are still *confined* to them.”⁹⁷ Later, Ridge expands on the changing role of women:

Justice is due to the females of the poorer class of whom I now speak. Duties assigned them by nature as Mothers or Wives are well attended to [as far as they are able & improved] and cheerfully do they prepare our meals, & for the family they sew, they spin and weave and are in fact a valuable portion of our citizens.⁹⁸

Ridge refers back to Pettus’ comment, viz the Euro-American ideology, that a woman’s natural role was that of a helpmate, a woman who embraces her role as the servant of her husband and *his* family. In doing so, he signals support for the erosion of the matrilineal kinship system. When describing the shift in the division of labor, Ridge states that “every head of a family has *his* own farm and House.”⁹⁹ Implicitly, he indicates that the head of a family is now a man, not a woman. This acts as a testament to the evolving ‘civilization’ of the Cherokee, especially since the aforementioned ‘Gentleman of Virginia’ believed a society’s level of civilization could be ascertained by the morality and social position of its men.¹⁰⁰ Ridge follows the gentleman’s argument when explaining changes to Cherokee law:

The laws of our Nation from time immemorial recognizes a separate property in the wife and husband, and this principle is universally cherished among the less informed Class and in fact in every grade of intelligence... If they are so disposed, the law secures to the Ladies, the control of their own property [Property belonging to the wife is not exclusively at the control & disposal of the husband, and in many respects she has exclusive & distinct control over her own, particularly among the less civilized].¹⁰¹

Here, Ridge is effectively arguing that “less civilized” communities allow women more control over her property, suggesting a direct correlation between how ‘civilized’ a society is and the level of a woman’s social and/or legal status.¹⁰² Ridge builds on this concept later when discussing marriage itself, writing that:

[Although] we have no law regulating marriage—and Polygamy is still allowed to native Cherokees...Time will effect the desired change, and it is worthy of mention, even now in the advance of law, & unrequired, the better class of

⁹⁷ Ridge; emphasis added.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid; emphasis added.

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, “Reflections on the Institutions of the Cherokee Indians.”

¹⁰¹ Ridge.

¹⁰² Ibid.

our female, prefer to be united in Marriage attended by the solemn ties of the Christian mode.¹⁰³

He again refers to a more 'civilized' woman, this time describing her as one that marries as a Christian instead of the traditional Cherokee practice. Simultaneously, Ridge argues that it is only a matter of time before the rest of the Cherokee women embrace Christian marriages, and along with them, their theoretical role as helpmates.

Despite the aforementioned 'civilizing successes' of the Cherokee though, it appears change was not enacted quick enough for President Andrew Jackson. In 1830, President Jackson, a long-time proponent of Indian removal, wrote directly to the Cherokee, stating that "it is impossible that you can flourish in the midst of a civilized community. You have but one remedy within your reach. And that is, to remove to the West."¹⁰⁴ That same year, Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, beginning the formal process of forcibly relocating Indigenous communities. Later, in 1838, federal and state troops evicted the Cherokee from their land, placing them in temporary internment camps before forcing their westward migration. This geographic removal was coupled with continued efforts to 'civilize' the Cherokee and render them culturally homogenous by forcing individuals to dress and look like white Americans, convert to Christianity, and embrace their 'natural roles' according to the Euro-American doctrine of hierarchy.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Although Cherokee women like Nanyehi sought co-existence, they were only met by empty promises and eventual excision. A system predicated upon balance could not simply merge with one that emphasized hierarchical relationships, especially one in which women were not considered equal citizens. Moreover, the rhetoric and practices of the Cherokee matriculture resulted in it being considered a subversive influence; Euro-Americans would not allow their women the opportunity to speak as openly as the Cherokee and had no intention of changing their stance. Instead, Euro-Americans sought to minimize the influence of the Cherokee women, preferring to deal solely with the men. Later, this turned into a governmental effort, one that sought to *domesticate* the Cherokee matriculture. The results of these endeavors are best described by Theda Perdue, when she declares that "the story of most Cherokee women is not cultural

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Jackson, "To the Cherokee Tribe of Indians East of the Mississippi," March 16, 1835, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc07377>.

¹⁰⁵ This often took the form of separating Indigenous children from their communities and placing them into boarding or day schools that mandated they dress in Euro-American clothing and only speak English. The United States government recently released a report detailing the history and abuses of such institutions. See Bryan Newland, "Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report," May 2022, https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf.

transformation... but remarkable cultural persistence.”¹⁰⁶ Cherokee women did not give in to the proposed “euthanasias;” instead they persevered and are still attempting to restore the matriculture today.¹⁰⁷ Hopefully this paper furthers that end by illustrating the remarkable agency and challenges that Cherokee women like Nanyehi faced as well as the world they hoped to introduce to Euro-American culture.

About the Author

Matthew Cerjak is an incoming PhD student in History whose research focuses on the lives of women in the British Atlantic World during the long eighteenth century. While he mostly writes on topics related to women and the law, his work also extends to studies of Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity.

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¹⁰⁶ Perdue, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Anonymous, “Reflections on the Institutions of the Cherokee Indians,” 55.

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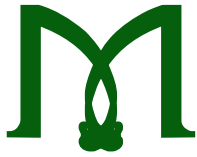
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**Introduction to John R. Swanton's
'Tlingit Sacred Peace Dance' in *Tlingit Myths and Texts*,
Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 39, 1909.**

MARIE-FRANÇOISE GUÉDON, PhD

Introduction

This introduction aims to provide a cultural context for Swanton's text as it relates one of the myths told by the Tlingit people about the origins of the Tlingit Peace ceremony, also known as *Kuwakan* or Deer Dance. Among other things, the dance is a remarkable socio-political tool allowing the Tlingit communities to make peace following a war, a murder or other crime, or any accident affecting their populations from the errors or abuses of human power. This Introduction is divided into three parts: a presentation of land otters and their cultural significance, the matrilineality of the Tlingit people, and the *Kuwakan*, also known as the Deer Dance or the Sacred Peace Dance.

Land Otters

The myths presented briefly here are part of a larger corpus of oral literature pertaining to the land otter and transmitted among the Tlingit people of southeastern Alaska. Abundant in southern Alaska, land otters have shown themselves to be extremely intelligent and, like the bears, are similar to humans in terms of family life, dwelling, communication, and play.

However, land otters have a very bad reputation among the Tlingit people, as they were formerly considered to be the animal form of human beings who had drowned in the rivers or in the sea.



Whether rescued or kidnapped by a land otter, victims were transformed into land otters, even while they kept the ability to present themselves in a human form (including as attractive young men or women). After transformation, the new land otters roamed the forests in hopes of luring further victims into the water or into madness. Even today, land otters evoke a deep fear and revulsion, especially among older people, and children are warned to trust neither land otters nor strangers. Occasionally, though, land otters may remember their human family and bring them good fortune.

Most importantly, land otters are also a direct pathway to shamanistic powers and are involved in many shamanic rituals as supernatural helpers and teachers. Shamanic masks depicting land otters are striking as they assemble human and animal features merging over a human skull. Such animal spirit beings, with at least a partial human identity (like that of the land otters) may also be inherited from deceased shamans, or may themselves be the spirits of these dead shamans, now reinstated in their inheritors.

Please note that the Tlingit language and dialects do not mark gender directly, whether in the equivalents of pronouns, nouns, or verbs (as in French). French translations automatically assign a gender, usually masculine, to anything considered a person not explicitly presented as female. Please note also that according to Tlingit traditions, animals and other living beings are considered to be persons.

That a land otter-person would be involved in the mythical origins of the Peace Dance, as described by Swanton (see Swanton's article) indicates that this Dance was much more than a simple socio-political or official diplomatic event. It means that the Deer Dance was sanctioned by one of the great mythological and supernatural beings of the Tlingit world, beyond the human realms and still active today.

A Matrilineal Society

The Tlingit people are a matrilineal society, with localised clans organised in two exogamous opposite moieties. Tlingit society is further divided between aristocrats (holders of noble names owned by the clan and bestowed publicly on persons with the proper kin connections) and commoners, as well as, formerly, a number of slaves (captives, or descendants of captives). Though one identifies as a member of one's mother's clan and moiety, kin on the father's side are essential to one's family life and one's public actions. Furthermore, in such an exogamous moiety system, one's clan and the clan of one's spouse are in a reciprocal relationship. However, as opposites, they are also in a position of potential conflict: "We marry those against whom we fight."

In this hierarchical society, adolescent boys and girls did not enjoy much freedom, particularly if they belonged to an aristocratic family. Here, they were under the direct supervision of their mother and their mother's brother. High-ranking girls were guarded most closely and upon reaching their puberty, were ritually secluded for several months (up to two years) in a small space and in semi-darkness.

While in seclusion, they were strictly prevented from interacting with human and nonhuman beings (even from looking at the sky), with the exception of their mother and older female relatives. One must note that a shortened version of that long retreat was observed by every adult women during her menses until menopause, keeping her away from her family and social duties. As was the case for the adolescent girl, this was done both to protect the community from contact with her power as a potential life-giver in touch with the non-human realms, and to protect her from undue influences.

At the end of her menarche seclusion, the girl was considered an adult women and quickly married to a husband chosen by her mother and her mother's brother, according to her rank as a noble person. The ideal noble marriage was with a man belonging to her father's clan who would have lived already in her mother's dwelling (avunculocal residence). This early submissive behaviour did not prevent women from becoming extremely active in the economic and political spheres of their communities.

The Kuwakan or Deer Dance

The following summary of the Tlingit *Kuwakan*, also known as the Deer Dance or Peace Ceremony, is based on Frederica de Laguna's ethnographic work among the Tlingit people of Alaska. Specifically, her research among the people of Yakutat which was first published in 1972 as *Under Mount Saint Elias: The History and Culture of the Yakutat Tlingit*.¹ Several paragraphs are summarized below with the kind permission of the editor. See also John R. Swanton, 1908, *Social Conditions, Belief and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians*, 28th Annual report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, and George T. Emmons, *The Tlingit*.

Among the Tlingit, while there could be violence and aggression or crimes between members of the same clan, such incidents did not constitute war as such and were settled by payment in money, goods, or other properties, including ceremonial privileges. Another category of conflict concerned international events, such as attacks by neighbouring tribes, or actions taken against invading European foreigners; in these cases, there was little hope of settlement or a formal peace treaty. War, whether large-scale battles, feuds, or simple retaliation against an accidental death, included *only* conflicts which pitted one clan against another, or more seriously, one moiety against another. In practice, one could talk of a war only if a peace agreement was possible at the end.

According to the information provided by De Laguna, and following an explicit equity principle aiming to 'even the score' after damage was done or someone was killed, the settlement agreements terminating a war were negotiated by third-party individuals called *nakani*, that is, 'in-laws' (men married to women belonging to the clans they were to represent). *Nakani* were, if possible, aristocrats and socially important persons; they could claim a neutral position because, as in-laws, they did not belong to the clans involved in the conflict. The *nakani* discussed the compensation of property or life demanded by the injured party and secured the resulting agreement; this agreement sometimes

1 A newer 3-volume edition is available: Frederica de Laguna, *Under Mount Saint Elias: The History and Culture of the Yakutat Tlingit* (Ottawa: Frederica de Laguna Northern Books, 2009).

asked for the life of a member or members of the guilty party, in counterpart for the loss of the initial victim(s). in this most exacting situation, compensation would require people of equal rank and number in a context where, if necessary, the life of one aristocrat could be worth the lives of up to four commoners. The leaders of the clan at fault selected who was to be killed in return for the death(s) on the other side; this was not necessarily the person responsible for the loss, as, for instance, a younger brother would customarily replace an older brother.

The *nakani* then arranged a Peace Ceremony or *Kuwakan*; this included a temporary and formal exchange of hostages during a complex process lasting for eight to ten 10 days and longer if the conflict pitted two distant communities. The hostages, four to each side, were carefully paired as to sex and social status but not according to age and they were selected, if possible, among close relatives of the victim and of the supposed aggressor. "If a woman were taken on one side, her 'opposite' (*geyi*) should also be a woman."²

Surnamed *kuwakan* (peace-makers, peace officers, or 'deer'), the selected individuals came out of their homes unarmed and in full regalia. They were seized by the opposing party, who pretended to kill them in a mock battle; each side then brought its 'captives' into their own respective homes and gave them new names. The 'deer' had to keep motionless while carried around and were required to remain in a totally passive, peaceful state for several days, being bound by many taboos and prescribed behavioural rules. They were also, however, required to participate in the nightly Peace Dance, an elaborate lengthy dance exchange every evening, featuring first aggressive dancing on the part of their captors and then their subjugation by the *kuwakan*, with rich entertainment for everyone. As well as participating in the dance, each *kuwakan* was given a ceremonial song to present.

At the evening Peace Dances, eagle feathers on their head, eagle down on their hair, and lines of red paint on their faces emphasized the role of the *kuwakan* as peace-makers. New clothes, new jewellery, new moccasins and other gifts demonstrated the good will of their captors. The Peace Dance ended on the ninth day, with a return home of the 'deer.' This exchange of the hostages, who crossed the floor to their own side, was accompanied by a series of feasts (exchange of food and goods) and ended with a common ceremonial encounter officially terminating the hostilities.

These Tlingit peace rituals demanded remarkable individual courage and full personal adherence to lineage and clan solidarity, with explicit primacy of the lineage's well-being resting on the individual's choice to subordinate their individual will to the decisions of their family groups and leaders. A noticeable aspect of the *Kuwakan* dance or Peace Dance ceremony (though not emphasized by De Laguna but well documented in her reports) is the fact that while men were the the ones involved in war and in retributions against harm caused to a member of their clan, women directly participated in the *Kuwakan* dance in several distinct ways.

First of all, women entered into the Peace Dance as members of their kin group. As kin (mothers, sisters) of the males of their clan or wives to the clan of their husband, they were called to perform

2 Ibid., 205-6.

various duties at various moment during the eight day ritual, including dancing. As siblings or mothers of a *kuwakan* dancer, they provided food, clothing and other necessities for the 'deer' kept as the opposite (*geyi*) of their own family member and would also act as attendant to any women held as *kuwakan*. Sometimes, women could become *nakani* (official conciliators) in default of a man of suitable rank, in which case gender was shown to be less important than their aristocratic status.

More importantly, women could be seized as *kuwakan* / 'deer' themselves and be full participants in the rites that followed, regardless of their age. Even a little girl could be taken. As female, they would be treated according to their gender, with female attendants rather than male servants, and dressed, served and adorned accordingly. But, again, it was their aristocratic status (position in their lineage and clan) and kin ties that mattered then rather than their gender.

My own research has uncovered a potentially misleading link between the *Kuwakan* and the female gender. Specifically, the *kuwakan* dance brings out a very different question about the symbolic gender of the 'deer.' Several male informants mentioned that *kuwakan* had to behave 'like a girl.' In view of that fact, Western readers might assume that the passivity required for the 'deer' contributes to a potential feminisation of their status. But this assumed correlation is wrong: the 'deer' are not seen, defined, or treated as women and women are not defined by the Tlingit as passive beings. Neither socially nor ritually are women seen as weak or powerless. *Kuwakan* do not behave like women, but they are obliged to follow the same ritual prescriptions as girls follow during the retreat imposed on them at menarche.

The nature of the *kuwakan* is circumscribed by a ritual context using three methods: a) supernatural sanctions and rewards to insure their proper behaviour; b) ritual protection against unwelcome influences; and c) a shamanic-like environment because they are in contact with supernatural powers (proximity with death in the case of the 'deer,' proximity with unborn children in the case of the pubescent girls). The demands placed on the 'deer' by their position intersects with their gender, but the ritual gestures were similar for both male and female *kuwakan*.

De Laguna mentions several similarities between the *kuwakan* and the menstruant. Any action was taboo, and one or two men would be appointed to attend to each hostage to care for their needs (if the latter were a women, she would have woman attendants). The attendants sat besides their charge at all times in order to care for them. "He can't do anything for himself — can't even wash his own face. He has to use his left hand, because his right hand cause trouble..." To insure that the right hand was kept idle, the fingers were laced together with cord - as was done to menstruants.³

The 'deer' was forbidden to scratch himself with his fingernails, for this would mean 'agitating more war.' [This was also a major interdiction for pubescent girls.] Instead he was given a flat hard rock, or rubbing amulet [...] with which to scratch any place that itches. This hung by a string around his neck. Because he was forbidden to touch his head, his 'servant' combed his hair for him. [This was also the case for pubescent girls.] [...] It

3 Ibid., 598.

was taboo for the 'deer' to dress by himself, a task for his or her attendants, and before he did so, moreover 'just like *wetedi* (a menstruant), he rubbed the rock around his mouth, put it under his feet and stepped on it. If this taboo were broken, either the captor's sib [clan] or the 'deer''s sib [clan] would 'die off.' Or, "if he do something, he's going to get crazy when he gets old, that's *ligas* (taboo)."⁴

The *kuwakan* had to follow exacting food prescriptions which prevented contact with anything alive or freshly killed, as well as anything strong or hot. "Peace hostages were also subject to a number of food taboos, similar to those of the adolescent girl. Hot food, hot soup was forbidden, or when they old like us, they sweating so easy."⁵ Fresh fish was also avoided because it was slippery (...) and would make money slip away, or could make it impossible for him to catch fish with a spear. Fish skin would make spots to the face in old age. Beach food (shellfish and seaweed) meant poverty. "Indian rice" (root of the Kamchatka Lily) and even that White people's rice was taboo "because they get fat" in the way the rice swells up as it is cooked. Bear meat, fresh or dried was also forbidden, because the bear is cranky. But [old] mountain goat meat put up in seal oil, boiled and dried fish, and fresh or frozen berries were permitted.

I must note here that these prescriptions are identical to those observed by neighbouring Tsimshian, Haida, and Northern Athapaskan women, though the consequences of non-observance vary from one community to the next. Among the Northern Athapaskan, the same ritual gestures also mark periods of personal transformation, such as dream or spirit quest, access to wealth, change of social status and access to an aristocratic rank, and, of course, access to shamanic powers. Among the Tlingit, as noted by de Laguna, the same ritual retreat was followed by menstruating women, adolescent girls reaching puberty, early widowhood, shamans, and, as described here, *kuwakan* – whether male or female.

In all these cases, the contact with the supernatural or non-human world is an opportunity for the acquisition of new powers. While a reluctant *kuwakan* could call misfortune upon himself or herself, as well as his or her relatives, the presence of the 'deer' resulted in good luck for all those interacting with them. This confirms the shamanic-like aspects of the Deer Dance, and the spiritual role of the Deer Dancers. Indeed, De Laguna confirms:

The same taboos applied to the attendants, and probably to all those who slept in the house with the hostages. To be in the house with the peace hostages gave those people a chance to "wish for something in their mind all the time: good luck, money, a good living, and all else desirable."⁶

4 Ibid, 599.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

After the final ceremonial feast, the *kuwakan* retained his or her power as a peace-maker for as long as he or she lived and continued to act as a peace maker or even as *nakani* (go between or negotiator) for the two clans involved in the original conflict.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the presence of women among the Deer dancers and their treatment as men's equals indicate their social importance, while the emphasis in the Peace Dance of female aristocrats as high ranking-persons rather than as female persons *per se* also demonstrates an interesting aspect of Tlingit social values where gender is not the primary indicator of a person's status.

We must discard idea of the *kuwakan* or 'deer' as a symbolic female person because this label does not fit the data. Instead, the *kuwakan* behaves in ways similar to those of girls reaching their puberty, which is also in the manner of persons facing a major personal and spiritual transformation, a situation that brings both exposure to dangerous powers and access to good luck or beneficial spiritual help. The 'deer' are not symbolically female, they are persons in touch with spiritual powers similar to those faced by girls during their puberty: the non-human domain of both birthing and dying. The involvement of land otters in the mythical origins of *kuwakan* confirms the need for extreme ritual caution for all participants to the Peace Ceremony dealing with the aftermath of war and death.

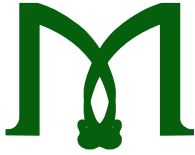
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Tlingit Sacred Peace Dance

JOHN R. SWANTON, PhD

Abstract

The man that first learned about dancing was upset in a canoe and became a land-otter-man called Tûts!îdîgû'L, who has very great power. Some time afterwards four boys were drawn out to sea after some black ducks, upset there, and taken into the land-otters' dens. A shaman told the people where they were, and they burned out the dens, killing many otters, but Tûts!îdîgû'L escaped with the boys. Now the land otters made war on human beings, and the bodies of the latter broke out in pimples and sores which were really caused by the spider-crab-shell arrows. At last some people came upon two white land otters, which they carried home and treated as if they were deer (peace ambassadors). Then the land otters came to the town and danced to make peace.

Keywords: Tlingit, dance, peace-making, oral culture, Indigenous tradition

Résumé

Le premier homme à avoir appris à danser s'est renversé dans un canoë et est devenu un homme-loutre terrestre appelé Tûts!îdîgû'L, qui possède un très grand pouvoir. Quelque temps plus tard, quatre garçons ont été attirés vers la mer à la recherche de canards noirs, ils y ont chaviré et ont été emmenés dans



les tanières des loutres terrestres. Un chaman a indiqué aux gens où ils se trouvaient, et ils ont incendié les tanières, tuant de nombreuses loutres, mais Tûts!îdîgû'L s'est échappé avec les garçons. Après cela, les loutres terrestres firent la guerre aux êtres humains, et les corps de ces derniers se couvrirent de boutons et de plaies qui étaient en réalité causés par des flèches faites avec des carapaces d'araignées de mer. Finalement, des gens tombèrent sur deux loutres terrestres blanches, qu'ils rapportèrent chez eux et traitèrent comme s'il s'agissait de cerfs (ambassadeurs de la paix). Puis les loutres terrestres sont venues en ville et ont dansé pour faire la paix.

Mots clés : Tlingit, danse, rétablissement de la paix, culture orale, tradition autochtone

One time four boys went out hunting from Klawak with bow and arrows. They saw some black ducks and shot at them, but the ducks kept swimming out to sea, drawing them on. Far out the canoe upset. They hunted for the boys for days and days, but could not find them. Then some property was given to a shaman named Tuxstâ', who sent his spirit after them to the point on the beach from which they had set out. Then the shaman said, "The spirits of the boys seem to have taken the road to the land-otters' dens." Therefore they kept on until they saw the boys upon a point of land, but, as soon as the latter saw them, they ran into the dens of the land otter. Then the town chief said, "Let the whole town gather pitchwood and burn up the land-otter dens." So all of the people went thither in their canoes, made fires at the mouths of the dens and killed the land otters as soon as they came out. All perished but a few, who said, "It is Tûts!îdîgû'L's fault that they have burned up our houses and our food." Then Tûts!îdîgû'L jumped into the sea from the other side of the point with the boys all around him, so that they could not be found.

After this the shaman said, "The land otters are going to make war upon the people here," and soon after they did so. The people attacked them in return and they warred for some time. Many people fell down suddenly and were taken sick, while others were injured by having limbs of trees fall upon their heads. The shaman said that these mishaps were really effects of the land-otters' arrows, made of the shells of the spider crab. The people were also suffering from boils and pimples all over their bodies, and he said that these were produced by the poisonous shells. So many were dying that all became frightened. Whenever anyone went out hunting or fishing he would be troubled with boils and itching places and have to return. The shaman's spirits, which the land otters could see, were the only things they feared.

Finally the shaman saw that there were two white land otters, and he said, "If you can get hold of those you will be all right." Then a canoe with four men started off, and the shaman sang with them telling them that his spirits were going along also to look after them. He said, "You will be lucky. You will get them. As soon as you get them put feathers

on their heads." So they went away and camped for the night. They were unable to sleep, however, on account of the strange noises about their camp as if people were talking in very low tones. Still they could not see anything. They would say to one another, "Do you hear that?" "Yes," they answered. It was caused by the two high-caste white land otters who were talking to Tuxstâ's spirits.

Next morning the men arose very early, and the eldest said to the one next in years, "Get up. I have had a queer dream. I dreamt that we had a deer and that we were taking our deer to the land-otter den." Then one of them answered, "You have had a lucky dream. Let us start right away." So they took the canoe down and set out. Going along on the opposite side of the point on which they had camped, they saw the two white otters swimming in the water. The shaman's spirits had been holding them. Then the men said to them, "Stay there. We have had you for a long time now." So the otters remained where they were, and they caught them and put feathers upon their heads. They were making deer of them. They took them home to the fort in which they dwelt and carried them in. All the people danced for them. And that night, after they had retired, the people dreamt that the land otters were dancing the peace-making dance. Some of the people said, "They really danced," but others replied, "No, they did not dance. We only dreamt it." Still they dressed up to dance in return. All were fasting, as was customary when peace is about to be made. They also fed the land otters and waited upon them very carefully.

By and by the shaman said that the land otters were coming, so the people made ready for them. They soaked a very bitter root, called sîkç, in water for a long time. Some said, "They are not coming. The shaman has made that up," but others believed him and got ready. Finally the shaman said, "To-morrow they will be here." The next morning it was very foggy and they could not see far out, but they heard a drum beating. At length the land-otter-people came ashore, and they helped them carry their things up to the houses. One of these land otters had two heads, one under the other. it was Tûts!îdîgû'L. All said, "We depend on Tûts!îdîgû'L." Then numbers of land otters came into the house, but, as soon as Tûts!îdîgû'L appeared at the door, everybody there but the shaman fell down as if dead. The shaman in turn filled his mouth with the poisonous water they had prepared and spit it about upon the otters, rendering unconscious all that it touched. The land otters, however, shouted, "Keep away from Tûts!îdîgû'L. Let him do his work." So Tûts!îdîgû'L danced, saying, "Ha, ha, ha." When they started a song, the land otters mentioned Tûts!îdîgû'L's name in the manner of the Indians. When they were through with their dance, all of the people woke up, and the land otters also came to. But, when the human beings got up on their feet, all had vanished including the two white ones.

Then the village people said to one another, "Did you see the dances?" "Yes," they answered. They knew something had happened and did not want to admit having missed it. "Did you see this Tûts!îdîgû'L?" "Yes." "How was he dressed?" "He had two heads and

wore a dancing apron. He carried two large round rattles. As soon as he moved around sideways we all went to sleep."

About the Author

John Reed Swanton (February 19, 1873 – May 2, 1958) was an American anthropologist, folklorist, and linguist who worked with Native American peoples throughout the United States. Swanton achieved recognition in the fields of ethnology and ethnohistory. He is particularly noted for his work with indigenous peoples of the Southeast and Pacific Northwest.¹

1 'John R. Swanton,' *Wikipedia*: available online at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_R._Swanton, accessed 23 April 2024.



The New Ideology of 'Eternal War' in Archaeology. Critical Reflections on Early History

HEIDE GOETTNER-ABENDROTH, PhD

Abstract

Nowadays the vocabulary of war dominates everyday language, just as violence and war dominate the media. This way of thinking, in which war predominates, sees peace as nothing more than the absence of war, and sees it as the result of rules of conflict – just as if peace and peace building did not follow their own rules. Even among scholars, the current fashion is to look everywhere for violence and war. This applies to both Indigenous societies and early epochs of human history, which until recently were considered peaceful. Instead of an appropriately meticulous analysis of ethnographic records and archaeological findings, articles of belief are formulated. The result is an extreme devaluation of peace.

The idea of 'peaceable' societies is just as imprecise as the notion of 'warlike' societies, and it is just as ideologically charged. One can directly experience how this involves emotions rather than knowledge by noticing how some contemporaries become downright aggressive whenever anyone speaks of earlier peaceable societies. The spiteful tone intensifies especially when one speaks of peaceable societies in connection with matriarchy. It is worth taking a closer look at this problem and to find clear definitions, which will be done in my paper.



Keywords: Organized War, Feud, Peaceful societies, Ideology, Archaeology.

Résumé

De nos jours, le vocabulaire de la guerre domine le langage courant, tout comme la violence et la guerre dominent les médias. Cette façon de penser, dans laquelle la guerre prédomine, considère la paix comme rien d'autre que l'absence de guerre et la considère comme le résultat de règles de conflit – tout comme si la paix et la consolidation de la paix ne suivaient pas leurs propres règles. Cela s'applique à la fois aux sociétés autochtones et aux premières époques de l'histoire humaine, qui jusqu'à récemment étaient considérées comme pacifiques. Au lieu d'une analyse méticuleuse des documents ethnographiques et des découvertes archéologiques, des articles de croyance sont formulés. Le résultat est une dévaluation extrême de la paix.

L'idée de sociétés « pacifiques » est tout aussi imprécise que la notion de sociétés « guerrières », et elle est tout aussi imprégnée d'idéologie. On peut directement constater à quel point cette question implique des émotions plutôt que des connaissances en remarquant comment certains contemporains deviennent carrément agressifs chaque fois que l'on parle de sociétés pacifiques antérieures. Il vaut la peine d'examiner ce problème de plus près et de trouver des définitions claires, ce qui sera fait dans mon article.

Mots-clés : Guerre organisée, querelle, sociétés pacifiques, idéologie, archéologie.

Introduction

Nowadays the vocabulary of war dominates everyday language, just as violence and war dominate the media. When there is no hot war, 'cold war' holds sway, meaning that in principle people speak of war without consideration of peace. This way of thinking, in which war predominates, sees peace as nothing more than the absence of war and sees it as the result of rules of conflict – just as if peace and peace building do not follow their own rules. The outcome is an extreme devaluation of peace, as if it were nothing but the consequence of weakness, retreat, and defeat. Even among scholars, the current fashion is to look everywhere for violence and war. This applies to both Indigenous societies and early epochs of human history such as the Paleolithic and Neolithic Ages, which until recently were considered peaceful.

The Talk of 'Eternal War'

We now turn to the experts in primeval and early history, the archaeologists, who uncover the material findings from those epochs. They adhere to the discoveries they make in their excavations: the human skeletal remains, ruins of built structures, and cultural artifacts, which they use to support their theories and avoid overstated interpretations. This, at least, is what they claim. But we soon see that there is plenty of audacious interpretation; it emerges from a background of the social environment one already knows, which is, of course, one's own patriarchal form of society. So, it happens that certain archaeologists interpret 'eternal patriarchy' with all its manifestations into human history, especially 'eternal war.' Lately, Laurence Keeley's theory of war has played an important role in archaeological discourse, since his overly simple definition of war allows him to claim that war is a widespread phenomenon, dominant since the earliest times.¹ But we easily can see that the idea of 'eternal war' is the pillar of 'eternal patriarchy,' therefore it is so necessary to them to claim it!

Now, let us look at some examples:

The claim is made that war was already notorious in the Paleolithic Age and demonstrated with the case of Krapina in northern Croatia. In this region, under an outcropping of Hušnjakovo Hill, the remains of around 70 Neanderthals were found; the age of the remains was dated at 130,000 years before the present time. The bones show traces of cuts and scraping, as well as further signs of violence, leading immediately to the hypothesis that here a group of Cro-Magnon people, early modern humans, encountered Neanderthals, defeated them, and then ate them. This is the gruesome but ever-popular cannibalism hypothesis, which denigrates the supposedly-primitive very early humans as eaters of human flesh. This hypothesis long haunted the field of archaeology.

But this scenario can have a completely different interpretation: it points to a death ritual common in the Paleolithic Age and the millennia thereafter, the custom of secondary burial. Here the dead were first buried individually, and after a period of decay, the bones were exhumed, cleaned, and separated, then gathered together at a sacred place for a second burial with a distinct ceremony. This custom is well documented in ethnology; it expresses the loving care which kin exhibited for their dead. Further so-called 'indications of violence' of this case likely resulted from the use of dynamite, employed at that time (1899) to blast the bones from the hard ground – a very special recovery method!²

1 Lawrence H. Keeley: *War before Civilization. The Myth of the Peaceful Savage*, Oxford-New York 1996, Oxford University Press.

2 Heidi Peter-Röcher: *Gewalt und Krieg im prähistorischen Europa. Beiträge zur Konfliktforschung auf der Grundlage archäologischer, anthropologischer und ethnologischer Quellen*, Series: Universitätsforschungen zur Prähistorischen Archäologie, vol. 143, Bonn 2007, Verlag Dr. Rudolf Habelt, 45. See also Peter-Röcher: personal interview on August 14, 2014, at the University of Würzburg, where she is Professor of Archaeology for Pre- and Early History.

Human sacrifice and cannibalism were also attributed to the Neolithic people; this scenario supposedly played out in an especially horrifying way in the Jungfernhöhle (Virgin's Cave) bei Tiefernellen, near Bamberg in Bavaria, an archaeological discovery dated to about 5000 BCE. Here skeleton parts of 49 individuals were found, most of them young women and girls. Once again, traces of scrapes and cuts on the bones and crushed skulls gave rise to the hypothesis of gruesome feasts. In 1990, the Virgin's Cave was still infamous among experts as the Cannibal Cave. Meanwhile, the interpretation of the finds of the Virgin's Cave has changed so that it is now also seen as a Neolithic cultic cave, where no traces of cannibalism can be found. The new viewpoint is that ceremonial secondary burials of the female bones were celebrated, which proves that for millennia the cave was a cultic site of exceptional significance.³ Moreover, no indications of human violence can be found. Instead, falling stones damaged the skulls long after their burial.⁴

Today, the hypothesis of a broad distribution of human sacrifice and cannibalism, which made early humans appear to be bloodthirsty savages, is considered passé. But it has been replaced by the hypothesis of war and massacre, where another kind of slaughter is projected backward into the earliest epochs of humanity. Since, due to the absence of evidence, the war hypothesis cannot be upheld for the Paleolithic Age, now it is the Neolithic Age that is made responsible for war and massacre.

Let us now look at how that proposition holds up:

The earthwork at Herxheim an der Weinstraße in Germany (ca. 5000 BCE), for example, was long misconstrued as a site of massacre because hundreds of skeletons were found there. Nowadays a contrary view has prevailed, one where this large complex is understood to have served as an important supra-regional burial ground with sequentially excavated ditches arising from overlapping long pits. They never represented warlike fortifications.⁵ Before that, the Herxheim Earthworks were called on to serve as proof for the hypothesis of human sacrifice and cannibalism; human flesh eating was thought to be at work here because the bones of at least 500 individuals had been disaggregated and the skulls cleaned and processed. But indications of violent death within a short time span are lacking, and the exceptionally beautiful ceramic pots placed among the skeletons speak for burials. This time, too, the custom of secondary burial was at work – as was often the case in these early epochs.

³ Ibid. citing the scientist Timo Seregély.

⁴ Ibid., 52n41.

⁵ Ibid., 144. See also Ibid., 144n74 for the earthworks of Rosheim (Bas-Rhin) and Middle-Bronze-Age Velim.

Another example of war and massacre during the Neolithic is, supposedly, at Schletz-Asparn in Austria (ca. 5000 BCE), because a number of skeletons and pieces of stone mace-heads were found in the ditches at this village complex. But otherwise, these graves contained no weapons, and whether the stone mace-heads represented weapons is questionable. In addition, ceramics, fragments of figurines, and burnt domestic plants were found with the dead, which here also speaks for burial. At this site, too – as with Herxheim – the ditches were not all dug at the same time, but at short intervals apart, meaning that here, too, there was no continuous fortification. The dead were not buried altogether, but at intervals, with grave goods. This situation can hardly be interpreted as a massacre, but more likely as the successive burial of people who died of a rapidly spreading sickness.⁶

Additionally, the late Neolithic causewayed camp of Altheim in Bavaria (c. 3500 BCE) fell under the massacre hypothesis, because broken arrowheads, a chaotic assortment of bone fragments, and many pottery shards were found in the ditches of this farmstead. This led to the odd assertion that here, in desperate a defense, even pots were thrown at the attacking enemy – perhaps by the courageous farm women? Later this assertion was corrected, and the causewayed camp is now seen as a mass grave due to an epidemic. The kin had thrown the dead into the ditches, but they provided them with gifts of arrowheads that could no longer be used and plenty of food in the many containers.⁷

These examples show that the earthworks as enclosures had a primarily religious-ritual function, not a profane warlike one – at least as far as Europe is concerned. This recognition naturally is submerged when every wall and ditch is seen as a military fortification, and one sees violence between the villages everywhere. Anyway, the number of massacres cited to prove constant warfare in the Neolithic Age is very low. For Central Europe, only two unambiguous examples remain, namely the attacks on a village near Talheim and on another near Eulau, both in Germany.

What should we think of this? How do the proofs of war stack up? First it is important to separate the automatic linking of massacre and war. It is true that in civilized state-based societies massacres often occur in the setting of organized war, but in early history we are not dealing with war at all. We are dealing with small-scale armed conflicts, which are brief and spontaneous, and have no institutional military organization behind them. They arise from personal motives like revenge for injured honor, retaliation for theft, or disputes over resources. Only a few men carry out the attack; in no way does the entire tribe or clan take part. In short, these are feuds. Even if there were many more of these than actually have left traces, these feuds do not amount to war. If we also consider the

⁶ Ibid., 144.

⁷ Ibid., 105-6.

great length of time between these two instances, the attack at Talheim around 5000 BCE and the one at Eulau around 2500 BCE, they do not suffice to constitute a warlike epoch.

For the Paleolithic Age, the concept of warlike times is completely inappropriate, because there are hundreds of millennia without attacks and massacres. The same is true for the Neolithic Age, where, after all, there are thousands of massacre-free years. It is obvious that in these very long-lasting epochs people lived peacefully – which is especially clear in comparison with the situation today!

The Talk of ‘Peaceable Societies’

Today, the most common idea of peaceable societies is just as imprecise as the notion of warlike societies, and it is just as ideologically charged. One can directly experience how this involves emotions rather than knowledge by noticing how some contemporaries become downright aggressive whenever anyone speaks of earlier peaceable societies. Does it not suit their worldview to think that the development of humanity might not be a linear progression toward ever nobler, more rational and violence-free behavior? The spiteful tone intensifies especially when one speaks of peaceable societies in connection with matriarchy. Thus, peaceable matriarchy is declared unequivocally and without any evidence to be a myth. The assertion of eternal war in early history is parroted with the following result: because matriarchy researchers use the criterion of non-violence or peacefulness as evidence of matriarchy, this proves there was no matriarchy in the Neolithic Age.⁸ But no definition of what these authors understand as matriarchy and as peaceable societies is forthcoming.

Here and elsewhere one sees the unspoken ideological tendency to set the bar for peaceable societies too high, with unrealistic expectations for human collective life. An ethnologist’s attempt at a definition reflects this very problem. According to him, peaceable societies are supposed to have values and sanctions that do not allow for any violence, even if it is personal and spontaneous; all their conflicts should be resolved in a violence-free manner; they should have no special role for fighters – which might lead one to conclude that they should allow themselves to be conquered and dominated.⁹

There are other broadly held, diffuse notions applied especially to matriarchal peaceable societies, such as: all their members should mother and love one another, hence no guidelines and social rules are necessary; but, if rules are accepted, no infractions of them should lead to even the mildest punishments; also, no animal should be eaten, no tree

⁸ Ibid., 37-40, 43.

⁹ Compare Thomas Gregor, "Uneasy Peace: Intertribal Relations in Brazil's Upper Xingu," in *The Anthropology of War*, ed. Jonathan Haas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 106.

should be cut down, etc. On the whole, they are based on an assumption that humans are angels, but not humans. It is an illusionary position arising from purely wishful thinking and is based, in this case, on positive projection – which is no improvement.

How the range of human possibilities takes shape in the world depends on the cultural and social structures within which they live. It is these cultural values and social patterns that constitute a peaceable or non-peaceable society. Matriarchal societies have a number of strategies for conflict resolution and peacemaking unknown in patriarchal societies, due to the fact that in matriarchal societies violence is proscribed and not glorified. An example from the Hopi living in the southwest of North America: they had a case of internal collective violence, but this was followed by ritual resolution of the conflict performed by two champions of the two struggling parties – a perfectly working strategy without bloodshed.¹⁰

There are indeed feuds leading to homicides against members of other groups. But these can lead to tribal alliances to end such feuds – as the Iroquois of North America did in founding their historical league from five tribes, which ended fighting between these tribes.¹¹ Another possibility is marriage policies between tribes which can ensure that fighting does not occur in the first place, as we can see from the history of the Akan peoples in West Africa. These peoples constituted their tribes from marriage alliances between different groups.¹² In some matriarchal societies, particularly in those that have come under patriarchal pressure, there are special roles for fighters, but these serve to defend, not to conquer, seeing that not all these societies were immediately ready to submit to patriarchal invasions. See, for example, the Iroquois who defended their independence for two hundred years against the invasion of the Europeans.¹³

Factors that make matriarchal societies so different are cultural values and societal structures whose basic aim is to create an egalitarian society and to secure peace. In matriarchal societies, mothers are at the center, but they do not dominate. Instead, they foster maternal values which are derived from prototypical maternal behavior and maternal work. At first, these include nurturing and care of what is small and weak, so that it might grow. Furthermore, they emphasize equality between the sexes and between the generations in the sense of complementary equality. That is, where diversity is respected and is not misused to construct hierarchies. Their social and economic patterns aim to create perfect reciprocity as a system of mutual help that excludes no one. In politics, they foster conflict resolution through negotiation, reciprocal marriage, or ritual arrangements. These values and patterns are valid for everyone, for mothers and non-

10 See Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchal Societies. Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe*, New York 2013, Peter Lang Publishing, Chapter 13.

11 Ibid., Chapter 14.

12 Ibid., Chapter 17.

13 Ibid., Chapter 14.

mothers, for women and men alike. In this way, they create a way of living that is, in any case, more life affirming than what one finds in patriarchal societies.

So, it is of the greatest importance to become familiar in detail with the matriarchal values, customs, patterns, and structures that guide matriarchal ways of life. This knowledge has been gained from societies of this type worldwide that still survive today – as I have done in my own research by which I created modern Matriarchal Studies.¹⁴ These studies can show us a way to view and understand early history from a completely different perspective than the usual one. Without this familiarity with matriarchal societal forms, the result would be a continued patriarchal projection onto the past – as we can see with the new ideology of Eternal War.

(You will find a more elaborated version of this criticism in Heide Goettner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies of the Past and the Rise of Patriarchy in West Asia and Europe*, New York 2022, Peter Lang, Chapter 1.)

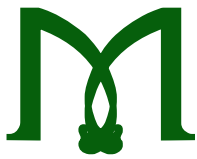
About the Author

Heide Goettner-Abendroth has published extensively on philosophy of science and matriarchal society and culture. She is the founder of Modern Matriarchal Studies and, in 1986, founded the International ACADEMY HAGIA for Matriarchal Studies. She has taught at the University of Munich, the University of Montreal, and the University of Innsbruck.

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¹⁴ For the founding of modern Matriarchal Studies, see Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchal Societies*.



“This Had To Be Done By Mothers Alone:” Research Notes on the Expansion of Women’s Agency During the Croatian Homeland War

MATTHEW CERJAK, MA

Abstract

In the years prior to, during, and after the Croatian Homeland War (1991-95), thousands of women answered the call to serve their nation. This research note offers a preliminary exploration of their stories. Initial discoveries show that Croatian women created pre-war networks attempting to prevent war, defied restrictive gender norms by serving in the military during the war, and utilized their wartime service to enhance women’s political representation after having endured unspeakable wartime atrocities. Emphasizing their pivotal roles in reshaping societal norms amidst conflict, initial research navigates through findings that show Croatian women strengthening their agency through the organization of pre-war protests and military service, and the political leverage of social networks and military service to enhance their status during postwar reconstruction.

Keywords: Women’s history, agency, activism, human rights, Croatian Homeland War

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Résumé

Dans les années avant, pendant et après la guerre pour la patrie croate, des milliers de femmes ont répondu à l'appel pour servir leur nation. Cette note de recherche propose une exploration préliminaire de leurs histoires. Les premières découvertes montrent que dans la période d'avant-guerre, les femmes croates ont créé des réseaux pour tenter de prévenir la guerre ; qu'elles ont défié les normes restrictives en matière de genre en servant dans l'armée pendant la guerre ; et qu'après avoir enduré des atrocités indescriptibles pendant la guerre, elles ont utilisé leur service en temps de guerre pour améliorer la représentation politique des femmes. Soulignant leur rôle central dans la refonte des normes sociétales en période de conflit, les premières recherches parcourent des résultats qui montrent que les femmes croates ont renforcé leur capacité d'action (« agentivité ») pour améliorer leur statut pendant la reconstruction d'après-guerre en organisant des manifestations avant la guerre, en servant dans les forces armées et en utilisant l'influence politique découlant de leurs réseaux sociaux et de leur service militaire.

Mots clés : Histoire des femmes, agentivité, activisme, droits humains, guerre d'indépendance croate

Introduction

The study of women in warfare is one that overwhelmingly depicts them as passive beings— primarily victims of violence—as opposed to active participants. This reactionary narrative disregards their contributions while undermining the transformational significance warfare often holds for women. Initial research suggests that by reflecting on the experiences of women during the Croatian War of Independence, one can understand and appreciate how women capitalize upon the social expanse created by war to shatter restrictive gender roles and increase political representation.¹ In doing so, I aim to theorize how warfare often acts as a fundamental catalyst of women's social movements, in this case the expansion of women's rights in postwar Croatia.

To do so, I first establish a basis of comparison that can be used to analyze change over time. This variable—the share of women in Croatia's pre- vs. post-war Parliament—does not tell the story of *all* women, however. As such, this paper considers a sociological baseline as well, and one that fits disparate agencies between rural and urban women. Following the establishment of a theoretical framework, the paper will shift its attention to the prewar environment of Yugoslavia to contextualize the Homeland War and examine how women formed, led, and participated in pre-war protests. The expansion of female agency did not occur in a vacuum; Croatian women did not, and arguably could

¹ Croats more commonly refer to their war of independence as the Homeland War (1991-1995).

not spontaneously decide to protest the status-quo. Instead, they took advantage of pre-war protests to blur the lines between their 'traditional' gender roles as mothers and action as political agents—action that would otherwise have been considered a masculine endeavor. This blurring of gender roles continued into the war as some women took on 'traditional' roles such as nursing, maintaining the home front, tending to refugees, etc., while others fought in combat. Finally, this paper considers the impact that women's service, both through protest and war, had on the expansion of women's rights in the postwar republic of Croatia. In doing so, I hypothesize that women utilized their service to advocate for increased representation all while overcoming traditional, restrictive gender norms.

As previously stated, the first step is to establish a basis of comparison—one that objectively demonstrates the increase in women's political representation while acknowledging, recognizing, and respecting the markedly different experiences of urban and rural women. This basis, although nuanced, still revolves around the question of citizenship and the rights or liberties afforded to women. Therefore, the first part of this comparison—the political—is best illustrated by the level of parliamentary representation women achieved and have maintained. Recent work in political science has tracked the percentage of seats women have held in the Croatian Parliament since its first free election in 1990. In the 1990 election, women composed 4.6% of the Parliament despite accounting for 51.5% of the country's population as per the World Bank's estimates.² During the Homeland War, the percentage of women in Parliament climbed slightly to 5.8% and then, in the post-war years, steadily until reaching 21.9% in 2000.³ What accounts for this significant increase in representation? I argue that it was primarily due to women taking advantage of the social expanse created by their pre-war protests and eventual service in the Homeland War. At first, Croatian women blurred the divided, gendered line between motherhood and the political sphere through their anti-war protests. Later, when their anti-war protests had proven to be futile and the war began, women shifted their focus to supporting the Croatian military in both traditional manners, by working in support roles like nursing, and nontraditionally, by serving openly as soldiers. In these roles, women contributed significantly to the war effort, personally, economically, and politically. Finally, once Croatia succeeded in gaining international recognition and its independence, women did not simply return to their quiet lives in the domestic world. Instead, they leveraged their service, demanding increased representation in the country *they* fought to create.

² World Bank, *Population, Female (% of Total Population) – Croatia*, 2019, Accessed 29 May 2022. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?end=2020&locations=HR&start=1989&view=chart>.

³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%) - Croatia*, Accessed 28 May 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=HR>.

Still, this process is not as straightforward as one may assume, especially for women who resided in the rural, often overwhelmingly traditional countryside. While both groups of women technically had the same rights—the Yugoslav Constitution of 1946 made no distinction between geographic location when it declared that “women have equal rights with men in all fields of state, economic and social-political life”—this didn’t pan out in reality.⁴ Instead, as scholars like Mirjana Morokvasic have pointed out, the interpersonal relationships of men and women did not change.⁵

Dr. Lynette Šikić-Mićanović focuses on this trend, specifically considering the perspectives of rural women. She argues that these women were effectively denied the same political and social opportunities as men since they had access to little decision-making capital, often because of the traditional gender beliefs that pervaded these communities.⁶ Šikić-Mićanović illustrates this claim by pointing out that while “‘going to church’ is one of the few public/social activities that exist and are suitable for women in these villages,” their role within the church mirrors that of their domestic role.⁷ The disparity of agency between rural and urban Croatian women is also demonstrated through the work of other researchers, like Dr. Ana Miškovska Kajevska, who focuses on urban women. Her research on feminist Croatian NGOs during the 1990s necessarily focuses on urban centers like Zagreb; the countryside did not have anywhere near the same level, if any, of feminist organization.⁸

The apparent inequality between rural and urban women suggests the need for two distinct baselines. The aforementioned measure of political representation certainly works for urban women, who had access to the political world for decades (that would only increase following the Homeland War). Rural women, however, tended to be too far removed to experience the benefits of political representation. Therefore, the starting point of rural women was different; their contributions during the war revolved around shattering restrictive gender norms while, afterwards, their urban sisters leveraged service for increased for governmental representation.

⁴ Yugoslavia, *Constitution of the Federal Peoples Republic of Yugoslavia* (Embassy of the Federal Peoples Republic of Yugoslavia, 1946), 12, https://heinonline-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/HOL/Page?collection=cow&handle=hein.cow/cyugo0001&id=12&men_tab=srchresults#. See also Maja Mikula, “Embrace or Resist: Women and Collective Identification in Croatia and Former Yugoslavia since WWII,” in *Women, Activism and Social Change*, ed. Maja Mikula (Routledge, 2009), 85.

⁵ Mirjana Morokvasic, “Institutionalised Equality and Women’s Conditions in Yugoslavia,” *Equal Opportunities International* 2, no. 4 (January 1, 1983): 9–17, <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb010386>.

⁶ Lynette Šikić-Mićanović, “Women’s Contribution to Rural Development in Croatia: Roles, Participation and Obstacles,” *Eastern European Countryside* 15, no. 2009 (2010): 75, <https://doi.org/doi:10.2478/v10130-009-0005-5>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 82–3.

⁸ Ana Miskovska Kajevska, *Feminist Activism at War*, Gender and Comparative Politics 1 (New York and London: Routledge, 2017). See also Šikić-Mićanović, 83.

With baselines having been established, attention shifts to the contextual background of the independence movement. Dr. Ante Cuvalo, a historian of contemporary Croatia, authored a monograph appropriately titled *The Croatian National Movement* that explores the movement's origins during the 1960s, providing the necessary context for this paper. While he establishes the ethnic origin of Croats and other background information, the majority of the work necessarily focuses on the abuses Croatia faced while it was a part of Yugoslavia.⁹ The main conflict revolved around Yugoslavia's attempts at creating a coherent nation composed of a single identity, that of a Yugoslav as opposed to a Croat, Serb, etc. President Josip Broz Tito made this abundantly clear when he declared "if we want to create a socialist culture, we must also have a common program. It must be Yugoslav. Not every republic and every nationality."¹⁰ This mission went on for decades until Tito's death in 1980 and to a lesser extent in the years leading up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Without the Soviet Union backing Yugoslavia any longer, and due to turmoil within the Yugoslav federation itself, Croats held their first free, multi-party elections for the reestablished Croatian Parliament in 1990. Some of the Parliament's first acts included revising the Croatian Constitution, amending Articles 11 and 12 to remove socialist symbols from the flag and reinstate Croatian as the official language.¹¹ Later, in May of 1991, Croatia held a referendum for independence in which 83.5% of the country voted, and of that, 93.2% of Croats voted for independence from Yugoslavia.¹² On 25 June 1991, Croatia declared independence but, after being advised to do so by other members of the European community, held it off for a three-month moratorium, as a part of the Brioni Agreement, an attempt at postponing the cession of Croatia and Slovenia. Despite this, fighting only intensified and on 8 October Croatia broke away from Yugoslavia completely, thus formally beginning the Homeland War.

Although Cuvalo provides an excellent political analysis of the evolving conflict, his work only contained a few sparse details regarding the role of women in the entire process. While women were certainly a political minority (only composing 5.8% of the Parliament, as previously mentioned), their perspective went largely unheard; that is until one woman went back, years after the Homeland War, to document their points of view. This woman —Marija Sliskovic— originally worked as a designer after graduating from the University of Zagreb several years prior to the outbreak of the war. During the conflict, she served alongside hundreds of other women who supported the effort by sewing clothing,

⁹ Ante Cuvalo, *The Croatian National Movement* (New York: East European Monographs, 1990), 5.

¹⁰ Cited in Griffith, W.E. *Communism in Europe: Continuity, Change, and the Sino-Soviet Dispute*. Elsevier Science, 2013. (Originally *Politika*, February 14, 1963).

¹¹ Croatia, *Croatia's Constitution of 1991 with Amendments through 2013* (The Constituent Project, August 26, 2021), 7, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Croatia_2013.pdf?lang=en.

¹² Croatian Parliament, *19 May - Croatian Independence Referendum*, n.d. Accessed 26 April 2024; <https://www.sabor.hr/en/about-parliament/history/important-dates/19-may-croatian-independence-referendum>

providing supplies, and caring for the displaced or wounded. Following the conflict though, in 2005 she began contacting women to document their version of events. These interviews were eventually published in an eight-volume series, *Women in the Homeland War*. In its introduction, Sliskovic comments that:

The following truthful testimonies of women about their experience, about their endeavors to stop the war, about the false endangerment of the Serb minority, about the unarmed defenders, about the expulsion from their homes are written down for the coming generations. Each and every one of them wrote down without hate, her own memories, emotions, pains, and truths about the horrifying war in Croatia at the end of the twentieth century, about the time when all of us defended our own homes and the Homeland.¹³

Thankfully, Sliskovic's work provides this paper with the opportunity to explore the direct perspectives of Croatian women as opposed to relying on other individuals to retell their stories accurately. Moreover, her interviews act as the foundation for future research on this topic, as well as being a mainstay of ever-expanding field of women's history in Croatia.¹⁴

Her Pre-War Protests

What were women doing in the lead up to Croatia declaring its independence from Yugoslavia? First and foremost, they were concerned about the safety of their sons. In former-Yugoslavia, men were conscripted for twelve months of mandatory military service. With the seemingly inevitable outbreak of war, this proved to be especially concerning for the mothers of young men who had just begun their service and could have been forced to fight against their own families if Croatia were to secede. In response to these concerns, women came together to protest against the mandatory conscription and to argue for the release of their sons. Josipa Milas Matutinović, the mother of two sons in the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), drafted a petition that read:

As the fateful day of 19 January approaches, we, the mothers of conscripts in units of the Yugoslav People's Army, appeal to you to spare the innocent lives of our sons! In the name of humanity, do not allow our sons' blood to be shed! In the name of peace, do not force our sons to fire on their brothers, their sisters, their parents, their friends! In the name of freedom, do not try to

¹³ Marija Sliskovic, ed., *Women in the Homeland War*, vol. 8 (Zagreb: Zene U Domovinskom Ratu, 2010), 10.

¹⁴ This research note owes a huge debt of gratitude to Marija Sliskovic. She recognized the importance of these women's stories and ensured they were accurately captured and preserved. Moreover, she continues to advocate for the rights of women in Croatia by serving as the president of the Women in the Homeland War association.

solve political problems over the dead bodies of our sons! Gather your strength for dialogue and reason! Listen to your conscience and think of our innocent young sons and yours!¹⁵

In the following days, this petition would be signed by over 67,000 individuals across Zagreb and hand delivered to a member of the Yugoslav Presidency, Mr. Stejepan Mesić.¹⁶ Matutinović's petition speaks volumes to the influence of the women's protest, both in terms of their reputation amongst Croats and ability to reach a member of the Yugoslav Presidency.¹⁷ While these petitions had mixed results, occasionally resulting in the release of some individuals from military conscription—like one of Matutinović's sons—they by no means proved to be effective across the board.

In light of that, Matutinović and other women began a more proactive campaign to liberate their sons from the JNA's barracks. She describes the expansive network mothers formed to facilitate these abductions, stating that "we were diligently snatching young men, one by one, from the barracks" and even bragged that "at some points we even snatched whole units from the jaws of that army!"¹⁸ While Matutinović's actions were certainly impressive, some scholars would argue that she was simply acting out of dedication to family, not to deliberately expand her agency. When considered on a personal level these arguments may have merit, but Matutinović's network was anything but limited to her own family. Instead, much like the petitions, the network demonstrated the agency and political prowess of women working together towards a single goal; it created a channel in which they could act politically while simultaneously creating a coherent identity for Croatian women. Matutinović herself describes the moment her understanding of this occurred: she wrote that "we thought if we snatched all the young men from the army, the army would totally implode and thus we could stop the violence."¹⁹ Clearly, the actions of Matutinović and other women were not simply those of individuals attempting to protect their own families. Instead, the protests leading up to the outbreak of the war offered women a unique opportunity, one in which they kept a foot in the domestic world through their devotion to family but also placed the other firmly in the political as they sought to stop the war. This is only reinforced when one considers the international reach of Matutinović's and other women's protests.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷ The Yugoslav Presidency was the ultimate governing body of the federation. It was composed of nine members, each elected by their country's parliament, Mr. Mesić being Croatia's representative and the Vice Presidency of the Presidency at the time.

¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ While Matutinović's contributions have been preserved by Marija Sliskovic, Matutinović has also been the topic of several other news articles. Her friend, V. Krčmar, wrote of her legacy following Matutinović's recent passing on 3 December 2021. See V. Krčmar, "In Memoriam – Višnja Milas Matutinović," *Portal of the Croatian Cultural Council*, December 8, 2021. Accessed 28 May 2022, <https://www.hkv.hr/izdvojeno/vai-prilozi/ostalo/prilozi-graana/38769-v-kremar-in-memoriam-visnja->

Following the inaction of the Yugoslav government after receiving petitions that called for the liberation of conscripts, activist Croatian women decided to march on Belgrade. This mission was spearheaded by Marija Horvat, another mother who had sons in the JNA. Her entry in Sliskovic's book is riddled with instances of fear and anxiety due to not knowing whether her son would be deployed, especially after a poignant exchange with her husband. She recalls this conversation, in which, after their morning coffee, her husband went out but soon returned and declared that he had joined the Croatian Homeland Guards. In horror and anger she exclaimed, "Which Guards?! What? Are you going to shoot at your sons, are they going to shoot at you?!"²¹ While one can only imagine how this conversation ended for her husband, their exchange illustrates the stark reality of what war would entail. This realization certainly drove Horvat, and other mothers, to renew their efforts in liberating conscripts. As the petitions did not seem to work, Horvat organized a rally where she "took the microphone and said, 'we can write to them, we can reason with them as much as you want, but we must go to Belgrade!'"²²

Following this declaration, the women organized twenty-six buses to take them nearly two hundred and fifty miles to Belgrade, and although they faced harassment from JNA units at the border, they eventually made their way to the Topčider Barracks Grounds. There, they began negotiations with military officials. Horvat recalled that "our intentions were not to leave before they let our children free. We spent two days and two nights in that hall...twenty-five buses of women in one hall...Women were exhausted, many fainted. We were not prepared for this; we did not any food or drink."²³ Unfortunately though, the women eventually had to give in and take empty assurances of their sons' safety back with them to Zagreb.

As these peaceful negotiations failed again, more women flocked to join Matutinović's network. Horvat herself recalled helping "snatch young men from the barracks" and facilitating their transportation through a local schoolteacher.²⁴ Despite these failures, the actions of Horvat and her fellow women exemplify the expansion of female agency from the traditionally domestic sphere into the public. Interestingly, Horvat mentioned that prior to leaving Zagreb on the buses to Belgrade, fathers had tried to join but she refused, stating "we said no to them; this had to be done by mothers alone."²⁵ While Horvat's decision was certainly symbolic, she demonstrated that these women did not feel a need for the assistance of their husbands. This is particularly substantial when one considers that the women faced down military officers of the country with whom they would soon be at war.

milas-matutinovic-29-2-19.html.

²¹ Ibid., 50.

²² Ibid., 51.

²³ Ibid., 54.

²⁴ Ibid., 57.

²⁵ Ibid., 52.

Croatian women continued to advocate for peace, hoping to avoid the outbreak of war and as the shortcomings of domestic activism became obvious, they escalated their advocacy from a national to an international forum. Vera Jurčević, a woman living in Petrinja, recalls waiting in front of a department store for the women returning from Belgrade. After she learned about all of the details regarding the agonizing trip, specifically the “inhuman behavior of the Yugoslav officers towards them,” Jurčević joined the next mission to Europe.²⁶ She recalls that “we went on that mission firmly believing that the world would recognize our cry for peace and that they would stop the war raging in Croatia.”²⁷ This mission would take Jurčević and nine other women in front of the European Parliament in Brussels, where they hoped to have the opportunity to describe the horrors they, and countless other women, were facing in Croatia. There, she remembered what it felt like having been chosen to speak for the women of Croatia and reiterated the instructions given to her that day: “we were told not to be afraid of anything and that we only had to answer questions truthfully.”²⁸ Finally, she testified about how JNA tanks and soldiers had razed Petrinja and questioned the Parliament’s members, asking “how long would that beautiful Europe wait to understand that Croatia was under attack, that there was a war and that people were being killed. Why did they postpone the recognition of Croatia?”²⁹ Despite her moving testimony, no aid would come. She later returned to Zagreb and was welcomed by President Franjo Tuđman, the Minister of Defense Gojko Šušak, and the Mayor of Zagreb Boris Bužančić but only wanted to return to Petrinja. Overall, Jurčević’s mission and testimony further demonstrate that women were becoming politically active to support Croatia, and that it was being encouraged by other men and women.

Her Wartime Service

Despite her involvement in pre-war protests, Jurčević’s story fades away from politics, instead focusing on her role as a non-combatant, in this case a nurse. Her experience, along with those of the vast majority of Croatian women, follows a common path, one in which women shifted their attention from peacemaking to supporting the war effort. At the same time, their devotion to Croatia inspired them to continue developing and strengthening their agency. Jurčević recalled this shift in priorities, writing that “nothing was the same anymore, we lived and we did what was the priority at a certain moment; no one asked about the schedules since between working hours and alerts there was only the first line of defense which was only several hundred meters away.”³⁰ While their agency was certainly less pronounced than it was during the protests, women still acted

²⁶ Ibid., 139.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 140.

²⁹ Ibid., 141-42.

³⁰ Ibid., 142-43.

based on *their* beliefs and values, not that of their husbands, sons, or other men. Jurčević demonstrates this fact herself:

On September 13, 1991 I came off duty and stood on the road not knowing where to go. I wanted to go home, I did not want to go anywhere else and I had no transport. I started to go on foot towards Petrinja. Columns of people were leaving the town and I was walking in the opposite direction. I managed to reach my house that day, I made coffee and sat on the terrace and watched the road. I do not know what I was waiting for, what I was doing there, everything was desolate. Suddenly, out of nowhere, my neighbor Mića appeared and asked me what I was doing there, why I did not leave, could I not see what was going on! I calmly told him that I had no intention of going anywhere because this was *my* house [emphasis added].³¹

Regardless of the looming threat of Yugoslav artillery or tanks destroying her home, Jurčević refused to leave. While some may claim that her stubbornness was futile, Jurčević asserted that “I would have never left my house since I could neither understand nor accept that anyone had the right to drive us away from our land.”³² Again, *she* was the one who decided this, not her husband or anyone else. While a difference in pronouns may not seem significant, it clearly demonstrates the growing agency of Croatian women.

Although the vast majority of Croatian women supported the war effort in traditional manners, some women chose to take up arms to defend their villages and the Homeland. While their stories are far less common than women serving in non-combatant roles, like Vera Jurčević, their heroics speak volumes to the courage and devotion Croatian women exhibited. Interestingly, their stories also provide a direct view into the gendered bias Croatian women had encountered for decades: exclusion from masculine spaces, e.g. opposition to their direct participation in combat. No Croatian is more familiar with this than Danka Dražina from Škabrnja, a young woman who sought to join one of the first units of the Croatian Guard. She recalled the thoughts going through her head during the summer of 1991:

Twenty boys from Škabrnja, known as the first Croatian policemen, were already getting prepared for the defense of the Homeland in various locations. Most of my friends without hesitation took that burden upon their shoulders. In those moments I wanted to be a man. At that time I was only making them coffee and keeping them company so as to encourage them. And then one day something broke inside me. ‘I want to take part in the defense.’³³

³¹ Ibid., 143.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 246.

While Dražina sought to defend her village, she was met with a simple answer, “you are crazy, stick to your classes, *you are a woman* (emphasis added).”³⁴ Fortunately, Dražina did the complete opposite of that, instead replacing her Levi jeans and books for “a secondhand camouflage uniform...and for a gun.”³⁵ Dražina again contemplated the significance of this moment, writing that:

At short notice I was holding a lethal weapon in my hands instead of books. I did not like the smell of cold steel and it took some time to realize that the lethal weapon I held in my hands had been transformed into means to help me feel safe. I hoped I would never have to use it, but I was wrong... I was a Croatian soldier.³⁶

After completing a basic training course, Dražina was deployed as a part of a medical unit in Škabrnja. There she served alongside doctors on the frontline, often moving between homes during the artillery shelling of the village to provide first-aid to the wounded. Inevitably though, the village fell after JNA tanks and infantry followed the barrage. Dražina recalled the retreat remembering that “on that day the sky above Škabrnja was in flames and the rivers of blood were soaking the earth. [The JNA] drove hundreds of villagers from Škabrnja toward Benkovac, the crowd in front of the store in Biljane laughed and humiliated [the villagers].”³⁷ As the war progressed, Dražina’s experience only became more harrowing, having to endure frostbite during the winter, constantly bury fellow defenders and civilians, and so much more. While Dražina survived the war, she never received recognition, and therefore the privileges, associated with being a Croatian defender. When she went to the Office of Defense in Zadar, she was met with a simple but infuriating conclusion: “Madam, you are not in the computer.”³⁸ Dražina recalls what went through her mind at that moment, thinking “did one become a Croatian defender by being on the front line or by legal procedure?”³⁹

While Dražina’s service may have not been recognized, it exemplified the opportunity provided by the war for women: the chance to disregard traditional biases that restricted women to the domestic world. In larger scheme of things, the Croats needed anyone who was willing to fight, especially as they were facing the better armed, better trained, and numerically superior troops of the JNA. Consequently, women were accepted into the Croatian Guards, taking on roles as medics and infantry, as demonstrated by Dražina’s service; women soldiers also appeared in war photos (see Figure 1).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 249.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 253.

³⁸ Ibid., 260.

³⁹ Ibid.



Figure 1: Croatian female soldiers at the Gospic front. Photograph by Robert Belosevic, September 1991. Image courtesy of the Image of War Photography Museum.

A lesser-known aspect of women's service during the Homeland War was the authorship of patriotic literature. This literature, primarily in the form of poems and prayers, offers the opportunity to view women from two lenses. First, on a personal level, their work often reflects heartfelt recollections of reality during the war, but, secondly, on a societal level, women wrote about their contributions to Croatia. While this volume of Sliskovic's work features numerous poems by women, one stands out in particular as it captures the personal sacrifices of women while acknowledging their service to the Croatian state.⁴⁰ The author, Milena Burčul Pašara, eloquently wrote:

To you woman, living in all women,
 To you, mother,
 Woman,
 Warrior,
 who instead of beds
 stretches the rags
 on the floors of deserted houses.
 Instead of light
 you ignite candle.

⁴⁰ For other poems see Sliskovic, Vol. 8: 37, 129, 146, 152-53, 172, 242, 269, 310-12.

To you, guiding star of our feelings,
the crib of our tenderness,
eternity.
To you,
who with a rifle in your hand
defend the hearth,
connect the splinters of the heart into entity.
To you,
who instead of a child
rock the Homeland in your lap.⁴¹

Pašara captures the essence of Croatian women's service as mothers, activists, and finally warriors: mothers, like Josipa Milas Matutinović and Marija Horvat, sought to save their sons from the terrible outcomes of war and activists marched on Belgrade and the European Parliament, demonstrating their agency as Croatian women to the rest of the world. Heroically, warriors, like Danka Dražina, took up arms in defense of their Homeland, often only receiving recognition in poems afterwards. What did their service earn them though? And how did the war provide women the necessary leverage to make gender equality a reality in the new Croatian republic?

Her Post-War Status

Following the Homeland War, women continued to expand their agency by refocusing their attention towards gaining political power and increasing representation within the new Croatian republic. This movement is evidenced by the post-war political environment in which many female NGOs, often ones that had originally been established to support victims of the war, became strongholds of feminist action that broadly advocated for women's rights.⁴² Still though, their movement was met with opposition; fundamentalists within the Croatian government sought to re-impose traditional restrictions on Croatian women who had stepped beyond the domestic sphere. Although Croatian women had sacrificed everything for their country during the war alongside Croatian men, Croatian culture remained an overwhelmingly conservative and religious society that tended to view women as mothers—not political agents. While their war-time service blurred the boundaries between their traditional roles in the domestic and actions in the political sphere, post-war Croatia was characterized by a gendered conflict when women would not simply return to their pre-war roles as mothers or domestic workers. What followed was a back-and-forth struggle between feminist groups and conservative actors, one in which the status of Croatian women was and remains ever-changing, mostly for good but also, at times, for the worse.

⁴¹ Ibid., 350.

⁴² For a longer explanation of these NGOs and summaries of their actions, see Kajevska, 27–44.

Out of the many women's NGOs that were active during this period, I will necessarily focus on the work of *Budi aktivna. Budi emancipiran*. (Be Active. Be Emancipated; BaBe).⁴³ BaBe was established in April of 1994; its founding members had already been involved with Women's Lobby Zagreb, another feminist NGO that had been active since 1992.⁴⁴ In an interview from 2020, Sanja Sarnavka, who acted as BaBe's president for seventeen years, discussed the organization's impetus, pointing out that "with war... came re-patriarchization" which BaBe hoped to counteract.⁴⁵ To do so, BaBe first considered the status of women in Croatia, comparing their current situation with the goals outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an international treaty of the United Nations to which Croatia became a signatory in 1992.⁴⁶ In one of its initial reports, BaBe focused on the disparities between what Croatia had agreed to by becoming a signatory of CEDAW and the reality that Croatian women faced; the authors wrote:

Unfortunately the Government of the Republic of Croatia does not display commitment to the ideals behind the progressive legal documents and treaties that it has sworn to obey. These documents often represent little more than decorative public relations pieces to convince the international community that Croatia is a liberal democracy. In the gap between law, principles and practice, women confront problems in attaining full recognition and enjoyment of all rights and freedoms to which they are entitled.⁴⁷

The authors argue that the Croatian government has merely put up a façade, one that disguises the reality of women in Croatia so that the country can gain international recognition and support for its independence. They go on to directly call out the "conservative policies of the ruling party and its leaders, certain members of parliament, media, church leaders and some professional groups," accusing them of threatening "women's full participation in the various spheres of cultural, political and economic life."⁴⁸ Later, the authors further demonstrate this disparity by discussing a variety of

⁴³ BaBe was, and still is, one of the most active women's NGOs in Croatia and, consequently, it has left behind one of the most accessible paper trails for international researchers. The records of other women's NGOs are housed in the Croatian National Archives in Zagreb but are unfortunately only available physically, not digitally.

⁴⁴ Kajevska, 39–42.

⁴⁵ Marcela del Portillo Cure, *A Past Gone Missing: Dealing with Contentious and Politicised Pasts Based on the Experience of Human Rights NGOs in Croatia*, Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Zagreb, 2019, 69, Accessed 26 April 2024, <https://repository.gchumanrights.org/items/7c5fcb38-1987-4c59-945d-9d4db3793cd4/full>.

⁴⁶ CEDAW had originally been adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 but Croatia had signed into the treaty on 9 September 1992 as a part of its efforts to gain international recognition during the Homeland War. For other treaties see https://tbinetinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=43&Lang=EN.

⁴⁷ BaBe, Women's Human Rights Group, *The Status of Women in Croatia*, Accessed June 6, 2022, <http://balkansnet.org/women/babe.html#babe>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

examples in which women face discrimination, mainly in healthcare, housing, domestic violence, etc., while also addressing the mission of a lesser-known department within the government: the Ministry for Renewal's Department of Demographic Renewal.⁴⁹

This department, headed by a Catholic priest named Anto Baković, was tasked with ensuring the ethnic homogeneity of Croatia and sought to do so by enshrining "MOTHERHOOD as the highest vocation and profession for women."⁵⁰ In other words, the department, and specifically Baković, hoped to preserve the Croatian identity by ensuring that women consistently birthed and raised enough Croatian citizens. Baković was eventually removed from his post, after protests from BaBe and other women's groups; he also drew rebuke from the Catholic Church, which stated that "he [went] too far" and that "the church can't let itself or its beliefs be used by people with racist or chauvinistic ideas."⁵¹ Still, Baković persisted and founded his own organization that would promote his natalist policies, the Croatian Population Movement (CPM).

Although Baković had been ousted from the government, he still received support from leading officials like the Croatian President, Franjo Tudjman, who diverted funding to the CPM and stated that its work would divert the "extinction of the Croatian nation."⁵² Later, in 1995, this support became even more pronounced as the Croatian Parliament adopted Baković's National Program for Demographic Renewal; this program sought to increase birthrates by, among other measures, offering women a salary and pension if they birthed four or more children.⁵³ While this sort of assistance could have been perceived as supporting women and mothers, BaBe and other women's NGOs argued otherwise in the courts and in public opinion. The late Vesna Kesic, one of the original founders of BaBe, described the program in plain terms: "basically," she wrote, "these people see women as the vehicles for their own ethnically homogenous Croatia."⁵⁴ Moreover, BaBe contended

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ RNS Blog Editor, "Aftermath of War: Family Planning Becomes Politically Charged Issue in Post-War Croatia," *Religion News Service* (blog), June 14, 1996, Accessed 7 June 2022, <https://religionnews.com/1996/06/14/top-story-aftermath-of-war-family-planning-becomes-politically-charged-issu/>.

⁵² Sabrina P. Ramet, *Central and Southeast European Politics Since 1989* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 260, Accessed 7 June 2022, <https://jerome.stjohns.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=313331&site=ehost-live>. Also see RNS Blog Editor, "Aftermath of War: Family Planning Becomes Politically Charged Issue in Post-War Croatia."

⁵³ S. P. Ramet and D. Matic, *Democratic Transition in Croatia: Value Transformation, Education, and Media* (Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 287, Accessed 7 June 2022, https://books.google.com/books?id=IicX_1DyNMUC.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Religious News Service by their Blog Editor, "Aftermath of War: Family Planning Becomes Politically Charged Issue in Post-War Croatia." The RNS cites the 7 February 1996 edition of the Women East-West Newsletter, a publication from Association for Women in Slavic Studies. Vesna Kesic also recently passed away in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Her colleague, Dr. Elzbieta Matynia of the New School for Social Research, wrote a touching memorial that described her life-

that the Baković's plan was actually a form of "long-term" discrimination since the program would "encourage women to stay away from public life and work."⁵⁵

Although BaBe's legal challenge would eventually succeed, the government's solution was to allow men to claim the status as well, although records indicate that few if any were able to claim the salary and pension.⁵⁶ Looking back, we can see that the Croatian government achieved its goal of promoting an ethnically homogenous Croatia while ensuring that women maintained their role as mothers and place within their homes. Despite that, BaBe's report illustrates the tenacity shown by Croatian women when confronting troubling realities; just as they fought for their country, they would have to fight against its attempts to re-establish their confinement in the domestic sphere.

The Croatian government's traditional stance regarding oppressive roles of women was also recognized by the international community, specifically the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.⁵⁷ In the country's initial CEDAW report, from 1995, Croatian representatives acknowledged the service of women; when discussing the impacts of the Homeland War they wrote that "women had also taken an active part in the war imposed on Croatia, both as combatants and as providers of ancillary services."⁵⁸ Despite that acknowledgment though, the government insisted it was not their fault that women were not participating in public life. Instead, they argued, women simply "did not always make full use of the rights guaranteed by law, particularly with regard to political involvement."⁵⁹ This victim-blaming did not sit well with the Committee, who later listed the government's ignorance of "indirect and structural discrimination and its impact on women" as an area of "principal concern."⁶⁰ Later, the Committee directly addressed the Croatia's National Program for Demographic Renewal:

The Committee is particularly concerned about the consistent emphasis placed on women's roles as mothers and caregivers in Croatian legislation pertaining to a variety of areas. While legislative provisions protecting maternity are important, the Committee is concerned that prioritizing that

long dedication to women's rights in Croatia. See Elzbieta Matynia, "Vesna Kesic: In Memoriam," *Public Seminar* (blog), December 31, 2020, Accessed 7 June 2022, <https://publicseminar.org/essays/vesna-kesic/>.

⁵⁵ Ramet and Matic, 287.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ This committee was the monitoring/enforcement aspect of the CEDAW convention.

⁵⁸ Garcia-Prince, "Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: Fourteenth Session Summary Record of the 279th Meeting" (New York: United Nations, January 31, 1995), 3, Accessed 26 April 2024, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n95/802/38/pdf/n9580238.pdf?token=kupm4MulxfyjTKj83h&fe=true>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women" (United Nations, 1998), Accessed 8 June 2022, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports/18report.pdf>.

aspect of women's lives reinforces traditional and stereotypical role expectations, which tend to limit women's full participation in society.⁶¹

After addressing its concerns, the Committee goes on to recommend numerous ways for Croatia to expand on women's rights, including gender quotas to ensure adequate representation, an education campaign that would illustrate an "equitable distribution" of family roles, and to cooperate with the "highly competent and active women's nongovernmental organizations in Croatia."⁶²

BaBe and other feminist NGOs had already been employing a variety of tactics to counter the re-assertion of traditional gender roles both on a national level, through governmental monitoring and lobbying, and on the grassroots level, by organizing and hosting workshops to inform individual women about their rights. Documents from the post-war years (mainly 1996 and 1997), attest to these strategies. For instance, a report from Promoting Women in Development, a program funded by the Office of Women in Development at the United States Agency for International Development, details the successes of BaBe's 1996 Women's Human Rights Network for Education and Action (WHRNEA). The network itself acted as "an education and advocacy project [that aimed] to foster communication and collaboration among women activists and professionals" in the hopes of developing local, national, and international networks that promoted women's rights.⁶³ Within Croatia, this took the form of organizing workshops that addressed topics related to the country's legal and legislative systems so that individual women could be aware of what their rights were and how to exercise them effectively. When discussing the results of BaBe's initiative, the report mentions that since women's political participation emerged as a key issue at each of the basic workshops, BaBe expanded from its original intent and began providing advanced training on networking, coalition building, and women in politics.⁶⁴

Soon after the WHRNEA project, BaBe shifted its attention to the 1997 elections. With the network it had created, BaBe planned to influence the elections to increase female representation in Parliament and in various localities. Internal documents reveal the extent of the network, now referred to as the Women's Ad Hoc Coalition: 18 women's groups from all around Croatia.⁶⁵ These groups included Ariadna, Rijeka (Autonomous Women's House, Zagreb); BaBe (Women's Human Rights Group, Zagreb); Center for

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 13.

⁶³ Promoting Women in Development, *Human Rights, Advocacy, and the Empowerment of Women: An Education and Action Project in the Yugoslav Successor States* (International Center for Research on Women and The Centre for Development and Population Activities, 1999), Accessed 6 June 2022, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnach368.pdf.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁵ B.a.B.e., *The Women's Ad Hoc Coalition '97 to Influence and Monitor the Elections in Croatia* (Zagreb, April 1, 1997), Accessed 6 June 2022, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/62/030.html>.

Women War Victims (Zagreb); Center for Women Studies (Zagreb); Dalmatian Committee for the Affirmation of Women (Split); Electra (Zagreb); Rosa House (Zagreb); SOS Telephone for Women Victims of Violence (Zagreb); Women of Anti-War Campaign Croatia (Zagreb); Women's Group of the Center for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights (Osijek); Women's Group (Losinj); Women's Group (Pakrac); Women's Group (Porec); Women's Group (Split); Women's Information and Documentation Center (Zagreb); Women's Peace Workshop (Suncokret, Rijeka); Workshop Open Door (Split). These groups gathered in Zagreb and decided on a common set of objectives that the Coalition would pursue:

- To promote women and women's agendas at the election.
- To increase the number of women in parliament and public offices.
- To monitor and influence elections from women's perspective.
- To enhance women's social and political status.
- To increase the awareness of women's human rights among policy makers, human rights activists and professionals such as lawyers, social workers, journalists and teachers.
- Networking and cooperation among women's groups in Croatia.⁶⁶

In addition to their platform, the Coalition created advocacy materials which featured the figure 51%—the female percentage of the population—and the phrase “I exchange one corner of the house for a seat in the Parliament,” an ode to the common Croatian proverb that women keep three corners of the house (read: a woman's place and power is in the home).⁶⁷ The Coalition even went as far as developing a commercial to get the word out; it aired several times on national television.⁶⁸ Finally, they worked with young anarchists in Zagreb to ‘beautify’ the city with their leaflets, posters, and other printed material.⁶⁹ How effective were these women? What, if any, gains did they make with regards to their platform? As demonstrated in the following table, women have won substantial gains but have not achieved a fully equal presence in Croatia’s Parliament.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ B.a.B.e., *B.a.B.e. up-Date (January-April, 1997)*, 1997, Accessed 8 June 2022, <http://balkansnet.org/women/babe02.html>. See *Promoting Women in Development, Human Rights, Advocacy, and the Empowerment of Women*, 3, for a picture of B.a.B.e. members standing with their 51% posters in Zagreb.

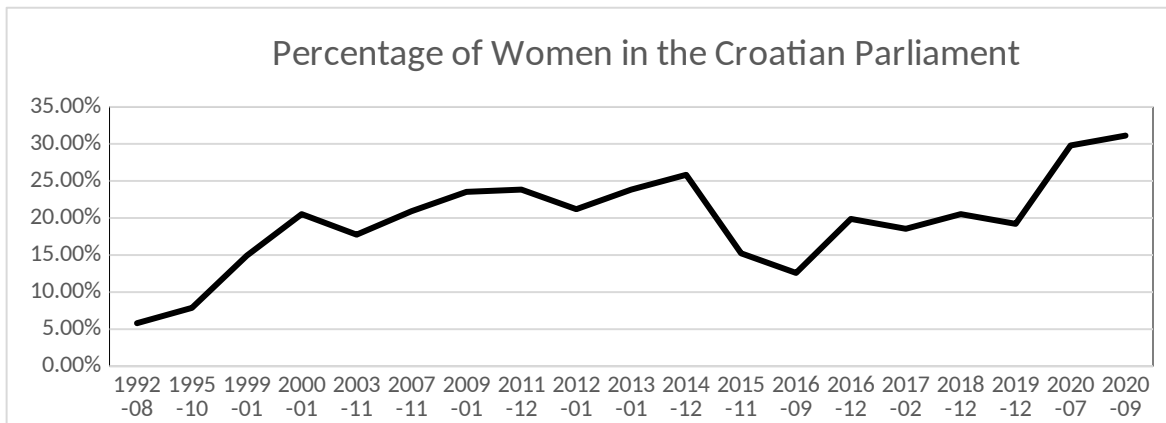


Figure 2: Parline Database on National Parliaments. Historical Data for Percentage of Women. Interparliamentary Union, 2021. https://data.ipu.org/noe/42/data-onwomen?chamber_id=13374

First, as contemporary scholars like Dr. Jill Irvine, Professor Emerita in the department of International and Area Studies at the University of Oklahoma, and author of numerous articles on the democratic transformations of formerly communist countries in Eastern Europe, have argued, women played an integral role in the post-war elections. While Irvine's work is mostly concerned with the role of the United States as a supporter of these women's groups, and in a larger sense as a promoter of democracy, she gave specific attention to the methods utilized by women in these newly-democratic countries and the results they reaped. Irvine argued that "through creating capacity, finding voice, and forging alliances, they crafted an insider/inclusionary strategy that translated their strong position in the opposition into direct political gains for women at the polls."⁷⁰

Figure 2 illustrates just that: beginning in 1995, Croatian women increasingly gained representation in Parliament and that trend continued steadily for nearly two decades.⁷¹ BaBe's own president, Sanja Sarnavka, spoke of this trend while reflecting on her seventeen years of service:

It was fantastic. In the very beginning it was huge, because when we came out, for instance, with women not being present in the political sphere and the Parliament, after our campaign, we had risen from 7% of women in the

⁷⁰ Jill A. Irvine, "Electoral Breakthroughs in Croatia and Serbia," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 46, no. 2 (2013): 244–45.

⁷¹ The drop in female representation after 2014 has been addressed by other scholars like Đurđa Knežević. See Đurđa Knežević, "Are Good Laws Enough? The Situation of Women in Croatia," *The Heinrich Böll Foundation*, December 2013, Accessed 8 June 2022, https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2013/12/knezevic.are_good_laws_enough.pdf. Thankfully it seems as if the trend has reversed itself and improved by reaching an all-time high of 31.79% in 2021.

Parliament before our campaigning and our public speeches to I think 28% of women.⁷²

The Coalition's successes also went beyond parliamentary representation. As reported in BaBe documents, several political parties included the Coalition's platform within their own: "ASH (Action for Social Democrats in Croatia) adopted in 1995 the entire Coalition Platform, SDP (Social Democratic Party of Croatia) has put stronger emphasis on women and women's issues in their party program, and HSS (Croatian Rural Party) has adopted four points of the Coalition's platform to their party program."⁷³ Furthermore, after women secured legislative support, the Croatian Parliament was able to institute the Commission for Equality's national policy, which is based on the Beijing Platform for Action and consultation with domestic women's NGOs.⁷⁴ In the following years, Croatia went on to elect its first female prime minister, Jadranka Kosor in 2009, and, in 2015, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović was elected as the first woman president.

Conclusion

How did Croatian women secure their place within their citizenry and how did they rise from such humble beginnings to the highest office in the country over the span of twenty years? Preliminary research shows that the Homeland War itself created a social gap that women filled. Through their pre-war protests, women cautiously stepped into the political world while advocating for the liberation of their sons who were JNA conscripts. These protests fell into a cultural grey area— one in which women were able to blur the lines between the domestic role of motherhood and acting as political agents in public. Therefore, they could participate politically without overstepping and subsequently being labeled as contrary to the traditional cultural values many Croats sought to uphold. This was particularly important for rural women like Danka Dražina, who were, initially, only able to support men through domestic roles (e.g. making coffee or keeping them company). Still, through their persistence and tenacity, these activist mothers went as far as testifying before the European Parliament as the envoys of Croatia. Despite their protests never quite succeeding, often due to the intricacies of international relations or simply a lack of tangible power, they still provided women with an acceptable outlet to voice their opinions and the necessary experience for their post-war success. Even when protests failed and war officially broke out, Croatian women still decided to defend *their* homeland because of their own personal sense of responsibility to it. As

⁷² del Portillo Cure, 69–70.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, 10. The Beijing Platform for Action refers to the product of the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The Platform, also referred to as the Beijing Plan or Declaration, has acted as the international vision of women's rights. See <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about> for more information.

such, the war offered the opportunity to step beyond traditional gender roles, so thoroughly demonstrated by Vera Jurčević's service. Although they often lacked recognition, women like Marija Sliskovic still swear they would act the same way. Sliskovic states that "no one has ever said that my participation or the participation of any other woman in the Homeland War was significant. Yet I am certain that all of us would do the same in the same situation again. We were led by and given the strength by—love."⁷⁵ It was out of that love for country that Croatian women used their service in the lead up to, and during, the Homeland War to secure a better future for their daughters.

About the Author

Matthew Cerjak is an incoming PhD student in History whose research focuses on the lives of women in the Atlantic World during the long eighteenth century. While he mostly writes on topics related to women and law, he undertook this project as a tribute to his Croatian mother and grandmother.

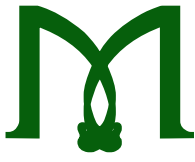
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⁷⁵ Ibid., 36.

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Review:

**Alejandra Dubcovsky, *Talking Back: Native Women and the Making of the Early South*
(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023).**

AUBREY LAUERSDORF, PhD

In 1670, a Timucua Indian named Benito insisted that the governor of Spanish Florida help him take control of the chieftainship of Santa Elena de Machava, which was currently held by an usurper. This political conflict was between two men, but women were still central to it. Benito could only make this claim because he was the son of the now-deceased María Magdalena, whose matriline had the right to lead Machava. The effort by this Timucua son to restore his mother's lineage to leadership is one of many stories in Alejandra Dubcovsky's *Talking Back: Native Women and the Making of the Early South* that show Native women "had everything to do with politics and power in colonial Florida" (16). Dubcovsky expertly navigates a Spanish colonial archive that filters Native women's voices through translation, summary, and manipulation – or excludes them altogether – to reveal women's continued importance to both their own societies and the imperial conflict transforming the South at the turn of the eighteenth century.



Telling Native women's stories is no easy feat: María Magdalena's name is only known to scholars from one line of text in a Spaniard's summary of some (now lost) letters written by her son (chapter 2). Thus, Dubcovsky must "rely on the available colonial documents but refuse to let them dictate the terms of historical engagement" (18) as she reconstructs the lives and experiences of women obscured or silenced in the Spanish archive. Among these is a murdered Chacato woman whose life was recorded only after it ended violently. In chapter 1, Dubcovsky offers possible answers to the questions that did not interest the Spanish men who investigated this unnamed woman's murder in 1695: How had her life intersected with the slave raiding that terrorized Chacato settlements in recent years? Why was she traveling alone in someone else's territory? And, most importantly, who was she to her family and community? In the process, Dubcovsky reframes this woman not as a passive victim of colonial violence, but as someone who "fled her captors and thus shifted the narrative of her enslavement" before her death (29).

Centering Native women like María Magdalena and the murdered Chacato woman also helps Dubcovsky challenge narratives about the colonial past that have been bolstered by the archival silence of women. She shows that Native voices can disrupt the stories Spaniards told about themselves, including an elite Criolla woman named Doña Juana de Florencia who petitioned the Spanish Crown in 1709 for restitution for her family's losses during Queen Anne's War (chapter 6). Doña Juana's petitions offered a "curated story of Spanish courage, wealth, and influence," (171) but Dubcovsky brings together archival fragments that allow the Apalachee people who lived alongside the Florencia family to 'talk back' to the elite woman's claims. Their complaints about the Florencias complicate Doña Juana's narrative, revealing "a pattern of abuse, neglect, and personal violence" perpetrated by both her and her male relatives against their Apalachee neighbors (178).

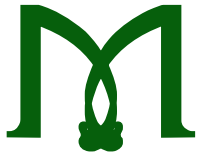
Yet Native women's voices can do more than cast a shadow on an elite Criolla woman's laudatory self-description. Dubcovsky argues that centering Native women reveals the persistence of Indigenous institutions across Florida and thus the limits of Spanish colonial control. To the dismay of Spaniards, Native people could and did insist on "a Native world that held Native women – as well as their knowledge, labor, and power – in great esteem" (4). Thus, when Benito made his matrilineal claim to the chieftainship of Machava, both Timucuas and Spaniards took him seriously, and he was ultimately successful. Dubcovsky's focus on women also helps her craft a satisfying narrative of Queen Anne's War (1702-1713), an imperial conflict that reshaped the colonial South but is rarely given serious consideration by scholars. The war exacerbated slave raiding in communities across Florida, which put Native women at the heart of the conflict – and not only as victims. When a 1702 English siege of St. Augustine forced the city's entire population

into the fort, Native, African, Spanish, and Criolla women alike suddenly found themselves in close proximity to the places where military decisions were made (chapter 4).

While Native women are the protagonists of *Talking Back*, these Spanish, Criolla, and African women also appear outside the fort: They are ever-present in the stories Dubcovsky reconstructs from archival fragments. In some cases, Dubcovsky emphasizes commonalities in these women's experiences. Native women especially "found their struggles enmeshed with those of Black women" (75) working to build family and social networks in a colonial context (chapter 3). Yet Dubcovsky is also mindful of the ways Spanish society was not just gendered but raced and classed. Spanish and Criolla women like Juana de Florencia had legal and economic privileges that were denied to Native and African women, and Dubcovsky shows how the former were uniquely able to use their access to imperial institutions to regain lost property after the war (chapter 5). Native and African women, in contrast, faced the real possibility of enslavement in the English colonies if they were captured during the conflict.

To tell the stories of Native women in the early colonial South, Dubcovsky uses not only Spanish archives but also archaeology, Indigenous myths and stories, and – perhaps most significantly – Timucua language materials. She insists that scholars "must stop ignoring sources written in non-European languages," (5) and she is currently undertaking a project to reconstruct Timucua from extant documents in collaboration with linguist Aaron Broadwell. These Timucua language sources enrich Dubcovsky's analysis, and *Talking Back* serves as a model for how historians might integrate Indigenous languages without living speakers into their scholarship. As Dubcovsky shows, language offers a window into Timucua people's views of their world and women's place within it, which Spaniards could not obscure or silence as they did in the colonial archive. Certainly, when María Magdalena regaled a young Benito with tales of their ancestors who led the town of Machava through food shortages, wars, ceremonies, and peace talks, she told him these stories not in Spanish, but in Timucua.

Aubrey Lauersdorf
Auburn University
April 2024



Review:

**Philip Dwyer and Mark Micale, eds.,
*The Darker Angels of our Nature:
Refuting the Pinker Theory of History & Violence*
(London, New York, Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022)**

MARIE-FRANÇOISE GUÉDON, PhD

Introduction

Why would a review of a book, *The Darker Angels of Our Nature*, edited by Philip Dwyer and Mark Micale (London, New York, Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), that is essentially a critique of another book by Steven Pinker on the history of violence in the world, be of interest to the readers of *Matrix*? More precisely, what could these readers gain from a short review by an anthropologist of comments by a group of professional noted historians about Steven Pinker's book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), when neither of these two books consider women *per se* as a main topic? It matters because social violence is an essential theme in women's lives and we need to know how violence is perceived, explained, and engaged in our world, especially when a popular scholar comes on the scene announcing the good news that violence is actually declining and has been declining for several centuries. Furthermore, *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* stands by itself as a solid historical study of violence that enlarges the debate about the history of violence in our world and provides much needed precision and context to the issue, thereby also



demonstrating what history, as a human science, is all about and what kind of knowledge it can achieve or produce.

Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* is a massive enterprise, revealing a wide-ranging vision and covering the history of the world in large syntheses made more concrete by a wealth of details, all presented in a witty and clear style. It appears extremely erudite and convincing. It is also controversial: the book received a highly polarized response, with immediate success among political leaders and celebrities, influencers and leaders of industry, finances and communication. It was endorsed by several scholars. It was also, however, considered with deep suspicion and strong criticism by other scholars, particularly historians, and by members of the public at large. Strongly worded opinions, including occasional insults and threats, were exchanged between critics. Having read Pinker's book myself, and while recognizing the seduction of both his style and his main thesis (who would object to the promise of a world getting better), I have to disclose the fact that I have no hesitation in ranging myself among the objectors.

Pinker's book is intended to confirm that when considering world history from prehistory to the present, social violence has followed a descending curve. While progress was slow in the beginning and due mainly to the invention of the State as a mode of governing, it sped up in later periods and more decisively with the European Enlightenment and the ensuing spread of its civilizing influence in the world. To be sure, Pinker notes that the path has not been smooth; violence has not disappeared and progress towards peace is not guaranteed to continue. Nevertheless, save for historical and political crises, humanity may now "be living in the most peaceable era off our species' existence" (Pinker, 2011: xxi).

In order to demonstrate this thesis, Pinker considers only the most obvious - and measurable - manifestation of violence, that is, 'intended violence' documented by official or legal records, which can therefore be presented as statistics and compared from one century to another. Pinker reiterates these two hypotheses (the decline of violence and the influence of the Enlightenment) in his follow-up book which focuses more directly on the British Enlightenment period : *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (2018). There, he furthers his demonstration that the Enlightenment (and more especially its views on, and practices of, reason, science, and humanism in the British world) have contributed directly to the rise of health, prosperity, safety, and peace in the rest of the world.

According to Pinker, the Enlightenment nurtured four human motivations – empathy, self-control, 'moral sense,' and reason – that is, the 'better angels of our nature' that, together, led us to control violence and to become socially and psychologically mature. Among the so-called historical forces responsible for this march toward a more peaceful world, Pinker emphasizes several processes:

- The invention and spread of the State as a mode of governing throughout different regions of the globe. This shifted violence from society as a whole, where it would roil unchecked, to a legitimized monopoly on the use of force controlled by governing bodies, along with the corresponding development of a justice system. Hobbes' *Leviathan* is an important philosophical reference.
- The rise of technological progress, especially strong in Europe. This allowed the growth of 'benign commerce,' an exchange of goods, services, and knowledge across national and international boundaries through global capitalism and securing trading networks. Potential enemies became instead valuable commercial partners.
- Cosmopolitanism and education, where values developed during the Enlightenment encouraged literacy, mobility and the spread of ideas. We now refer to this as globalization.

Almost embarrassingly Eurocentric, Pinker's synthesis nevertheless takes the whole world into consideration. The present state of our planet, mired as we are in several horrific wars and unheeded warnings of severe climate change, does not bode well for the future of Pinker's thesis. He does note, though, that the progression toward a peaceful world might derail at any time.

I am not a historian, therefore I am not directly equipped to tackle a critique of an historical study of this importance and scale. But I am an anthropologist, and an anthropologist of the old school, raised according to the idea that as the science of the human, anthropology starts as a crossroad of human and social sciences. As a scientist and a scholar, I have been trained to assess scholarly enterprises and their scientific validity, and I can at least read archaeological records, historical accounts, ethnological description and statistical charts. So I can state that, in my opinion, in none of these modalities of research does Steven Pinker's book do justice to the data, and despite its disclaimers, is indeed promoting, defending, and, in the end, being supported by a strong ideological system that influences the selection and handling of the data presented and its conclusions.

Against Pinker's sweeping vision, several voices rose to testify to some disturbing assumptions made by the author. *The Darker Angels of our Nature*, subtitled *Refuting the Pinker Theory of History & Violence*, took ten years to write and was intended specifically as a challenge against Pinker's claim that his work was historical and therefore valid in its data and argumentation. Between 2011 and 2018, a series of scholarly meetings was organized by historians in response to the growing influence of Pinker's ideas. These meetings resulted first in the March 2018 publication of a special issue of *Historical Reflections / Réflexions historiques* (Vol. 44), edited by Mark Micale, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Illinois, and Philip Dwyer, Professor of History at Newcastle

University. The text was then re-edited with new added contributions on related themes. Published in 2022, the resulting anthology, also edited by Dwyer and Micale, brought together some sixteen professional historians or historically-minded anthropologists and sociologists, and one archaeologist, whose contributions are divided between five sections: Interpretation, Periods, Places, Themes, and a Coda, allowing us to examine a wide range of the issues at stake.

Part One: Chapters 1-6, Introduction and Interpretation

The introduction to the volume (Chapter 1), 'Steven Pinker and the nature of violence in history' by Philip Dwyer and Mark S. Micale, first interrogates the concept of violence, or more precisely, the nature of violence as seen from historical perspectives. Pinker did not address this question, relying instead on the assumptions of his sources. After reviewing and summarizing the content of the critics' comments and book reviews for both *The Better Angels* and its follow-up book, *Enlightenment Now*, Dwyer and Micale introduce the contributions of their collaborators for this volume. A common thread that emerges from this general review is that Pinker did not produce a history of violence in the human world; he produced instead a description of the evolution of a certain type of violence revolving around what Pinker chose as his main indicator (or 'proxy'). That is, documented physical intended death: homicide.

Part I is entitled 'Interpretation,' and contains Chapters 2 through 6. It is dedicated to unveiling the basic assumptions underpinning Pinker's methodological choices. So doing, it also retraces the origins and evolution of the principles which rule the ideologies of the financial elite of our contemporary world and their disciplinary base.

In Chapter 2, 'The inner demons of *The Better Angels of Our Nature*,' Daniel Lord Smail explores both the underlying ideology that sustains Pinker's argument, and the ensuing selection and handling of data, thus exposing an important methodological weakness in research that is supposed to be objective. First of all, one would have to justify the selection of a 'proxy' or main indicator for measuring violence; since it is not possible to measure all the violence in the world, the next best thing is to follow a reliable indicator, that would vary in accordance with the variations of the total violence. As indicated before, Pinker chose violent death and, more precisely, official data on intended violent killing as a direct indicator that could then be subjected to statistical evaluation. For Smail, this 'semantic narrowing of 'violence''(34) leaves behind most of the violence that is not homicide registered in court and official warfare. Many scholars agree with this judgment. Reducing violence to official data on homicide silences everything else, from slavery to torture, from incarceration to domestic abuse, as well as politically motivated engineered famine, or even ethnocide. It leaves the accounting of violence in the hands of perpetrators.

Smail also accuses Pinker of selecting data. He reminds us of the enduring popularity of what he sees as a 'faith' in the decline of violence; this is not a recent idea, as evidenced by Hobbes' thesis of a brutish past evolving into an orderly state, or by the cultural evolutionists' vision of 'primitive tribes,' or by Raymond Dart's prehistoric hominids as 'Killer Apes,' among other popular theses. The complementary notion of an ineluctable social and scientific progress is equally powerful. Smail argues that this faith does not justify selecting anecdotal data to paint horrifying prehistorical times evolving toward the supposed peaceful present times.

[As an anthropologist, I had to teach repeatedly to my students that Hobbes's vision of life outside of so-called civilization as 'violent, brutish and short' had nothing to do with fact, neither with prehistorical populations nor with Indigenous people.]

In Chapter 3, 'Pinker and the use and abuse of statistics in writing the history of violence,' Dag Lindstrom's primary concern applies to the proper use of quantitative evidence. He denounces the fact that Pinker "often neglects the many problems associated with historical and prehistorical quantifications, he tends to ignore evidence pointing in other directions." (41) Lindstrom reminds us of the need for context when handling quantitative data:

Most of the available quantitative evidence for a long-term decline in homicide rates is extracted from (Western and Northern) European sources. Pinker, however, places the rest of the world into the general Western European pacification narrative. Evidence derived from a specific context is used as a general model for a global trajectory. In doing this, Pinker seems to apply a rather outdated diffusion model: a civilizing process started in a Western European epicentre, then spread to other parts of the continent and later also to the rest of the world. What Pinker describes might of course be a general pattern in human history, but we do not know for sure, and the quantitative evidence he presents cannot prove it. (42)

Among unresolved or ignored issues, Lindstrom also cites the mishandling of archaeological data, and the simplistic dichotomy between state and non-state societies, leading to non-state societies being arbitrarily depicted as very violent and the shift from non-state to state society as a major step toward peaceful coexistence. This dichotomy is extended though time to the contemporary world between tribal or Indigenous people and nation-states.

[As an anthropologist and ethnographer working mostly with Indigenous societies, I was outraged by the ignorance displayed by Pinker on those matters. I have seen violence both within and outside of the community rapidly increasing with the advent of state

organisation, even more when that violence was then sanctioned by the state and its internal institutions. Also, nation-states have existed in several Indigenous societies.]

In Chapter 4, 'Progress and its contradictions: Human rights, inequality and violence,' Eric D. Weitz provides an interesting approach to violence through the concept of human rights. The global progress in human rights, which we can all verify, is used by Pinker to bolster his thesis. Weitz brings two counterpoints to Pinker's argument, especially his views on the Enlightenment as a game-changer for human rights:

The first [counterpoint] entails his honey-coated understanding of the Enlightenment as a philosophical movement. Human rights today certainly rest upon the Enlightenment's promotion of liberty and the rights of the individual. Yet the same Enlightenment figures who advocated liberty also limited its scope though their drive to categorize the human population based on racial and gender hierarchies.(58-9)

The division of human beings into civilized and barbarian [lays] at the centre of Enlightenment thought and enabled human rights violations and outright violence against those deemed incapable of rational and progressive thought. (59)

If the Enlightenment is a complex period with a complex set of ideas, we cannot bypass the fact that the notion of race, with its support for the institution of slavery, the notion of biological or cultural inferiority of Indigenous people or members of stateless societies, and the reiteration of the implied opposition between a passive domestic female realm and an active public male realm, all contradict the progress of human rights. Furthermore, the progress toward a peaceful society has not been without violence:

In his two books, Pinker offers an assemblage of trends that make for the decline in violence. [...] But trends do not make for an explanation. The causative factors for each is not clear, and we have little sense of who exactly is pushing forward these developments. It all seems like a natural unfolding from barbarism to civilization. If only it were so easy. Pinker soars over the hard political struggle that Blacks, slaves, women, Korean citizens and so many others engaged to *create* the realm of liberty - with all its limitations - in the real world. In those struggles, the incidence and intensity of violence was often huge, and those events do not appear in the statistical tables on murder rates or the number of wars that have been fought in the modern period.(59)

In Chapter 5, 'Pinker's technocratic neoliberalism, and why it matters,' David A. Bell examines the links between theoretical underpinning and ideological convictions. In Pinker's case, Bell analyses assumptions that are, in his view, ideological rather than

theoretical, and that compose what Bells calls a 'technocratic neoliberalism.' He then interrogates the influence of Pinker's overall political vision on his research as a neoliberal (a term admittedly slippery) and then as a technocrat.

According to Bell, Pinker's neoliberalism is the more obvious part of his political stance.

Here I use it to mean, first a faith derived from older ('classical') liberal thought that free markets are the most efficient and economically productive way to distribute goods and and services. This faith is coupled with a readiness to accept high levels of inequality in exchange for maximum possible economic growth with a strong distrust for taxation, economic planning and nationalization, and with a distinct hostility to labour organisation. 'Neo-'liberalism distinguishes itself from its classical ancestor by its particular emphasis on freeing the financial sector of the economy from restraint, by its tolerance for so-called 'creative destruction,' and by its insistence that free trade operate on a global level, with goods and services freely circulating across the world at maximum possible speeds and volume.(76)

One of the questions raised by this ideological stance stems from its reluctance to engage into politics. Bell refers to Pierre Rosanvallon in describing the ideal neoliberal world as 'a world largely free from politics:'

... a world where self-regulating, self-organizing market mechanisms determine the most important social configurations and patterns of distribution, leaving ordinary citizens with little or no recourse to political action.(76)

The technocratic label has a similarly long history, and Bell questions why Pinker does not seem to recognize the contradictions between neoliberalism and technocracy. Bell quotes Sophia Rosenfield, who asserted in *Democracy and Truth: A Short History* (2019) that the thinkers of the Enlightenment period were most ambivalent about a democracy involving everyone. From Voltaire to Madison to the aristocracy, many Enlightenment thinkers would advocate what Rosenfield calls 'the social and political utility of a distinct cohort of the learned.' This cohort was intended to become, over the decades and centuries a class of technical experts, wise, moral, and habituated to governance. Empowered to govern according to principles of science and engineering, here again "the technocratic vision is a vision of government without politics." (78) Obviously Pinker himself does not trust the intelligence or rationality exhibited by ordinary people, while those qualities and others are assumed to be present in technocrats and experts.

In short, in both his neoliberal and technocratic guises, Pinker has little confidence that ordinary people can successfully choose forms of social and economic organization that

will further their well-being. Better to leave the common good to the impersonal action of growth-generating free-market, or alternately, to trained experts.

In conclusion, Bell notes that neither neoliberalism nor technocracy have proven as stable or functional as their advocates had hoped.⁽⁸⁵⁾ In addition to all the problems generated by enormous economic inequality, including a general precarity for workers and their families, history has shown that enormous wealth engenders massive political power that pushes society in the direction of oligarchy, while technocracy tends to petrify and cordon off the experts from the rest of the population.⁽⁸⁵⁾ In such systems, says Bell, denied their freedom, "...ordinary people will not always peacefully and quietly obey the dictates of the market or the precept of the experts, they will turn in frustration to the demagogues. Far from moving ever closer [...] toward enlightenment, ordinary citizens will turn back toward toward an all too familiar darkness."⁽⁸⁶⁾

In concluding Part One with Chapter 6, Philip Dwyer joins Elizabeth Robert-Pedersen for a review of the notion of the *The Civilizing Process*, a notion at the intersection between history and psychology which informs a central theory in Pinker's argument. The concept was developed in the early twentieth century by Norbert Elias, a German sociologist in a book of the same title first published in 1939 (translated and published in English in 1994). Inspired partly by Freud, Elias' theory has been well studied by historians and much criticized both from a psychological view point and a historical view point. To summarize, the notion of a 'civilizing process' at work in the development of humanity draws a parallel, if not a direct link, between the development of an individual human being and that of society (if not humanity), uniting psychology and anthropology in a simple and grand synthesis.

However, this synthesis remains purely theoretical and bends both disciplines out of their scientific basis. Taking medieval European society as an unrestrained, uneducated, and violent toddler who discovers courtly manners and the rules of etiquette during the Renaissance and thereby turns into an educated man - as does a maturing adult - does not fit the facts. It may work as a metaphor, but not as a factual description. However, Elias' theory fits Pinker's scheme: he enlarges the model to correspond to the development of mankind from its beginning to its present maturity, from the unrestrained, childlike, and violent behaviour of the prehistoric and medieval periods through the Renaissance and the next centuries in a process that moves independently through the centuries. Altogether it is a grand model, but it is built on false conceptual foundations. As Dwyer and Robert-Pedersen conclude, Pinker's uncritical use of Norbert Elias' ideas and his extrapolation of Elias' theory into the last century weaken an argument already questionable.

[Unfortunately for Pinker, his argument is more than questionable: both Elias' model and Pinker's version of the model are fallacies fed by myths. Anthropologists have long since

debunked the idea as no more than a misleading figure of speech, together with similar ideas drawing parallels between a) individual physical development, b) the emergence of hominids leading to *Homo sapiens*, c) and cultural 'development' from tribal societies to industrialized, urbanized nations, with the corresponding religious hierarchy and organizational complexity. This scheme of unilinear cultural evolutionism was favoured by early proponents in the 1850s and it has been repeatedly refuted by anthropologists, including human paleontologists and prehistorians. At base, the problem is that it conflates technological complexity with culture and feeds on the feelings of superiority of the elite in a class society. Unfortunately, such a triumphalist perspective has strong roots in our culture.]

Part Two: Chapters 7-9 - Periods

Part Two, entitled Periods, is devoted to key temporal periods in Pinker's synthesis, and brings a revealing and contemporary historical context to the history of violence in the world, a context often missing from data presented in *The Better Angels*' sweeping saga.

In Chapter 7, 'Steven Pinker's 'prehistoric anarchy': A bioarchaeological critique,' human osteoarchaeologist Linda Fibiger examines how Pinker treats archaeological remains so as to deduce rates of violence in the prehistoric past, which he assumes from the start to be chaotic and brutal. Fibiger provides a blunt archaeological critique of both this primary assumption and Pinker's methodology. First, she denounces the lack of representativeness of his sample and his biased selection of sources, followed by denouncing his inability to react to prehistoric records, his ignorance of regional variability, the lack of coherence of his data set, and his misunderstanding of the complexity of the results in archaeological data, all mistakes due to a lack of competence in the discipline. She notes that hypotheses from Raymond Dart (1950s) and from Robert Ardrey (1961), presenting early man as 'the killer ape' and violence as the driving force behind human evolution, have long been discredited. Among significant gaps, she notes the absence of references to the neolithic period when, contrary to Pinker's claim, agriculture and permanent settlements did not result in a decline of violent death.

[Anthropological recent research has indeed confirmed that rates of violent death increased with the introduction of farming, while overall health and longevity markedly decreased.]

Referring to prehistory and bioarchaeology, Fibiger insists that the multiple aspects and manifestation of human activities result, of necessity, in a fragmented, incomplete and complex record. The record is sufficient, however, to demonstrate the range and multiple variations in these human activities, shifts in subsistence patterns and in social

organizations, including recourse to aggressive behaviour. This complexity is not recognized by Pinker:

Pinker, on the other hand, presents 'prehistory' as a universal term, a unifying or global expression used to refer to non-state societies and the 'anarchy of the hunting, gathering and horticultural societies in which our species spent most of its evolutionary history....(110)

[Against Pinker's opinion, anthropologists see no simple universal transitions from one stage of development to another, from one subsistence pattern to another, or one mode of social organization to another. Instead, markers of transitions such as sedentary life, division of labour, agriculture, animal domestication, writing, institutionalized religious rituals, and state formation, etc, seem to have developed, and in several cases retreated, each in their own time and according to different factors.]

Contrary to Pinker's practice, Fibiger asserts that a single site cannot be taken as representative of whole region or period, and one should minimally include all sites of a given area. She further confirms that skeletal evidence for interpersonal violence goes back as far as the original of human themselves. But, she writes, the recognition of biological, cultural, and ecological factors contributing to violence requires an admission regarding the complexity of violence and the impossibility of isolating and identifying any single cause. Moreover, the further back in time researchers explore, the more difficult it becomes to disentangle the web of causative factors.(119)

Fibiger takes care to define both violence and war, and by doing so, underlines the problem incurred by Pinker when he conflates the two without considering the considerable variations in what we deem to be violent behaviour, and the further difficulties in identifying traces of violence or signs of warfare in archaeological remains. In a most interesting suggestion, prompted by Pinker's tendency to reduce violence to acts of violence, Fibiger proposes to consider violence as a process rather than an event.(123). This approach would prevent us from falling into the trap of reducing violence to a single moment in time as manifested by one debilitating or fatal injury (Pinker's fatality count) and [help us to] recognize it as a process with significant consequences for the individual [as well as] his/her social network.(124) This suggestion could extend the consequences and influence of violence from the individual victim and perpetrator to other members of the community. If we consider violence as a social process, we may also more easily recognize people from the distant past as not so different from us.

In Chapter 8, 'Getting medieval on Steven Pinker: Violence and medieval England,' Sara M. Butler, a historian specializing in Medieval England, marital violence, and family crises, questions whether medieval times in England were as deprived and cruel as Pinker describes them. She examines his sources, numbers, and historiography, and provides

alternative sources and corrections. In effect, she notes, Pinker needs the Middle Ages to be barbaric in order to establish a strong contrast between that period and a more peaceful contemporary world. To do so, he used suggestive references to grisly images of execution and torture instruments which he found in sources that are not exactly reliable. Butler does not soften her tone as she cites Arthurian romance treated as historical fact, bogus statistics, and flawed historical numbers. Unfortunately for Pinker, his sources (or illustrations) are not representative of the actual mores of the time:

[Pinker] cannot maintain that violence has declined since the Middle Ages because we have no real evidence to prove that it has. Indeed, it is not at all clear just how violent the Middle Ages actually were.(136)

To further complicate the question, many of the court records and related documentation available to statisticians cannot be taken at face value - records have disappeared, population figures are imprecise, and, among other factors, medieval naming practices were not standardized. The authors of the Domesday Book - a form of census - counted only the heads of household, neglecting women, children, elderly and other dependants; neither did they count the people who lived and served in a castle, or the members of religious orders. These, among other factors, prevent a quick recourse to statistics or an easy comparison with present-day statistics.

In the conclusion to her chapter, Butler echoes her colleagues' complaint: While it is clear that Pinker misrepresents the Middle Ages in Great Britain, what rankles medievalists most about Pinker's book is that he is not particularly interested in the period. Rather the era is simply a starting point from which to apply a well-worn historical theory while adding his own psychological twist.(141) As far as scholarly work is concerned, Pinker could not pass as a historian. But then, how many of his readers would be able to appreciate the research work accomplished by actual historians? History, as a scholarly discipline, needs its champions.

Chapter 9, 'History, violence and the Enlightenment,' sees Philip Dwyer, Professor of History and Founding Director for the Centre for the Study of Violence at the University of Newcastle, add to the debate a counter-study of the Enlightenment period, which represents for Pinker the pivot around which the world will launch itself toward peaceful times. Pinker takes this short period as 'a coherent project,' if not a 'coherent philosophy,' or 'a set of ideals' centred on reason, science and humanism.(145) However, Dwyer takes this same period as a crossroad of ideas and trends, the influence and opinions of which were mixed, especially regarding wars and social inequalities; it was a complex and changing process including multiple perspectives issuing from national, regional, religious, and conceptual variations which are still analyzed today. The ideas that circulated through Enlightenment society did not necessarily develop *in situ*. The Enlightenment, writes Dwyer, is not defined by ideas, but by the fact that they were shared and debated.

Scholarship on that much-studied period has profoundly changed over the centuries, and especially the historiography of the past two decades. As Dwyer remarks : "Much of what we once took for granted about the Enlightenment has been overturned." (145) One cannot rely on outdated sources, nor consider Enlightenment as a single straightforward movement; today, historians speak of and study French, Austrian, Scottish, German, even Islamic and Catholic Enlightenments. Even when considering British Enlightenment, we are confronted to many themes still unresolved. Following his role of professional historian, Dwyer asks central methodological questions:

- a) Historical causality: If we consider the Enlightenment as a set of ideas, can we assume that ideas drive history? This has been disproven, yet the topic brings us to the problem of causality in history, where few historians today would agree with Pinker.
- b) The rational and irrational in history: Like some, Pinker assumes a dichotomy between science and religion: embracing one means rejecting the other. This assumption is linked to a parallel opposition of reason and emotion, an equation that permeates Pinker's thinking and sustains his definition of violence as irrational. This assumption, like all Pinker's other assumptions, is not a fact; Dwyer notes that violence serves a purpose and a function, no matter how 'irrational' or 'barbaric' or 'savage' an act might appear to the outside observer, and that this is as much the case today as it was in the past. (156)

As Dwyer writes:

This [question] goes to the heart of Pinker's own personal world view. He rejects the powerful liberal current of Enlightenment thinking that includes, in the West at least, Jacobinism, Bolshevism and Nazism, all political ideologies that at their core believed humans and humans society could be improved through violent means. They all not only advocated but practiced violence in a methodical way to bring about revolutionary change in society. Pinker, on the other hand, cannot countenance the idea that there was a link between ideology, the 'invention of reason,' and 'reason' being used for violent ends, because for him violence is necessarily irrational. (156)

[Dwyer's chapter is enticing as a teaser on many question. As an anthropologist, I would have liked these questions to be explored further. For instance, violence as a tool of governance could be coupled with the variations in how societies define historical causalities. The Civilizing Process can be reframed within the idea of Progress, an idea that opens on various interpretations: from an initial golden age (Greece and China), to a glorious futuristic new planet in space, or to the second coming of Christ (USA). Science, another of these themes, coincides with the displacement of the Medieval in a purely

anthropocentric view of the world. Paradoxically this did not necessarily lead to a lessening of the collective hubris. Coupled with the idea of Progress, instead it gave rise to an idea developed during the Renaissance: the idea of the New Adam. According to this notion, God's creation was not fully completed by placing Adam and Eve on the earth. Instead, man is now endowed with the task of completing the work through the advancement of sciences and technology; through our intellectual advances, we can further man's control of the earth and its creatures. and make it into a better world, perhaps even conquer death itself.

One cannot underestimate the diversity of views emanating from the Enlightenment and the many different orientations that can be read among its thinkers. Thomas Hobbes was not its leading reference at the time, though he appeared to be a useful provider of justifications for the expansion of the British empire, capitalism, and government by a learned superior elite. As a philosopher imbued with the view of scientific knowledge as absolute truth based on principles that are, of course, reserved for great minds, Hobbes lived and thought in a hierarchical world. His model of kingship was partly inspired by Plato's rather undemocratic and hierarchical Republic; Plato himself explicitly described his ideal government as supported by a Great Lie. That is, everyone must believe they occupy the social status they were always destined to occupy.

But Hobbes had his opponents: Robert Boyle, for instance, saw scientific truth as an always evolving knowledge that was accessible to all, and he was not adverse to displaying his inventions and teaching sciences to workers and peasants. Boyle's sciences were opened to new perspectives, to the future, to the outside world, and to the common man, perspectives that were all compatible with his Christian faith. As a renowned chemist, a scientist credited for developing experimental sciences, and a founding member of the Royal Society, Boyle associated knowledge with the laws of nature; his democratic ideals were far removed from those entertained by Hobbes.]

Part Three: Chapters 10-12 - Places

In Part 3, *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* veers toward scholarship that opens onto the history of a larger world, bringing geographic alternatives to Pinker's perspective that is decidedly centred on Western Europe. Chapters 10, 11 and 12 are devoted respectively to Russia, Japan, and the Middle East. The editors apologize for the absence of intended chapters on China and other parts of the world, which were not available at time of publication for various reasons.

In Chapter 10, 'The complexity of history: Russia and Steven Pinker's thesis,' Nancy Shields Kollmann, a specialist of Eastern European History, takes Russian history to demonstrate the importance of historical regional variations. She focuses her analysis on the three

historical processes identified by Pinker as contributing to the rise of a peaceful and civilized society, that is, 1) the rise of a centralized state with a monopoly on violence and policing (see Hobbes' *Leviathan*), 2) the expansion of inter-regional commerce (global economy and capitalism), and, finally 3) the diffusion of civilized behaviour through the spread of etiquette and courtly culture (encouraging restraint and empathy).

Kollmann argues that the practice of criminal law in Russia, as defined and practiced by the Russian state, was less violent than its western European counterpart, with a reach kept intentionally narrow,(167) and the development of state power was more focused. Russia, being an autocracy, had a strong potential for despotic arbitrariness in its justice system. However, that was mitigated by the uniformity of its standard, the centrality of the tsar's position as the 'father' of his people, therefore capable of mercy, and the recourse to a pragmatic perspective. For instance, since the Russian State's foremost concern was the provision of human and material resources, it made sense on the one hand to preserve the serfdom system, but on the other hand to abolish the death penalty in favour of exile and forced labour. Against Pinker's explanations, Kollmann says:

Russia's judicial practices into the nineteenth century, therefore, would seem to reflect an aversion to violence. But few of Pinker's driving forces for such a case were at play here... [...] The pacifying impulse of commerce hardly played a role: Russia was a resource-poor society with a serf-based autarkic economy where the state exerted as much control over productive resources and economic exchange as possible. [...] ... Russia relied on a more complicated relationship to violence than Pinker's smooth path of decline.(172)

Kollman notes, however, that Russia never fully embarked toward a decline of violence: instead, its emphasis on human resources, or rather a perception of human beings as resources toward production, went unchecked. The official violence of the justice system was dwarfed by the violence exerted by the serfdom system and the exile system, both of them brutal and often deadly.'

"...and in the twentieth century Russia suffered under a utopian ideology that wrecked (sic) unimaginable pain on the Soviet people. The red thread uniting these disparate relationships to violence is the drive to mobilize resources.
(174)

Kollmann writes in conclusion that this "suggest that different states assess the utility of violence differently and use or limit it as it suits them."(175)

[To Kolmann's remarks, I would add - as an anthropologist - that regional differences often correspond to cultural variations that engender divergences in worldviews, social expectations, social norms, values, and ethics, as well as in patterns of social organization.

Culture is not often mentioned in *The Darker Angels*, and cultural differences are openly ignored by Pinker, who professes instead a universalist point of view supported by his version of evolutionary psychology.]

In Chapter 11, 'The necrology of angels: Violence in Japanese history as a lens of critique,' Michael Wert presents a history of violence in Japan through which we uncover local and global facets of violence that would have to be considered an essential component of a world history of violence. His presentation begins with a scathing accusation: Pinker's book is not a work of scholarship but of polemics and ideology.(177)

Wert does not intend to offer "a case study of how Pinker's facts are wrong, [...] or a positivistic critique."(177) Instead, he explores three themes or approaches that would seem at first to present parallels to those found by Pinker in Western Europe: first, the historical meta-narrative embodying the so-called Great Peace of the Tokugawa or Edo period. This was interpreted by the Japanese state as a civilizing process, focusing on elite culture and classical texts from 1603 to 1868. The second theme emerges once the Tokugawa period is replaced by the Meiji Restoration, which oversaw the development of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Japanese industrial capitalism. As a third theme and during the same period, between 1868 and 1912, the notion of the self-restrained individual continued to exert its influence. As depicted by Wert, the case of Japan is interesting because it unveils how national meta-narratives of peace and prosperity, claimed by Japanese rulers during most of their history, occult various types of systemic violence.

In questioning the Era of Great Peace, embodied as it was in a feudal class system led by a warrior regime (the Samurai) and focusing on the elite, Wert notes:

On the surface, it seems like the title 'great peace' accurately describes the era. Nobody invaded Japan, warlords became 'lords', [...] no lord revolted against the Tokugawa regime. [...] But the domains located throughout Japan were relatively autonomous; some even drove diplomatic policy with close neighbours, especially the Korean kingdom. As long as the lords played into the ceremony of deference to the shogunate, a government with sympathetic lords as advisors, then they were left to their own devices, thus 'performing the great peace,' as one recent scholar described it.(184)

By the end of the Tokugawa period, Ikegami asserts, "the direct connection between samurai honour and the exercise of violence gradually weakened, and a new ethic of the samurai as law-abiding "organizational men" had clearly emerged."(185)

This officially peaceful facade is still claimed to this day as part of the Japanese historical identity, and it may indeed correspond to a decrease in certain forms of violence. If so, it occurred before Japanese contact with Europeans and American civilizations, and it was not without its own violent outbreaks. As Wert notes:

A pitfall of 'the era of peace' notion is that it usually referred to a peace among warriors through a lack of war; but what about everyone else?(187)

Gangs of unemployed samurai in the cities, retaliating gangs of commoners, armed youth groups whose activities increased with economic hardship, countless peasant uprisings, and even waves of infanticide marked a growing disaffection toward the collective, particularly as wealth was concentrated in the hands of merchants and greater insecurity led to violence among the poor.(189) In the end, the shogunate collapsed in 1868 under the concentrated weight of colonialist western powers led by the USA, the pressure to restore the imperial authority amid succession disputes, civil wars, and natural disasters. This led to the Meiji Restoration, a series of event that brought their own load of violence.

[As an anthropologist, I note that even as the samurai were undergoing a transformation of their identity from warrior to self-restrained and cultured leaders and men of power, the ideology of honour and violence endured, disseminated by heroic tales, public ceremonials, and ancestor rituals. Several indicators demonstrate that this ideology went unchecked in the collective memory, including the so-called 'children wars' of the early nineteenth century. This event featured children in Ido, numbering several hundred at a time, engaged in large scale mock wars with bamboo spears. This ideology persists in the contemporary world of comic books and films.]

The era of the Meiji restoration that followed, imperialistic and led by oligarchs, was marked by the opening of relations with the Western powers.(192) As Wert notes,

The most significant change in what we might call 'modernity's violence' was its invisibility, masked by notions of scientific, bureaucratic, and economic progress. [...] The stakeholders who control the means of production constrain the leader and his government, preventing violence to their disruption of trade, but they support violence when seeking sources of raw material and cheap labor. [...] Thus, the early Meiji oligarchs, looking to the West as a model, understood the connection between capitalism and violence - 'rich nation, strong military' became another popular slogan.(192-3)

From the joint expansion of mutually supportive military might and industrial domination, there is only a very short distance to imperialistic reach beyond the nation borders toward subjugating neighbouring countries in order to provide the ever-increasing demands for resources and land base. While the toll of violence during warfare is partially accounted

for in Pinker's charts, he ignores the human cost of industrial development (loss of land, relocation, pollution, low wages or forced labor, and general impoverishment of the population with the resulting loss of life). The Japanese military empire will collapse in the aftermath of the Second World War, but the industrial global network created there evolves into the familiar landscape of the international industrial hub, where human interests fade into concerns about relentless financial domination.

The civilizing forces of statehood and 'peaceful trade' have a dark side in Japan and around the world. The essential characteristic of this dark side in Japan - its invisibility - is also repeated. That invisibility is, of course, deeply desirable to the perpetrators and the state, but it relies also on the public audience. In a telling aside, Wert goes back to Norbert Elias:

What is often forgotten in Norbert Elias' account of the public disappearance of torture and punishment [is that it] is not due to people no longer supporting violence, but simply not wanting to see it. As Barry Vaughn eloquently states it: Elias 'does not associate the onset of civilization with the extinction of violence, merely its occlusion.(186)

[We might also note that with the dawn of social media and the age of communication, the great hope of the late twentieth century to end that invisibility was rapidly thwarted by the states' alliance with the global market and international financial interests in their respective quests for control of information and marketing data on individual lives.]

In Chapter 12, 'British imperial violence and the Middle East,' Caroline Elkins explores another aspect of that equally dark side of the supposedly shining benevolence of the civilizing European 'peaceful trade' advocated by *The Better Angels*, a trade often accompanied by military intervention. Colonization, from whatever nation it arises, and especially when it pretends to be a 'civilizing' and pacifying process is not, in fact, a peaceful process.

In a few terrifying pages, Elkins demonstrates how the whole picture of legitimized violence in the wake of European colonization is nothing but a screen hiding the very violence that is not recognized by Pinker's statistics. Not the official war, but the revolts; not the public accounts of victory, but the reprisals and genocidal punitive expeditions; not the extension of British administrative and military 'pacification,' but the take over of land, natural resources, and human labour, and, endlessly, the recourse to torture, maiming, killing and rape, led by – embarrassingly - the very men who Pinker identifies as embodying the peace-promoting virtues of the British-led Enlightenment. What is more, that violence, while not publicly recognized and often denied or hidden, was nevertheless sanctioned by the state and justified on the grounds of ideological claims of racial and cultural superiority; it quickly became systemic. Elkins mentions Jamal al-Husayni in

Palestine, the Kikuyu in Kenya, and Morant Bay in Jamaica, among multiple examples repeated *ad nauseam* in our recent common history. They may be alluded to in Pinker's text, but they do not mar his statistics. They, too, are invisible.

[I would like to add that these events and policies are not emblematic specifically of the British Empire. They can be found in any period and any state; they are the oft-forgotten, unidentified, and mislabelled underside of most celebrated ventures of economic development, military conquest, and successful colonization projects culminating in social order and political control. Coercion follows the rules of law supporting economic power.

Three related methodological points emerged for me from Part Three. Though they are not underlined in the conclusion, they should be useful when studying matricultural systems: First, the need to support any research in human sciences on the observation of the concrete world (Robert Boyle) rather than on preemptive principles (Thomas Hobbes), or actual documents versus theoretical or ideal laws, is still valid today. Second, seeing violence as process rather than a succession of single events could allow us to think contextually. Third, and most importantly, the invisibility of violence, and even more of systemic violence, should warn us that progress in social well-being depends on a large part on making violence visible.]

Part 4: Chapters 13-17 - Themes

Part Four of *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* addresses types of violence that do not fit the criteria set by Pinker to measure violence in our world, though they are on the front page of our news media: sexual violence, the situation of Indigenous peoples, racism, the militarization of policing, mass incarceration, and capital punishment, among other hot topics. Part Four also addresses our environmental history and our violent - if not suicidal - treatment of our planet and its non-human inhabitants. Can we then pretend that we have become rational beings over the last three or four centuries, as stated by Pinker? Or have we failed to understand our nature?

In Chapter 13, 'A history of violence and indigeneity: Pinker and the Native Americas,' Matthew Restall, a historian and Latin American scholar best known for his work with the Maya people, the Spanish conquest, and Central American history, shows that if Pinker seems to pay relatively little attention to Indigenous people in the world (most of it directed on the Aztecs, a Central American empire), Indigenous people, and particularly the first inhabitants of the Americas, play an important role in Pinker's argument.(223) That is to say, Pinker's thesis demands that the past, especially the prehistoric past, exhibit extreme violence. True to his early nineteenth century perspective on the world, Pinker considers Indigenous people as leftovers from the past and, therefore, equivalent to prehistoric humanity. As Restall remarks, the first line of Pinker's book is revealing;

“‘Kennewick Man was shot.’” (Pinker 9) is the first seed of a link between violence and indigeneity that takes root and grows throughout the book.(224) Indigenous people, both as quasi-prehistoric people and as non-state societies, apparently had little opportunity to get their supposedly violent natures under control.¹

More than suggestion, Pinker declares that men in non-state societies routinely engaged in unrestrained violence, most notably committing massacres of whole villages, as well as acts of torture, rape, mutilation and cannibalism. Over a five-page passage, references are made to Indigenous peoples in New Guinea, Australia, and New England, and to the Yanomami of the Amazonian Basin and Inuit [Arctic]. He gives an overwhelming three-fold impression: that Native Americans and non-state peoples are essentially the same category; that their societies were fundamentally and relentlessly violent; and that they existed overwhelmingly in the violent past, not the peaceful present. All three impressions are patently false.(224)

For Restall, Pinker’s use of one Indigenous society, the pre-Columbian Aztecs, as the most representative sample of Indigeneity in America - one whom he blatantly misrepresents by using the most biased and shocking references to large scale human sacrifices and cannibalism, forgetting they were also a state society with an agricultural market economy and a sophisticated urban organisation - preempts the idea of their survival in modern times. This leads to what Restall calls a gross misrepresentation of Native American history and culture [or, I should add, cultures].(232) Entering the historical period, that of settler colonialism, writes Restall, Pinker could not avoid the cost in Indigenous lives of the European and Euro-American imperialism, but it is mentioned, mostly in table and chart entries. Restall objects specifically and most strongly to the cursory coverage of settler violence and the impact of colonization on Indigenous populations.

Restall further objects to Pinker’s reduction of the violence during the early colonizing period to a ‘civilizing process,’ particularly the implication that while European settlement was a violent process, it was less violent than Native America before Europeans arrived. (230), This only serves Pinker’s larger argument, leaving behind the deadliest period of the European conquest. Restall objections to Pinker’s treatment of Native America has serious implications for the Indigenous perspective:

My third objection is that Native American only appear in the passages of the book (ed. *The Better Angels*) that cover the modern era (by which I mean post-1900) as leftover hunter and gatherer groups on the margins of the civilized world - specifically Arctic Canada and the Amazon in the early- to mid-twentieth century - and then only as examples of the intrinsic violence of nonstate and Indigenous societies. Otherwise, after encountering the Civilizing

1 Kennewick Man is the name given to the nine-thousand-year-old skeleton of a paleo-American man found on the banks of the Colombia River.

Process, Native Americans disappear. In effect, they cease to exist. A reader who did not know otherwise would conclude that Native Americans contributed to humanity's violent past, but that they are entirely absent from the civilized and peaceful present.(230)

According to Restall, it is precisely the invisibility of Native Americans which allows Pinker to feed the belief that American native societies do not exist any more, and to ignore their survival, their contemporary cultural presence, and their counter-narrative of historical events; to ignore, also, the systemic and multi-faceted types of violence, including genocides, Indigenous people have encountered and still encounter in their struggle for surviving as a people [not as anonymous populations]; and to ignore the reality that this violence increased in the centuries after the European Enlightenment. While underlining the importance of the counter-narrative presented by the Indigenous people themselves - who have not only survived but also continue to speak with their own voices - Restall summarizes the gist of his argument with the following words:

Pinker sets up his thesis from the opening paragraph of his books' [sic] preface as a happy surprise: 'Believe it not - and I know that most people do not - violence has declined over long stretches of time, and today we may be living the most peaceable era of our species' existence. [...] But behind that you-won't-believe-it-but set-up is a less benign one, more of a you-already-know-this foundation stone: The West is better than the non-West. Thus, it is the West's triumph over other cultures that has made the world a better place. [...] The slippage in Pinker's book between West/Other and present/past is nowhere made starker than in his treatment of the Native Americas.(234)

[Having spent the best part of my life working with Indigenous peoples and cultures, I was outraged, again, by Pinker's treatment of Indigenous people, a treatment that comes straight from the nineteenth century. Like Restall, and knowing how ubiquitous these theories still are in certain segments of my own society, I understand how Pinker would have simply followed the received ideas of his social milieu. These ideas are still entertained by such countries as China, where matrilineal societies are considered to be 'fossil people' and Tibetan people presented as the direct descendants of Neanderthal, Russia (with Siberia plundered by the Russian administration), India, certain parts of Africa, and many others. That does not weaken the outrage, nor the consequences of propagating these same and dangerous ideas in today's world. I find myself totally in agreement with Restall's counter-argument. I also appreciate his emphasis on the contemporary and active presence of Indigenous societies in North America and in the world.]

The following chapter, Chapter 14, 'The rise and rise of sexual violence' by Joanna Bourke, looks at the sexualization of violence. It offers us a direct opportunity to bring women to

the forefront of the discussion, together with other victims of sexual violence. It is a tightly argued, precisely detailed, and very critical report based on the same populations used as samples by Pinker, mostly the United States and the United Kingdom, but using different criteria. Sexual violence [note Bourke's emphasis on the sexual rather than on women, which enlarges the debate] is treated by Pinker as a sideline in the grand scheme of things. But to do that, Pinker has to minimize the fact that 'violent practices, technologies and symbols increasingly permeate our everyday lives,' (236). and the fact that much of that violence is sexualized. Bourke directly confronts Pinker with five serious shortcomings or 'traps:'

1. Selectively choosing his data: Pinker relies mainly on the US Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Crime Victimization Survey, thus excluding "some groups of people that are most at risk of sexual assault, including people living on military bases, and in institutional settings (such as correctional or hospital facilities) and people who are homeless. [...] The increase in prisoners is particularly telling since Pinker reports positively on increased incarceration rate in the United States, stating that one of the reasons for the decline of rape is that more 'first-time rapists' have been put behind bars [not mentioning that the levels of sexual assaults in prisons have increase dramatically.
2. A narrow definitions of violence: Pinker's definition of violence was drawn from legal precepts relying on a) the presence of a victim of a cruel act, b) a perpetrator and c) hurtful consequences. This prevents us from paying attention to the fact that most violence today does not conform to this model; rather, it is structural and institutional. It is about pervasive insecurity, poverty, disease, and inequality, and affects the whole social environment. This kind of violence is powerful precisely because it had become naturalized: It is a fact of life that seems impossible to challenge.(238)
3. Minimizing certain harms and repeating long-standing prejudices: Pinker ignores the historical record of victims of violence because the terms were different; this does not mean that harm was not done. Bourke notes that Pinker also believes that, contrary to the past, women who report being sexually abused are now treated with care and respect, [...] thus conflating regulations with implementation.(241-2) Further, sexual violence is difficult to address when many form of sexual violence are supported by the rest of society, such as hazing practices, abuse in the military or police forces, or sexual abuse including sexualized forms of torture in military prisons.(234) And what about modern slavery, international sex trade industry, forced marriages?
4. Minimizing contemporary forms of violence assisted by technology: According to readily available evidence, the sexualization of violence and the violent treatment of genders and sexualities have been on a fast rising curve, affected and fortified by the new technologies. These forms of violence are not included in official statistics, but well documented image-based sexual abuse (including revenge-

pornography) and online sexual harassment are now common forms of violence. (245) Users of video gaming and virtual space are now exposed to virtual rape by other characters and “technology-based sexually coercive behaviours” are available to players in several computer games. Contrary to Pinker’s opinion, they are increasing in popularity. and we should regard them as violent, because they have real-life consequences.

5. The last trap is an evolutionary psychology model: Bourke’s analysis shows that Pinker’s view of sexual violence is framed in terms of self-interested competitors, a ‘genetic calculus’ and a ‘reproductive spreadsheet’ which presents sexual violence as a fact of nature, women as predisposed to be choosy and coy, and men to be indiscriminate. Pinker believes that ‘the prevalence of rape in human history’ and the ‘invisibility of the victim in the legal treatment of rape’ are “all too comprehensible from the vantage point of the genetic interest that shaped human desires and sentiments over the course of evolution, before our sensibilities were shaped by Enlightenment humanism.”(245)

The idea that males are biologically and genetically predisposed to sexual violence used to be fashionable. It is no longer defensible; it twists Darwin’s theories by ignoring recent research by biologists and primatologists which, for instance, demonstrate the essential role of the group in the selection of genitors rather than limiting one’s perspective to an individual contest of physical strength and individual self interest. research is also calling into question the efficiency of choosing a sexual partner on the basis of physical strength alone, rather than intelligence, or ability to form collaborative strategies, or the ability to care for the young and their mothers.

Bourke concludes her remarks by pointing out that Pinker failed to recognize the neoliberal ideological underpinnings of his research and the political consequences of his work. Specifically, accepting that sexual violence has a biological basis has normative consequences for our response to sexual violence. She notes that “... by failing to acknowledge and then control for his own ideological bias, Pinker has missed an opportunity to convincingly explain the changing nature of violence in our societies.”(251)

Robert T. Chase, a specialist in the history of prisons, prison reform, and state violence, offers a critical synthesis of the conjunction of the state violence and racism in Chapter 15, ‘Where angels fear to tread: Racialised policing, mass incarceration and executions as state violence in the post-civil rights era.’ So doing, he demonstrates with major contemporary examples that the benefits supposedly derived from a state monopoly on violence can quickly convert into extreme violence and disparity of power. Unsurprisingly, according to Pinker, the post civil-rights era in the United States (after 1965) saw a shift from systemic racism and racial violence to isolated racist incidents.

Chase uses a three-pronged move to challenge Pinker's view: 1) a historical analysis of the connection between racialized policing (discriminatory police brutality) and urban uprising, together with the rapid development of SWAT units in the post-Vietnam era and the transformation of the police into a militarized force; 2) a review of the rapid development in the American context of mass incarceration and the use of prisons as punitive racial discipline; and 3) a recontextualization of the death penalty as state violence. Each prong corresponds to a major blind spot in Pinker's narrative:

Of course, this history of anti-Blackness and state violence does not exist in Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, nor does any mention of state violence directed at Black Americans. Instead, Pinker takes a 'colour-blind' narrative as critically integral to his claim of a post-civil rights era that represent a 'New Peace' symbolic of a less violent post-1965 Western civilization.(255)

For instance, Pinker dismisses urban uprisings as evidences of Black criminality rather than a function of state violence against its Black and Brown population.(262) Starting with a historical review of riots and protests in US cities, and unveiling the political games supporting racialized policing on the one hand and the militarization of police on the other, Chase demonstrates the direct synchronicity between police brutalities sanctioned by the state and directed at people of colour, and the ensuing mass protests.(265-6) According to Chase, it is critical to note that none of these acts of brutality are random, rare or committed in isolation by solitary 'bad apple' cops, On the contrary, they are part of a sustained and systematic anti-Black and anti- Brown violence that has been historically consistent as a expression of carceral state power.(255) In order to contest Pinker's focus on criminality as an individual process, Chase uses Keeanga-Yamatha Taylor's argument that

...the focus on "state violence" strategically pivots away from a conventional analysis that would reduce racism to the intentions and actions of the individuals involved. The declaration of "state violence" legitimizes the corollary demand for state action.(257)

The scale of incarceration in the USA is staggering:

Mass incarceration is the post-1965 increase of the US prison population from 200,000 people to the modern-day prison population of 2.3 million and over 6.1 million under auspices of the carceral state through prisons, jails, probation and parole. To control that immense population, the carceral state in America comprises 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 2,259 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,283 local jails, 79 Indian Country jails, and over 200 immigration detention facilities.(264)

The historical context, as Heather Thompson makes clear in her seminal article 'Why Mass Incarceration Matters', is that from the Great Depression to the Great Society the number of people in federal and state prisons increased by 52,249 (1935-70), while in the post-civil rights era (1970-2005) the number of incarcerated people in US prisons and jails increased by 1.2 million.(265).

Reviewing the official statistics and the political accounts of the history of death penalty in the US demonstrates that death penalty is indeed part and parcel of endemic state violence directed against Black and Brown people in the American criminal justice system. According to a 2015 study by Frank R. Baumgartner and colleagues, quoted by Chase:

Between 1976 and 2013, only seventeen white people were executed for killing a Black person while 230 Black people were executed for killing a white person; black people were put to death more than twice as often for killing a white person (230 executions), than for killing a black person (108 executions). (271)

Although Steven Pinker never acknowledges policing and prisons as sites of well-documented racial violence, it seems indeed that some violence and some lives matter more than others.

[What an anthropologist could emphasize in light of this chapter, is that racism is not really caused by individuals enmeshed in a older belief system, nor is it simply an added ingredient to an already violent society. Instead, it seems to be generated by the state itself in order to establish the domination demanded by the exercise of power. Because the exercise of power is a spectacle, the horrifying display of terror, suffering, and degradation emerging from recent historical studies is not senseless: it has a logic of its own that generates the same tired scenarios, century after century, for a staged demonstration of power that is physically acted out on individuals, becoming more brutal as the state's real authority seems challenged. The state needs enemies, while its power demands demonstration.

Anthropologists would also add that there are many forms of power (see Anthony Giddens, for example); power built on the spectacle of crushing people to nothingness and irrelevancy is not the most constructive, efficient or stable. The reasons why terror suits the power sought by many state societies is a matter of debate. Or could we define types of state societies according to the type of power they choose to exercise? We may, however, surmise that in any given society the dominant metaphors of power found at the political level, and therefore the dominant forms of violence, are repeated throughout the cultural system - at the family level as well as the religious level, or within economic structures. One usually finds, as demonstrated by Anthony Hobbes and Steven Pinker, the

lowest members of a patriarchal class society treated as women or as cattle, or women treated as children, or the earth itself treated - like cattle or women - as simply a resource for exploitation.]

Chapter 16, 'The better angels of which nature? Violence and environmental history in the modern world' by Corey Ross, considers our plundering of our planet and its non-human inhabitants as a form of violence. Whether we consider our treatment of the natural environment itself as a violent enterprise or whether we limit ourselves to the consequences on human beings of entire swaths of land and water rendered useless, we have to cope with the same end result. Pinker's grand vision is out of date even as a utopia.

Instead of limiting himself to a descriptive summary of violence, Ross seeks to suggest some the ways in which we can enrich our understanding of the history of violence when we extend our attention to the non-human world. From his perspective, this expanded focus also provides insight into how the treatment of people, environment and resources were interlinked. Social and ecological systems are always entangled.(274)

In so doing, Ross brings out certain traits that are common to both violence against human beings, and our treatment of non human beings: First, he describes problems that used to be local processes and have grown to a massive scale, noting that the changes that allow us our present standards and modes of living are not obvious, in part because the beneficiaries of progress are not the ones who bear the immediate consequences.

[These changes] entailed considerable costs, which the people have grown increasingly adept at shifting on to other things - whether to those less wealthy or powerful than themselves, or to the physical environment (or both). Insofar as human have become masters of nature, they have done so by also becoming masters in the art of displacement.(275)

Such displacements were facilitated by one aspect common to many destructive interventions: the slow unfolding of their consequences. It may take years, if not several life times, for the crisis to reveal itself in what Rob Nixon calls 'slow violence.'(275) That is, slow moving crises and gradual deterioration that are easily ignored, as in, for instance, the case of agriculture modernization and the use of herbicides, of polluting mining practices, industrialization of the fishing industry, or, most obviously, of global warming, a slow moving - though now clearly accelerating - process. The creeping insidious consequences of biodiversity loss, soil deterioration, global warming and toxic pollution are far more serious to humans and other organisms than the level of attention they attract.(275) As predictable, poor people and poor countries are directly affected by these changes and pay the cost with their health and their lives.

We are blind to another aspect of the violence in our relationship with the environment: the faster and faster replacement of wild life by domestic animals raised for the cheapest and fastest meat. The routine slaughter of terrestrial animals leads us to think it is a normal behaviour, but this too has a cost. When we realize that the combined biomass of humans and their domesticated animals is now greater than that of all wild terrestrial vertebrates, and that the bulk of these domesticates are killed as soon as their feed-to-meat ratio has reached optimum levels, we get a rather different impression of human-animal relations than the story of animal rights suggest.(282)

Marine life does not fare any better. The industrialization of the fishing industry and the pollution in the ocean are located mostly out of sight and in an alien environment, which facilitates its exploitation and degradation. The destruction of land and water brought by the expansion of human living space and the simultaneous expansion of resource extraction by and for human activities not only amounts to killing animal and plant life on a massive scale, they also make every resource, including food, more difficult and costly to produce.

One of the most important links between violence, from a human perspective, and the environment is also one of the least known: the direct connection between human warfare and the development of human control over nature. Chemical weapons have killed more people than nuclear weapons, and the link between the development of chemical weapons and the needs of modern pest control grew into a mutually beneficial arrangement. DDT began as a chemical weapon in the hands of the American army, first against malaria, and soon after as a miracle weapon against man's insect 'enemy.' Its production then led to another fight - against insect resistance to pesticides. The consideration of such devices as incendiary substances, crop contaminants, incapacitating gasses, defoliants, climate control, pest and bio-invaders, extended the logic of 'total war' to the biophysical world as a whole in a rather suicidal cycle.(291)

[As an anthropologist exposed to a relatively wide cultural horizon and to a diversity of worldviews, I would take neither the Northern American attitude toward nature nor the corporate world view of the world as universal. However, I was expecting Corey Ross to further discuss the relationship between humans and their environment in terms of the basic principles supporting their definitions of themselves and their world. I would mention three principles that seem to be shared by societies most involved in a violent relationship with their environment.

First of all, these societies have developed anthropocentric perspectives that tend to organize the world in a hierarchy that positions human beings as above the rest of the living world, and the earth as a human planet, rather than a living planet. For further discussion, see Robert Redfield (1955) for an early iteration of the differences between cultures dominated by domestication and industrialization, where other-than-human

living beings, as well as land and water, are resources to be owned and exploited (necessarily anthropocentric), and cultures where the notion of domestication is ignored (biocentric). Second, they establish a fundamental difference between humanity and other living beings. The biblical cosmos is a good example of that separation, reflected in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions. This exploitative perspective is supported by representations of God as having given dominion over the earth and its inhabitants to Adam and his descendants (see Linnéa Rowlatt, *Weathering the Reformation* (2024), for an exploration of explicit articulations of this idea by early Protestants). The Chinese ethnocentric cosmos is another example of this principle.

To obfuscate the plundering of natural resources and our lethal habit of considering ourselves - whether as humans, as rational beings, or as men - as apart from and above nature, we call it 'development' or 'natural resource exploitation.' Given the present political, economic, and climatic state of the world and the level of violence it generates and promises to further generate, Steven Pinker's optimism, his embrace of capitalist development, and his easy dismissal of the consequences of global climate changes are no longer possible options.]

Chapter 17, 'On cool reason and hot-blooded impulses: Violence and the history of emotion' by Susan K. Morrissey, approaches the history of violence from a new and contemporary perspective, the history of emotion being a rich but relatively new field. In her words: "This chapter draws on the research in the history of emotions to interrogate some of [Pinker's] foundational categories and to suggest some alternative perspectives." (294) Those foundational categories include a binary system where the realm of emotions is understood as standing in opposite to the 'hard-boiled faculties' (reason, control, and fairness).

In positing the faculty of reason as the single most important driver of the alleged decline of violence in the West since the Enlightenment, [Pinker] also attributes much of the underlying source of violence to untamed emotions, which he locates within the structures, systems and circuits of the brain and describes in terms of instincts, drives, urges and impulses. [...] A binary opposition thus shadows [Pinker's] historical narrative, in which reasoned self-control progressively displaces emotional anarchy, first among western Elites and then 'trickling down' unevenly to plebeians and the non-Western World. (293)

Apart from most readers' negative reactions to an explicit statement denying primary access to reason to most of the people in the world, Morrissey points out that Pinker's synthesis relies on at least three very shaky foundations, if not more: First, the idea that violence is irrational is founded on a simplistic dichotomy between emotions and reason, which, though popular in some circles, does not seem to have taken into consideration

any recent scholarship on the history, anthropology, or psychology of emotions. Second, even though binary models are easily constructed and popular in their simplicity, they may not, and in this case do not correspond to any concrete process. The third shaky foundation in Pinker's grand vision is Norbert Elias' notion of a 'civilizing process,' mentioned above, supported by Sigmund Freud, and borrowed by Pinker to interpret the individual experience of emotions as similar to the social experience of emotions.

Since Pinker assumes that all people think in the same ways and share the same mental patterns, cultural differences are not even mentioned as a possibility in this ahistorical model of universal human nature. By taking emotions as a biological substrata, cultural differences are superficial irrelevancies to him and both for an individual and for a society, emotions vary in accordance with a mental age that depends on one's capacity for maturity. The corollary of this grand narrative is, of course, that one can now oppose the mature West to the childish Other.

Morrissey brings together three main humanistic disciplines to offer alternative perspectives: psychology, history and anthropology. A growing body of research among them reveals major variations in emotional life and expression across time and space, with many languages possessing distinctive emotion concepts that do not translate easily and change over time. Even the English term 'emotion' only dates to the seventeenth century, when it was introduced from the French.(296) For instance, she mentions that we can now perceive how emotion has functioned as a discursive category, one that Western culture has persistently relegated to the lower element in a series of hierarchical and interconnected binary opposition: reason/emotion, rational/irrational, mind/body, masculine/feminine, culture/nature, civilized/savage. It is worth stressing that these binaries are neither innate nor unchanging, but they are important here precisely because of their centrality in Pinker's thesis.(297)

[These binaries are also important because Pinker did not invent them; they belong to his own society and his own culture and are part of his scholarly heritage, and they are still reiterated from time to time, mostly to justify violence against the lower element of the binary. Many cultures adopted a form of dualism as a root principle of their world view, and the Western world is not alone in relying on a form of hierarchical dualism as a basic principle. The Russian and the Chinese civilizations, as well as some African kingdoms, are built on similar ideas that support their hierarchical sociopolitical systems as well as their dominant philosophies.]

Morrissey reminds the reader of Pinker's assertion that the logical development of reason is sufficient in itself to insure the eventual end of violence; empathy is not enough and too constrained. Reason is not constrained. As follows:

Once it is programmed with a basic self-interest and an ability to communicate with others, its own logic will impel it, in the fullness of time, to respect the interest of ever-increasing numbers of others.(304)

Note here the emphasis on gradual advance of peace, which Morrissey describes as 'quietism.' Indeed Pinker explicitly rejects political demonstrations, public actions, and mass protests as 'de-civilizing' events that may derail the advance of reason. Moreover, since in Pinker's view, reason is decoupled from emotion, it can never be associated with violence. Morrissey tests this neat delimitation by inquiring about the scientists involved in the making of war weapons or tools of environmental destruction. The impossibility of justifying rational and logical acts of violence short of minimizing these cases as accidental or isolated incidents is obvious.

Morrissey then examines Pinker's views on revenge, one of the 'inner demons' opposed to his better angels and responsible, according to him, for countless conflicts as well as serving as a major cause for violence. Pinker, of course, finds revenge to be amenable to the intervention of reason. Morrissey identifies a major lacuna in Pinker's approach, however: his failure to theorize the social, that is, the ways supposedly individual psychological urges and drives are also somehow 'shared' by collectives and change over time.(311)

Morrissey addresses the same critique to much of Pinker's approach to emotions, to reason, and to his brand of evolutionary psychology. Together with a universalist perspective that blurs differences of all kinds and cannot even consider the effect of context, she concludes that it fits with a reductive, ahistorical definition of violence.

[Morrissey's work provides an elegant and informative survey of the sciences focusing on emotion. Whether history, anthropology, psychology or biology, these new sciences, ignored by Pinker, deserve attention. They also offer Morrissey the opportunity to mention the cultural context as an important factor in the process and form of violence to which one is confronted. And most importantly, it allows Morrissey to talk about violence as a social phenomenon.

A similar set of ideas is at work when dealing with the world of emotion, their definitions, viewed as processes, in their social, historical and cultural context, rather than as the almost archetypal ideas presented by Pinker. Finally, to bring emotions, as Morrissey does, in the larger context of the series of the binaries that are so commonplace in our world, gives the reader a glimpse of the emotional power of these oppositions as figures of speech, as political agendas, as ways of speaking, and as reasons for acting.]

Part 5: Chapter 18 - Coda

Part Five (Chapter 18) contains the volume's conclusion; it is entitled 'Pinker and contemporary historical consciousness,' and written by Mark S. Micale, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. He begins his Coda by reiterating the methodological principles on which history is built as a discipline and moves into a list of twelve significant deficiencies that beset Pinker's grand synthesis. In the end, says Micale. "His work does violence to history." (321)

Then, instead of querying how historians as a community of professionals have responded to Pinker's philosophy of human betterment, an issue already addressed by his colleagues and one that could be addressed simply with a recitation of recent events, Micale asks, "Why study history at all?" (323) Assessing the various answers to this question from different historical periods (since history as a discipline has a history of its own), Micale locates Pinker's 'History' within a paradigm that belongs to the past, not to our century. Indeed, the responses generated from this question have changed with Western culture: from chronicling the lives and deeds of famous individual men (starting in the Classical period and lasting more than a millennia) to uncovering the unfolding of God's purpose (emerging from major texts of the so-called Great Religious Traditions) to the spectacle of virtuous, powerful, or learned men engaged in the grand work of world maintenance (during the Enlightenment) to a new vision enmeshed in the notion of progress:

The nineteenth century, particularly in the British Isles during the long Victorian/Edwardian period (1837-1914), produced a fourth paradigm of historical meaning. This model has, since the 1930s, been labelled Whig history writing. In the Whig outlook, history represents first and foremost a steady advance towards a future quasi-utopia in which the principal traits being chronicled will reach their fullest possible realization. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, sweeping moral narratives of this sort focused on a variety of themes: freedom, happiness, enlightenment, constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy, science and technology, and civilization itself. These stories tended to divide people and events into good and bad. There might be challenges and setbacks along the way, but eventual triumph was a matter of historical destiny. (323)

Obviously, Steven Pinker's understanding of the steady advance towards the end of violence fits nicely with this list of Whiggish historiography. Today, however, few people adopt any of these paradigms and most historians stay away from the Whig historiographical tradition.

This sea change was prompted by a simple realization: that all the earlier paradigms had excluded the experience of the vast majority of human beings

who lived in the past. Among those omitted were such numerically massive segments of people as women, peasants, workers, and the poor. Earlier modes of writing history also excluded entire categories of people who - by dint of their national, ethnic or racial identity - constituted minority populations in the societies under study. Geographically speaking, these past accounts left out much, if not all, of the world outside the author's own civilizational orbit. (324)

Recent historiography is much different due to this realization, and historians today are working steadily to recover previously ignored or excluded people and topics, including becoming aware of the unavoidable ideological implications of methodological decisions that are part of scholarly work.(324) This paradigmatic change is well represented by the authors of the chapters composing *The Darker Angels of Our Nature*. Ignoring the nature and reach of this shift may partly explain Pinker's shortcomings, but it does not excuse them. By all indications, Steven Pinker remains oblivious to the growing shift of historical consciousness.

As far as the history of violence is concerned, contemporary scholarship has profoundly modified its context. Unavoidably, it is uncovering 'the good, the bad, and the ugly.' Detention camps, prisons, hospitals, hidden sites and far away places, even slave ships, or the American transcontinental railroad are all now the locus of scholarly inquiry. While history used to be written by the victors, it now strives to include the perspective of the losers. Military historians, for example, are now likely to spend as much time discussing the experience of civilians, including women, children, prisoners and [refugees](#), as presenting the achievement of male combatants and their leaders.(326).

Events of mass mortality, which previously received little attention outside of local or regional news, are now for the first time being integrated into global history. The Taiping rebellion in Southern China (1850-64), which resulted in 20 to 30 millions deaths; the Paraguayan war of the 1860s, which did away with 70 per cent of Paraguay's adult males; the so-called Holodomor of the early 1930s which starved to death millions of ethnic Ukrainians; and the Hindu-Muslim massacres following the partitioning of India and Pakistan in 1947 are examples of this phenomenon.(327)

Indigenous history and colonial/postcolonial studies are now reshaped by new narratives. Genocides like the Mendocino Indian Wars (1846-73), that saw a initial population of 310,000 in 1769 reduced to 16,277 people in 1880, are being painfully analyzed and the fact that support for the the massacres spanned the entire colonial social hierarchy, from settlers to governors, is unveiled. Such historical work has consequences: For instance, based on the publication of the research undertaken by Carolin Elkins (this volume) on the events surrounding the British decolonization from what is now Kenya and the genocidal

treatment of the Kikuyu people, the British government was brought to court in 2009 and now acknowledges its responsibility. Elkins' book likens the Kenyan penal network to Soviet repression and gulags in Siberia.(330) This British government was brought to court in 2009 and finally acknowledged its responsibility, issuing an official apology and agreeing to compensate 5228 Kenyan survivors who were imprisoned and tortured, as well as subsidizing a monument to the victims of torture under British rule.(331)

But whether studying mass killings in such places as "Turkish-controlled Armenia, Nazi-occupied Central and Western Europe, Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, and Khmer Rouge Cambodia,"(332) or retracing the genesis or militarization of police work, contemporary historians cannot remain unaware of the political aspects of a contemporary history of violence. That reinforces the necessity for rigorous methodologies and transparent ideological positioning.

Conclusions

Dwyer and Micale's edited volume *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* is an important book. The informed corrections brought to Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* are only one of the reasons for my opinion. *The Darker Angels* also acts as a guide to Pinker's readers in identifying the source of their disquiet and sometimes outrage, as well as the loci of agreement or even enthusiastic approval for some of his statements. It gives access to the processes at work in Pinker's argumentation, provides a critical analysis of Pinker's sources, and a context for Pinker's affirmations. More importantly though, for those interested in the history of violence in the human world, *The Darker Angels* offers a better alternative to Pinker's books by providing a wealth of reliable data covering a much wider reach, with an awareness of the ideologies at play.

For readers looking for a gendered perspective on violence, which is not one the goals of this book, several aspects of this history of violence are nevertheless interesting. Having noted that women *per se*, and gender in general, did not generate much focus in Pinker's *Better Angels*, they can still find several aspects of gendered violence brought to light in *The Darker Angels* that directly and specifically address this issue.

First of all, we can take it for given that women as active individual historical figures are practically absent in Pinker's account. In Dwyer and Micale's *The Darker Angels*, however, two chapters (Chapter 8 on domestic violence in medieval times by Sarah M. Butler and Chapter 14 on sexual violence by Johanna Bourke) treat women like all other victims of violence usually generated by men. That is, women are only considered as such as far as they are involved in violent processes, on par with the other actors. This is an interesting standpoint because it leads us to place violence against women within its larger context, which is that women are not always victims of violence because they are women, but also and perhaps more generally because they live in a context of violence. It has been

demonstrated by Peggy Reeves Sanday, among other anthropologists, that societies with a strong matricultural systems, including most of the matrilineal societies, maintain a social context where violence against women is markedly less tolerated (and children better treated), and that even males members of such societies tend to exhibit much less aggressive behaviour toward each other.

Invisibility surfaces in one modality or another in every chapter of *The Darker Angels* and especially in Chapters 11 and 18, without, however, being singled out as a particularly potent quality of modern violence. I would like to make several remarks about invisibility here.

- A) This invisibility is reinforced with the increase of the size of the population being assessed. The invisibility of violence is mentioned repeatedly, especially when dealing with the official nature of Pinker's proxy for measuring violence (homicide). While court cases of murders and military battle deaths are counted, instances of wife abuse, civilian deaths from bombing a city, or deaths resulting from policies leading, among other consequences, to poverty, incarceration, and malnutrition are not counted. But invisibility also results from a culture of silence practiced by the victims as well as the surrounding community (shaming the victims of rape and spousal abuse, for instance). It is also a direct goal of state policies enacted in agreement with a cultural context that does not mind violence as long as it is not seen.
- B) Indeed, the invisibility of violence is not just a question of being or not being counted in statistics. It is a systemic social quality of a hierarchical or class society where wealth means having a recognizable name, status, or identity. Anonymity has its consequences; what happens to anonymous members of a group does not matter in societies like this, and what happens to members of a group considered as socially inferior is not perceived at all.
- C) For women and people not considered as social actors, but as passive victims or side-casualties, this invisibility is an invitation to forced obedience. It is easy to dehumanize migrants, poor people, slaves, workers, children, strangers, and other so-called lower forms of life, including women. (See *L'enfant et la raison d'état*, or *The Child and the State: The intervention of the State in Family Life* by Philippe Meyer for a chilling demonstration of this process.)
- D) Last, but not least, invisibility is acknowledged as frequently resulting from the story of events – their history – being written by the winner of any conflict.

From an anthropological perspective, invisibility often results in neglect, but neglect, in the right circumstances, can lead to a certain freedom. For instance, among the North African Kabyle (who are a branch of the Berber group and consequently enjoyed a strong

matricultural system), following the Arab conquest, the Muslim state brought all its power to bear on men and boys, with the goal of bringing them socially and culturally into the Islamic community. Kabyle women, being of negligible value, were left to themselves and, consequently, were able to continue Berber traditions, rituals, and values within their villages. For another example, in Korea, shamanic practices were forbidden by the Confucian philosophy introduced by China, which placed men and their sons in charge of public life. Men and rich families had to follow the rules, but poor women remained invisible in the most miserable parts of the cities, as in remote rural communities. These marginalized women kept the healing practices alive until they could re-emerge in the twentieth century as the embodiment of Korean cultural identity.

It must be noted that one central process to Pinker's theory remains partly unchallenged. In direct contrast to the rather quick deductions by Pinker and Norbert Elias about the effects of 'enlightened' education, there emerges from the scholarly analysis of Pinker the disturbing shadow of a blueprint for the inculcation of violence into the young of Western society, especially young males, who, in the course of their becoming 'civilized,' are fed a systematic but implicit - and therefore invisible - set of violent principles for social life until these principles are embedded in their psyche as unquestioned. These principles are not innocent. Among the most disturbing of these principles are the following ones, which are actually easier to spot because they correspond to those explicitly stated by Pinker himself the course of his argument:

- First, assume it is a bad world out there.
- Then, divide the work into civilized and barbaric. The barbarians are nasty, violent and emotional; the civilized are polite, restrained, and able to reason.
- Above all, consider that 'we' are the ones who are civilized beings, while most, if not all, the Others are barbarians, at least until we can (if possible) teach them or make them be like us by integrating them into our world from the bottom up. The Others include servants, the poor, strangers, animals, or any unexpected kind of Others, including most women.
- Add to this the notion that, with a few exceptions, emotions are bad.
- Define children as barbarians and, therefore, without reason or self-restraint, who have to be shaped (by force if necessary) into civilized adulthood.
- At the same time, consider the barbarians identified above as children who have to be managed. The qualities that will make civilized beings and, therefore, a peaceful society have to be imposed from the outside by adults, and elite, or colonizers.
- Violence is acceptable, if not necessary, as long as it is legal or allowed by the State.
- An individual and a society are built on the same model and grow in the same manner: They both need a restraining and organizing structure (reason/a state), efficient and productive access to resources (exchange/commerce) according to

one's capacity in an evolutionary competitive system (Wealth is a measure of man).

- Culture, collective memory, and community ties are by-products of human activities that matter less than economic or technological productivity.

From an anthropological perspective, these principles are actually strong indicators for a society led by an elite cut off from their own social context, from their own emotions, and even from the natural environment, leading to a rather dystopian future for our world. They also make for a rather sad education system.

The new international communication networks, with all their promise as well as their dark side, and the new realities brought by global climate changes are going to profoundly modify the world as we know it, bring countless opportunities for old and new forms of violence. We already know that people on the move, whether immigrants, refugees, or victims of climatic catastrophes, are direct targets for abuse and exploitation when they are not abandoned to their own meagre resources. Global solidarity does not fit well in the workings of the happy capitalist world announced by Steven Pinker. However, Pinker's world could itself be only an illusion. *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* provides us with better tools for approaching the future.

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