Women as Creators and Subjects Across Disciplines and Cultures

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To all the women throughout his/herstory
whose artistic creations of all sorts
are as yet undiscovered
and/or have been misattributed
and/or have been suppressed or destroyed.

CONTENTS

Part II Women as Creators and Subjects

PREFACE

The content in this book crosses multiple world cultures as the chapters highlight women, both as creators (by) and as subjects (about). Chapter topics address widely varying socio-cultural facets of multi-cultures from various historical, sociological, artistic and literary perspectives. *Women as Creators and Subjects*, in that order, summarizes the content, which begins with commentary on women as creators and moves to elucidating *about* women to establish a framework. Themes of the chapters range from power and politics in regards to Aztec and/or Arabic women's bodies, various roles of historical indigenous, Spanish, Latin American and Latinx women, and female participation in development efforts in the Global South[1] to studio art, i.e., visual representations of women by women and as female muses and/or subjects for male artists--plus all manner of works and genres featuring women in works literally by a litany of women artists writers, both in literature and film, from the Middle East, Global South, Europe, and the Americas, as well as women represented in works by men.

First in a planned series of volumes with Cambridge Scholars Publishing, *Women as Creators and Subjects*, as part of the *Across Multi-Cultures* series, expands the scope from that of a prior eight-book series, *Indigenous and Hispanic Worlds*,[2] seven volumes published by Sussex Academic Press and the eighth volume published by the Liverpool University Press.[3] While, like the prior series, still consisting of collaborative efforts and likewise including content on groups of directed foci from American (Indigenous, Latin American, and Latinx) and European (Iberian) cultures, this series branches out to cover other European and indigenous cultures, as well as Middle Eastern (Syria), Northern African (Morocco) and the Global South (defined as South Asia, much of Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa) content for comparative and contrastive purposes.

Admittedly, the systematic inclusion of all sorts of works by women in the "canons" (or at all, in some cases), as well as of amplified information about the historical efforts by women in the arts and life in general, in addition to how women have been characterized in socio-cultural and artistic fields, changed fairly dramatically by the mid-twentieth century--but not until then and piecemeal at that! Basically, until the mid-twentieth century, any

woman mentioned in any of the various canons was limited to a few of those women so-over-the-top in active accomplishment in any field that they could NOT be ignored (including not a few monarchs who held such status and privilege as to "get away with" their activities). Examples like the Egyptian pharaoh Cleopatra, the Greek poet Sappho, Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine (France and England), the Mexican Baroque nun/writer Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Queen Elizabeth I of England, artist Artemisia Gentileschi of Italy, emperor(ess) Catherine the Great of Russia--and precious few even in the first part of the twentieth century, e.g., Marie Curie, the Polish/French first female Nobel Prize winner (for the discovery of radium), the prime ministers of Israel and India, Golda Mier and Indira Gandhi, the Chilean Nobel Prize winner in literature, Gabriels Mistral and the like. The *overt* historical nearly total absence and/or misrepresentation of female individuals or groups, those aspects, and those associated details, omitted for eons, not to mention contemporary continued *covert* (and overt) sexism and patriarchy in every aspect of very many, if not most, societies, from the basic linguistic to the anatomical to the artistic to the political and beyond, emphasizes the need for continued (scholarly and more) focus on women.

Now, in the days of the first quarter of the 21st century, when women's and gender studies programs are being cut from university offerings because *it's all ok*, as more than one of my university students has insisted, when politicians in many countries are publicly calling for and attempting to, sometimes successfully, legislate socio-legal control of women's bodies, e.g., in the U.S., women's health care and reproductive rights;[4] in China, perceived need and political pressure for population growth as provided by women who focus on reproduction, as voiced by a major (male) political figure,[5] it's dramatically STILL NOT OK, in spite of changes. Any number of official studies, books, and sites document that women world-wide are still paid less, denied education in some cultures, and are victims of ever so many more examples of overt and covert discrimination and/or violence.

Immodestly quoting myself from volume 3 (2016) of the just-previous series I edited and contributed content to, *S/HE: Sex and Gender in Hispanic Cultures*--and paraphrasing the introduction to any number of my own presented and published scholarship--along with later asides in brackets: "Women's studies, as an "interdisciplinary discipline," helps scholars to both recover women's lost history [I love the term "herstory"[6] and sincerely wish that so-useful word, along with "shero"[7] and "womym"[8] had entered the vernacular in English for a myriad of reasons] and to deal with woman as [an active] participant in all aspects of society (S/HE 183)." This emphasis is STILL important. However, lest this preface seem a diatribe, I

cite three time-related justifying examples, though perhaps evolved, at least from the English-speaking world.

I remind the reader that in English, for example, the most common references, the words, *women and female,* are derivatives of *men and male*. General practice/belief STILL insists that the masculine is generic, although late 20th Century rigorous linguistic studies provided considerable and convincing evidence that study subjects must see photos containing BOTH sexes in order for them not to choose photos of solely men when the so-called generic *man, mankind, etc.,* references are employed.[9] While somewhat half-hearted attempts to disassociate from the traditional derivative terms, the brief and limited-camp use of *wimmin, womyn, and womxn* and similar terms neither resolved the *man* nor the *womb* aspects, in addition to being associated with at least somewhat specific groups and were never employed (or even generally known outside those specific groups) by the majority of speakers of the language. More reasons why the aforementioned three words, *herstory, shero*, and those alternative versions of woman/women are essential, though I'm not using the "alternative" terms religiously in this essay since they are not in common usage by the probable, hopefully greater readership.

A professional example which has evolved includes *Jansen's History of Art*, the textbook *bible* of art history classes and scholarship, now in the eighth edition:

> "According to feminist art historians Norma Broude and Mary Garrard: 'Women artists in the 1950s and 1960s suffered professional isolation not only from one another, but also from their own history, in an era when women artists of the past had been virtually written out of the history of art, H.W. Janson's influential textbook, *History of Art*, first published in 1962, contained **neither the name nor the work of a single woman artist** . . . No, the first edition of Janson's History of Art did **not** include any works by women . . . It was only in the **fourth edition** (1987) that Anthony Janson, the son of H. W. Janson, added **nine women artists** to the text'" [emphasis mine throughout].[10]

Grey's Anatomy, the medical school *bible*, a second example, has followed that trend of catch-up on gender issues and inclusions, as Alan Peterson summarizes in his article.

> This article examines how the multiple-edition anatomy textbook, Gray's *Anatomy*, has portrayed the sexed body and male/female differences during the course of its publication, 1858 to the present, focusing on specific parts of the anatomy, namely the sex organs or `organs of generation,' the

> pelvis, the skull and the brain. An analysis of textual descriptions and graphic illustrations reveals that the male body has been the stable norm or standard against which the female body has been compared and implicitly judged as underdeveloped, weak or faulty. Only rarely has the male body been compared with the female body. Reflecting long-standing views about sexual complementarity and natural differences between men and women, some comparisons emphasize the reproductive functioning of females or imply that females are intellectually inferior. It would appear that the discipline of anatomy has remained largely immune from broader public debates about sexual inequality and gender representations.[11]

This is not to mention that medical clinical trials were, and frequently still are, arguably more frequently conducted with male patients, as if "he" were still purported to be the generic even in the physical world.

Yet, to be more even-handed than gender history in general, some well-known and respected periodicals have published about women, with an ever more common, ever more even-gender, ethnicity, historic, geographic, etc., approach over time. *National Geographic* and *Smithsonian* both spring to my mind from my experience from their inception, 1888 for the former and the latter nearly a century later, 1970. I personally have been reading the former since I began to read, a bit less than seven decades ago, and the latter from its start. From *National Geographic*, I have learned about, and been inspired by, famous individual women (frequently sheros but not always), as well as "generic" groups of women at various times in history, e.g., from Queen Elizabeth of England's coronation (1953) to a photo collection of various women from 30 countries across the world (2018)--and all sorts of articles in-between and after, like about Cleopatra of Egypt, the majority female legislature in Rwanda, indigenous Ecuadorian women of the Amazon, women and safety on the streets of India, and SO much more. *Smithsonian*, too, has featured from *What 1970s Women Did During the Women's Movement* through, *The Unsung* [female] *Hero Who Saved Thousands of Children During the Holocaust* to *New U.S. Quarter Honors Maria Tallchief, America's First Prima Ballerina.* Certainly my daily multiple perusals of the *New York Times* qualify that print-and-online newspaper as one of the more even-handed in terms of sex/gender content.[12] These three examples are just my personal favorites (two reasons why I'm a diehard fan and dedicated subscriber and supporter of both due to quality and inclusive content) but there have been other publications, and even online sites, though with a less mainstream readership but not particularly what I sarcastically term "bra-burning"[13] content, e.g., *Ms.* (print and online) and the recently defunct online *Jezebel,* a self-characterized "feminist U.S. news site."[14]

Continuing on the theme of time and change, the evolution of recognition of, and attribution to, women on all fronts, particularly art museums around the world (to contrast with the early editions history of the textbook by Janson) have made notable strides in gender inclusiveness. The National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., founded 1981, the most prominent museum dedicated to solely works by women, at least in the U.S., recently reopened after a more than two-year building renovation. The website cites the holdings at "5,500 works from the 16th century to today created by more than 1,000 artists."[15]

Continuing on the progress made worldwide in terms of women taking active roles on the political leadership scene, I have proudly touted to students in my classes in Spanish that 14 Hispanic American countries have elected women as presidents! But I was recently shocked to be able to document, upon research, that approximately *eight dozen* countries in the world have elected or appointed women to lead their countries formally, 31 of those on two to four different occasions, and 27 additional countries have put women in "acting" status in such roles. Frankly, so many countries in the world have had or have female presidents or prime ministers, and in not just a few perhaps culturally unexpected countries to have done so,[16] (not counting monarchies, which have also had quite a number of active female leaders apart from the royals themselves) that it might be easier to list those countries which have still only had male leaders thus far--one glaring example being in the United States of America. In fact, the U.S.A. actually elected a female VICE president for the first time in the presidential 2000 election!

One last brief concern in this *Preface*, addresses that there are those who believe that emphasis on study of topics by and about women constitutes a sort of reverse discrimination. Admittedly, there are times when women manifest what could be interpreted as stereotyping men, albeit in a so-called humorous manner. For example, a few years ago, my BFF (as the youth of today characterize) gave me a holiday-themed printed tea towel about which we have laughed a lot privately as we accomplished a myriad of holiday-associated tasks usually ascribed to women, in addition to our end-of-semester professional tasks. Said towel notes that "Three Wise Women would have asked directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, brought practical gifts, and there would be peace on earth."[17]

More pointedly, and hopefully now in the mainstream of literary criticism, (we) women professionals have moved on from situations of what I consider

to have been reverse discrimination, as occurred in a personal anecdote. In the early 1980s, I presented at a conference dedicated to critique of literature by women, held in another country, where a second woman presenter, whose ethnicity/cultural heritage was from that country, yet her ability to speak that language was non-existent, (now all these years later, she's a very famous and successful writer--and fluent) verbally excoriated male presenters for their audacity in presenting papers based on literature by women. This was certainly a dramatically different situation from that private humor of the silly tea towel Surely, as I have repeatedly emphasized to my students of both sexes/genders thereafter, any critic of any sex/gender can explicate—and ascertain and relate to the emotions, in order to relate to the message. Those of us who do translations know that there are literal words—but more importantly, there are messages those words figuratively interpreted convey. Finally, then, this volume includes chapters by whatever sex/gender about artistic works by and about women.

Rather than elucidate the how and/or why the contents of this volume contribute to the aforementioned evolution of recognition here in the *Preface*, such commentary, as well as segues from sub-theme to sub-theme and from chapter author and content to chapter author and content precedes each thematic section as an introduction, with a little background for, and a guide to, the content of the chapters within. And, notably different, as most of the world, including academia, has changed to a generally more informal style, especially among the younger generations, in this volume I/we refer to each other and, frequently, the subjects of our studies, by first names.

Notes

[1] "The Global South is a term that broadly comprises countries in the regions of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia (without Israel, Japan, and South Korea), and Oceania (without Australia and New Zealand), according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)." Global North and Global South - Wikipedia.

[2] Sussex Academic Press | Independent Publishers Group (ipgbook.com) and Liverpool University Press.

[3] Listed by abbreviated titles and in chronological order of publication, those volumes are *The Body: Subject and Subjected; Insult to Injury; S/She: Sex and Gender; Family, Friends and Foes; Crossroads; Death and Dying, Sustenance for the Body and Soul,* and *Rites, Rituals and Religions.*

[4] Ashika Manu, *The Politicization Of Women's Bodies In The Ongoing U.S. Birth Control Debate* – The Organization for World Peace (theowp.org).

[5] Alexandra Stephenson and Zixu Wang, *China's Male Leaders Push to Get Women to Stay Home for Family* - The New York Times (nytimes.com), Section A, Page 10, Nov. 3, 2023.

[6] "Herstory is a term for history written from a feminist perspective and emphasizing the role of women, or told from a woman's point of view. It originated as an alteration of the word "history", as part of a feminist critique of conventional historiography, which in their opinion is traditionally written as "his story", i.e., from the male point of view. The term is a neologism since the word "history"—from the Ancient Greek word ἱστορία, or more directly from its Latin derivate *historia*, meaning "knowledge obtained by inquiry" is etymologically unrelated to the possessive pronoun *his*. In fact, Roman languages originally attribute the word to the feminine grammatical form, for instance *la storia* in Italian--the Romance language most resembling Latin. The *Oxford English Dictionary* credits Robin Morgan with first using the term "herstory" in print in her 1970 anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful*." *Herstory - Wikipedia*.

[7] "Just recently, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* included a brand new word in their index: 'shero,'" according to the website: Shero: The New Word You Didn't Know Your Vocabulary Needed (readunwritten.com). The Content Authority goes further: "When it comes to discussing heroes, the gender of the person being referred to is often overlooked. The term hero is often used to describe both male and female individuals who perform heroic acts. However, in recent years, the term shero has emerged as a way to specifically recognize and celebrate the heroic actions of women . . . a hero is typically defined as a [active male] person who is admired or idealized for their courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities. They are often seen as a symbol of hope and inspiration for others. On the other hand, shero is a term that specifically refers to a female hero. It is often used to highlight the accomplishments of [active rather than the passive heroine waiting for her prince to save her] women who have overcome obstacles and achieved great things. While some may argue that the term hero can be used to describe both men and women, the reality is that language matters. By using the term shero, we are able to specifically recognize and celebrate the contributions of women in a way that is often overlooked in mainstream media and culture. It's important to acknowledge the struggles that women have faced throughout history, and continue to face today, in order to fully appreciate the significance of their accomplishments."
https://thecontentauthority.com/blog/hero-vs-shero

[8] "*Womyn* is one of several alternative political spellings of the English word *women*, used by some feminists. There are other spellings, including *womban* (a reference to the womb or uterus) or *womon* (singular), and *wombyn* or *wimmin* (plural). Some writers who use such alternative spellings, avoiding the suffix "-man" or "-men", see them as an expression of female independence and a repudiation of traditions that define women by reference to a male norm. Recently, the term *womxn* has been used by intersectional feminists to indicate the same ideas while foregrounding or more explicitly including transgender women and women of color. Historically, but unrelatedly, "womyn" and other spelling variants were associated with regional dialects (e.g. Scottish English) and eye dialect (e.g. African American Vernacular English)."
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Womyn

[9] Lingoda study investigates the importance of inclusive language.
[10] Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrad, *H. W. Janson* - Wikipedia.
[11] Alan Petersen, Sexing the Body: Representations of Sex Differences in Gray's Anatomy, 1858 to the Present
Body and Society 4 (1):1-15 (1998).
[12] For example, the online version to my email of *The New York Times* on November 26, 2023 alone included guest essays by Kelly Barnhill, a female writer who suffered a traumatic brain injury and has had to learn to write again; *The Witch Hunt Underway in Russia* [for feminist women as defined by the government], by Vasilisa Kirilochkina; a historical piece, *Who Was the Real 'Shaved Woman of Chartres'?* by Valentine Faure; and how not only the single professional women, the *shen nu* or 'leftover women' over 27, but other *Young Chinese Women* [are] *Defying the Communist Party* [in regards to the aforementioned push for traditional marriage and childbearing and other sexist repressive policies] by Leta Hong Fincher.
[13] Jone Johnson Lewis debunks the characterization of feminists as bra-burners in her July 3, 2019 article, *The Myth of the Bra Burning Feminists of the Sixties* on ThoughtCo.: "Telling stories is what we humans do, and in some cases, veracity be damned if the truth isn't as colorful as what we can make up. Then there's what psychologists call the Rashomon Effect, in which different people experience the same event in contradictory ways. And sometimes, major players conspire to advance one version of an event over the other. Take the long-held assumption, found even in some of the most respected history books, that 1960s feminists demonstrated against the patriarchy by burning their bras. Of all the myths surrounding women's history, bra burning has been one of the most tenacious. Some grew up believing it, never mind that as far as any serious scholar has been able to determine, no early feminist demonstration included a trash can full of flaming lingerie. The infamous demonstration that gave birth to this rumor was the 1968 protest of the Miss America contest. Bras, girdles, nylons, and other articles of constricting clothing were tossed in a trash can. Maybe the act became conflated with other images of protest that did include lighting things on fire, namely public displays of draft-card burning. But the lead organizer of the protest, Robin Morgan, asserted in a *New York Times* article the next day that no bras were burned. "That's a media myth," she said, going on to say that any bra-burning was just symbolic. But that didn't stop one paper, the *Atlantic City Press,* from crafting the headline "Bra-burners Blitz Boardwalk," for one of two articles it published on the protest. That article explicitly stated: "As the bras, girdles, falsies, curlers, and copies of popular women's magazines burned in the 'Freedom Trash Can,' the demonstration reached the pinnacle of ridicule when the participants paraded a small lamb wearing a gold banner worded 'Miss America.'" The second story's writer, Jon Katz, remembered years later that there was a brief fire in the trash can—but apparently, no one else remembers that fire. And other reporters did not report a fire. Another example of conflating memories? In any case, this certainly was not the wild flames described later by media personalities like Art Buchwald, who wasn't even near Atlantic City at the time of the protest. Whatever the reason, many media commentators, the same ones who renamed the women's liberation movement with the condescending term "Women's Lib," took up the term and promoted it. Perhaps

there were some bra-burnings in imitation of the supposed leading-edge demonstrations that didn't really happen, though so far there's been no documentation of those, either. The symbolic act of tossing those clothes into the trash can was meant as a serious critique of the modern beauty culture, of valuing women for their looks instead of their whole self. "Going braless" felt like a revolutionary act—being comfortable above meeting social expectations. Bra-burning quickly became trivialized as silly rather than empowering. One Illinois legislator was quoted in the 1970s, responding to an Equal Rights Amendment lobbyist, calling feminists 'braless, brainless broads.' Perhaps it caught on so quickly as a myth because it made the women's movement look ridiculous and obsessed with trivialities. Focusing on bra burners distracted from the larger issues at hand, like equal pay, child care, and reproductive rights. Finally, since most magazine and newspaper editors and writers were men, it was highly unlikely they would give credence to the issues bra burning represented: unrealistic expectations of female beauty and body image. (thoughtco.com)

[14] Jezebel to shut down after 16 years as parent company lays off staff | Media | The Guardian

[15] National Museum of Women in the Arts | Home (nmwa.org).

[16] I list these countries in alphabetically order for a variety of reasons. List of elected and appointed female heads of state and government - Wikipedia

[17] wise men/women tea towel - Search (bing.com)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All clip art featured on this volume's cover and introducing various parts or chapters are in the public domain. From around the world throughout time, these symbols are associated in various ways with the female or feminine, e.g., the Venus sign derived from astrological symbols denoting the planet and representing the feminine; the moon representing the rhythm of time and the cycle associated with the feminine birth, death, and rebirth; *le main de Fatima/hamsa/*Fátima's hand (the prophet's *daughter*) in Islam/five fingers of the hand in Judaism; *urus*, the Norse rune symbolizing life energy of (mother) nature awaiting new growth; the spider web, the creation/weaving of life energy; the butterfly symbolizing feminine grace, transformation and new beginnings; the ancient Egyptian *tylet* or representation of the female genitalia; *Sheela na Gig* from the Irish *Sile na gcioch*, literally "Sheila of the breasts," an architectural depiction of a naked woman or exaggerated genitalia; the star of Lakshmi, a principal goddess in Hinduism; the lotus, associated with goddesses, the bud as virgin and the flower as sexually mature woman; the ancient Egyptian *Shen* as feminine energy; and possibly, the *pempansie*, a West African symbol associated with sewing and energy or creation, etc., are from the site *35 Feminine Symbols of Strength and Courage* (liveboldandbloom.com).

Translations are by the chapter authors themselves. However, the entire translations of Rose Mary Salum's two essays are by Debra D. Andrist, as are several quotes in the chapters by others.

All references to illustrations of artworks and/or literature by Picasso in the chapter by Enrique Mallén are from *The On-Line Picasso Project,* founded and edited by Mallén, authorized by the Picasso Foundation. Request a password at https://picasso.shsu.edu/

All reproductions of images in Jeanne Gillespie's chapter are in the public domain. See image attributions in the chapter text itself.

With reference to quotes and commentary from chapters in previous books in the *Hispanic Worlds* series, volumes one through seven were published by Sussex and the eighth by Liverpool University Press.

PART I

WOMEN AS CREATORS

A

Introduction to Original Works Created by Women: Essay and Short Story

Both writers whose works are included in this first part of the first volume of this series are long-time professional collaborators and personal friends—their influence on my career and life has been extensive! I look forward to their continued interest and participation in the next volumes of this new series with Cambridge Scholars Publishing; reportedly they are already at work on chapters for *Men as Creators and Subjects*, the second volume.

Rose Mary Salum, the author of the first two essays in this volume (and of six either original essays or short stories or critical articles in prior volumes of the *Hispanic Worlds* series (some of which I've translated) and whose literary production was the subject of three chapters I wrote and one that Eduardo Cerdán authored in the previous series), is the exemplar of the student all we professors dream of: s/he who eclipses everything we ourselves--or almost all other students--accomplish! I first met her over twenty years ago in my literature classes for the Master's in Liberal Arts at the University of St. Thomas/Houston, a new immigrant with big aspirations and amazing abilities, a traditional wife-and-mother whose academic pursuits and prowess brought her to the U.S. due to problematic socio-political concerns for her family. She wrote the single best master's thesis I've ever directed (and allowed me to translate and publish her thesis as *The (Spiritual) Body Cured by Alchemy: Francisco Quevedo and His Knowledge of Alchemy* in *The Body: Subject and Subjected*, volume one of the prior series). Since then, she has soared worldwide as a writer and a publisher. She asked me to translate her first collection of short stories, *Entre los espacios*/[which I took translator's license to and wrote justification for] reverse to *Spaces In-Between*.[i] I also published reviews and translations and interviews in her two stunning glossy literary magazines, three in *Visible* and 15 in *Latin American Voices/Literal: Voces latinoamericanas.* Rose Mary's two essays in this first volume of the latest series deal with her

frequent themes of generations of women immigrants and expression of her informed commentary on current events.

Gwen Díaz, my contemporary within a very few months and also a life-long academic both as faculty and in administration, and I discuss just when we did meet--forty plus or minus years ago?—and where, in Argentina or in Houston in a Rice University Mellon Foundation post-doc in magical realism? We discovered another tie and exchanged experiences about relocating to dramatically different cultures, Argentina to Waco, Texas in her case—her 1972 undergraduate degree is from Baylor University--and I became faculty at Baylor directly out of my SUNY/Buffalo PhD program ten years later, moving from assistant to associate professor during 1982-1996! In any case, our usual mutual scholarly interests in Latin American literature by women, have led us both to present at many of the same professional conferences around the world. Though we've never taught at the same university per se, we've invited each other to speak on our campuses and have collaborated on any number of projects. Gwen, like Rose Mary, has risen to the top of the profession in every way. While the majority of her scholarly work has dealt with teaching and publishing literary criticism (including one article about Luisa Valenzuela that I published, "Luisa Valenzuela: Revisionist Mythmaker," in her *Texto, Contexto y Postexto: Aproximaciones a la obra de Luisa Valenzuela*, a volume in the series, *Nueva América*, and one she published about Sandra Cisneros' *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* in *Crossroads*), she has organized many recurring conferences like the *Hijas del Quinto Sol* (at one of which I presented) and all manner of cultural events in San Antonio, Texas (now professor emerita at St. Mary's University there) and Buenos Aires. She interviewed women writers from Argentina (one about Alicia Kozameh, Borges' widow, that she published in *S/HE)* and other countries. In a tie-in with Rose Mary, I reviewed Gwen's books, *Women and Power in Argentine Literature* (interviews and commentary) and her *Buenos Aires Noir/The Dark Underbelly of Buenos Aires* (short stories) for Rose Mary's *Literal: Latin American Voices/Literal: Voces latinoamericanas*. In the last few years, Gwen has begun to focus on publishing original short stories (one published in *Death and Dying* and one currently, in this volume, *Women as Creators and Subjects*).

Note

[1] Houston: Literal Publishing, 2005.

The Metamorphosis of Exile: Generations of Women

Rose Mary Salum
translated from Spanish by Debra D. Andrist

A retro cameo photo showing my grandmother and me in her arms, the summer breeze, the stories of other lands, the accent of their languages, the recipes for exotic food, the longing for a lost Paradise . . . I write this as I reminisce about my childhood, as I understand, perhaps for the first time, that my family has crossed centuries of oceans to get home. That my origins have determined me, have given me the place I now have in the world. That my life has not been static, that my home was never where I imagined it. But which home do I mean? Mine, hers, or that of the generations to come?

They, my paternal grandmother and my maternal grandmother, are no longer with us. Their voices, their prayers, their accents from other lands are gone. But not so the memories, their presence during my childhood or the reasons that forced them to leave the Middle East and make it to the Americas. Nor has the idea of exile and the traces they have left in the city, in the community that received them, left me. Because my life has also been that: a perpetual movement that forced my family to uproot those roots that were beginning to find their way to the depths of the earth. One day, we took them in our arms, threw them behind our backs, and went out in search of new horizons. And those circumstances marked us forever.

The experience was painful, it remains painful in many ways. Because that pain, the nostalgia for the land of our ancestors is inherited but also intensifies as a sounding board when we, who continue their legacy, also experience exile. The great theme of recent decades, as I have said in other essays, is migration. But that phenomenon, to which we refer with sophisticated words, sometimes academic and impersonal, does not include feelings, the circumstances of the soul and what happened to go embroidering with the roots, which means leaving the beloved land. Now we only speak from reason: statistics are collected, graphs are drawn, data is accommodated.

The issue is politicized, those on the left think one thing, those on the right, another. In social networks, they rant against immigrants, non-profit associations that help them. But nothing that marks us as human is said between those boxes of infinite counts or among the chatter of the networks.

And so began that watershed that left a significant mark on my life. Because my move to the United States was abrupt. It happened from one day to the next and all I found was the face that the country showed to the world. That humanitarian virtue, the idea that America is a country of immigrants, sounded false. The reception was imposed. I pretended to be kind but the circumstances, the requirements, the social codes delivered another reality.

When we arrived, and despite the fact that family customs did not indicate so, I already used writing as an artistic and vital medium. First I started timidly, almost without knowing it, even without wanting to. Little by little, writing became an important channel of expression. It was through words that I could recognize my reality and my past. Through them and through them, I began to understand myself, to understand the world. The response from the family was ambivalent. They celebrated it as one who celebrates a little bit to say thank you, but they also reproved it. A woman was to tend to her home, not those artistic inclinations that would lead to nothing, they said. I perceived it as a normal response within the family context but it was not within the work context. A couple of years ago, when I was invited to Rice University to give a talk about my career,#he response was overwhelming when I commented that my family did not support my education. Until then, I had seen it as just another cultural issue when family customs clashed with community customs. These contradictions had to be resolved by attending to family requests or, failing that, hiding them. Now, as I write this essay, I understand the cultural clash that we have been dragging along since my grandparents left Lebanon and went to Mexico in the first third of the twentieth century, to such an extent that we continue to perpetuate customs that promote female illiteracy.

The move to this country had a double effect on my writing; on the one hand, it became imperative but on the other, restrictive.#Sooner rather than later, I began to question, to its very essence, the reason for this creative impecuniousness: Who would understand what I wrote? Did it make sense to do so? Would there be means to publish my texts? Wouldn't it be the appropriate time to resume that dream of mine of the visual arts and abandon these pretensions? The lack of response from the literary media began to frustrate me, even block me. What's the point of continuing to write if no one could understand me and there weren't even the means for them to do

so? On the other hand, the move opened the doors to the possibility of developing internally and without the need for the energy expenditure that for me implied fighting against all the obstacles and family customs. Because, even though my father supported me, my mother and the rest of the family around me, my in-laws, my brothers-in-law, and other relatives represented a difficult obstacle to overcome.

Time was showing me the way, one that was hidden from me at times and at others, was clearly presented. It was a slow process, even though the detachment of my generation also happened immediately after my departure. It even happened before I could conceive of myself as a writer belonging to a group of writers. The orphanhood that this implied was also hard to swallow because one's own work becomes anonymous or almost non-existent when one does not belong to a generation of writers. But it was time that began to offer an accommodation for both my ideas as well as my own adaptation and writing.

A quarter of a century has passed since the accommodation itself was settled. I have been forging a destiny and a professional career of which I could not conceive in my younger years. My cultural activities have given me a home. A very different home from the one my grandparents longed for. It is a home in languages other than one's own. A home that does not perpetuate its customs. A cultural activity that they never contemplated among their ideals. And yet, it is a home just like the one they found after traveling miles and miles in search of a better place for us.

The traces left by exile can create a sense of orphanhood, a deep sense of loss. Hence the importance of seeking refuge in creativity. My grandparents managed to assimilate to a different continent and language. But none of that would have been possible without the primordial human element of creativity. Only through it can new forms of adaptation be conceived. Imagine to think, imagine to adapt, imagine to survive. Accessing it requires reflection and a rich inner life. It demands to stop, to think, to search the soul, and to get in touch with oneself because there is nothing that gives more strength than inner strength. And there is nothing that can happen if we do not imagine it before.

It has been thanks to that inner life rich in creativity and imagination that my family and I got ahead. Now my grandparents are no longer here to guide me. Only the memories remain, my life with them and their legacy. Sometimes I talk to each one and the only thing I see on their faces is a smile of acceptance. And that shelters me, just as their love did while they lived.

THAT'S HOW SIMPLE IT IS

ROSE MARY SALUM
TRANSLATED BY DEBRA D. ANDRIST

A few years ago, my daughter set out to film a documentary that she once called *Ensoulment*. It was a fascinating project because we had the opportunity to interview physicians, intellectuals, and journalists from various disciplines to talk about a topic that, although it is designated under the category of Jungian, is actually better described simply as a universal theme.

I still remember those conversations because they were so brilliant that they soon became a book titled the same. At that time, we had the opportunity to talk with Dr. James Hollis, Dr. Abigail Disney, Rev. Dr. Serene Jones, and amazing academics like Dr. Cynthia Eller, Dr. Anne Fausto-Sterling, and Dr. Debra Andrist, among others. One of those conversations was with Dr. Cynthia Eller who, in a moment of great spontaneity, confessed that the heart of patriarchal society was that men had more physical strength than women. The statement resonated with me in some way because it is still difficult to think that someone would submit to impositions that go against their own essence, their soul or their desires, if not for fear of being punished. And if disobedience implies the impossibility of accessing education, work, freedom of expression or perhaps even facing death, rebellion becomes an unattainable luxury. The coercive capacity of a group can upset any behavior or conviction by changing the future of an entire country.

So what has been happening in Iran in recent months [2023] is extraordinary because, after the death of the 22-year-old Iranian woman with Kurdish roots, Mahsa Amini, a good part of the women in the country have decided that they can no longer cope with this degree of oppression and have taken to the streets despite the risks to which they are exposed. We have all seen the images of women protesting, burning their hijabs, and cutting their hair. They shout "Women. Life, Liberty."

While it is true that many of them wear the hijab and adhere to religious prescriptions, what they really demand is the right to decide for themselves, to lead, as activist Masih Alinejad puts it, a *normal* life. And that translates into being able to sing, to listen to music, to have autonomy over what they wear, freedom of choice and, above all, respect for their individual guarantees.

The activist, who has been the face of the protests from the United States, had to leave her country in 2009 because of the death threats she received. Her life has not been easy since then because her sister has disowned her on television, her brother has been imprisoned and, for thirteen years, she has not been able to see her mother.

The Morality Police—a name that seems to have come out of a science fiction book—has abused its power and has a multiplicity of missing women to its credit. In addition, they have already killed other teenagers and young women since the demonstrations began and show no sign of giving in.

The *New York Times* has justified these marches, which many already call revolution, by the economic situation that the country has suffered since the sanctions imposed by the world have weakened the Persian economy. But feminist human rights defenders say that this has been a revolution started by young women, that their songs ask for freedom, and that their only objective is to free themselves from what has been imposed on them by the mere fact of being women.

In her multiple conversations with the media, the activist does not stop showing her surprise at what she presents as an unusual situation: that in the twenty-first century, women are still second-class citizens. That you must cover your hair and if any bangs peek out, it should be punished, sometimes even with death.

The interesting thing is not that Iran so oppresses half of its inhabitants. The impressive thing is that there is an echo of oppression in a country like Mexico where its femicides are increasing and the government ignores these crimes, society criticizes women for being *unruly* and everyone, in general, turns deaf ears to female pleas as if they were foolish words. It is also surprising that it has been years since society became aware of this very painful situation and that there is still no commitment to stop this crime wave.

If anything, the statistics show a shocking increase.

This deafness also extends to the United States, which is said to be a leader in everything: education, weapons, technology, and a long etcetera. Because it is not only that the Democratic senator of Iranian origin is not showing her support for Persian teenagers, something that says a lot about political hypocrisy, even if she is a Democrat, but that the entire country has left the female population vulnerable. Since access to abortion was reversed, women are questioned every time they go to the pharmacy for some medication, whether they suffer from an unprovoked miscarriage or if, simply, they bet on the freedom of choice of each citizen. Also, drugs that can cause abortion, such as those for ulcers and other maladies, are rationed to women or denied to them on the pretext that they will use them for other purposes. The news shows again and again the treatment they receive every time they go to a medical establishment-- as if the same questions are asked of men every time they feel ill. It is both hard to understand such a situation and that, at this stage of the game, writing articles on this subject must continue.

Thinking of a comparison between the treatment of women in another country and how they are treated in American countries, especially in the United States and Mexico, seems unthinkable. This difference in treatment aims to be only the beginning of a change of status in women's autonomy that could spill over into other countries that call themselves democratic.# The tragedy of the issue is that for these policies to be imposed, the brute force of which I spoke at the beginning of this essay is necessary, and that it is imposed from the most toxic part of a patriarchal society—and that sometimes, certain sectors of women also support it.

In reality, what moves women to reveal themselves and protest both in that Middle Eastern country, as well as those who do it from the Mexican and North American streets, is nothing more than demanding a life where they themselves have the right to life, number one, and to choose over their own daily lives. And that, in theory, should not only be a given but should not offend anyone.

And, much less, it would seem redundant to write it down, to intervene in the most trivial decisions such as what is worn on the hair. It's that clear. It's that simple.

THE PIGEON LADY

GWENDOLYN DÍAZ-RIDGEWAY

In fact, she didn't know the pigeon lady's name but she decided to call her Eleonora, for Eleanor Rigby. *Eleanor Rigby picks up the rice at a church where a wedding has been . . . lives in a dream . . . all the lonely people, where do they all come from?* The woman sang this Beatles melody in *sotto voce* as she thought of Eleonora.

The pigeon lady lived on an old bridge with a broad esplanade adjoining the British Embassy in the center of the *Recoleta* neighborhood. It was a turn of the century bridge with a railing of ornamented columns that reached up to the waist of anyone walking along that romantic, albeit rundown, plaza.

Eleonora would hang her clothes to dry on the railing and bushes. If it was a nice day, one might see the worn-out brassieres, socks of all colors, and tattered pants that the old lady shamelessly left to dry in the sun. At least she was clean, the woman thought, having taken an interest in her. Not so clean, however, was her mane of hair, like a gray medusa, blowing to the four winds. Her long rebellious locks pointed upwards and to all sides.

One time she had come across the old lady making soup in a black pot set on a piece of grill that she had placed over a can with lit coals inside. She scuttled from one side of the esplanade to the other, taking carrots first, then a bunch of parsley, from her bags, and thus, she prepared her meal while talking to herself. She would speak non-stop, conversing with the cats and the pigeons surrounding her constantly, the latter pecking at kernels of corn or grains of rice that Eleonora had sprinkled around her.

But, on this day, she didn't see her at all. What had happened to her? The woman was afraid the authorities might have evicted her with all her belongings. The old lady had accumulated a small treasure of discarded items with which she had fixed up a precarious home on one side of the bridge, nestled beneath the century-old trees. The sun's rays filtered through the ceiling of branches, illuminating the space or, on less pleasant days, dripping rain. For that, Eleonora was prepared. She took advantage of the

rain to collect fresh water in plastic bottles and then she hung an enormous canvas over the columned railing and snuggled beneath it with the cats while the pigeons found shelter in the treetops.

The woman had begun to include this stroll along the bridge in her daily walk. It was comforting to find the pigeon lady there day after day surrounded by her bags and cats. She began to think that the old lady might be waiting for her and, although they never greeted one another because Eleonora only spoke to the cats and pigeons, it was pleasant to see her every day feeding her winged friends, all the while maintaining her monologue--or perhaps it was a dialogue with mute beings.

So, she was disturbed this time when she didn't find the old lady or her belongings. Nor was she there the next day or the next. After a week had past, the woman began to look for her along the nearby streets. Perhaps she had taken refuge in a plaza or the entranceway to some abandoned building. "What would have happened to the cats and pigeons?" the woman wondered. "What could have happened to the old lady? Perhaps she'd been beaten, perhaps the city, in some vain attempt to clean up the streets or make them more secure, had forced her to go somewhere else. Although they might also have relocated her to a shelter for the elderly," she speculated, with a kind of hope against all likelihood.

Her walks had now become daily searches in which she explored, like a detective, the places where the old lady might have settled in. One day it occurred to her to inquire at the British Embassy itself. What a beautiful building, what a majestic palace! The woman marveled at how the old lady should have the Ambassador of England as her neighbor. He performed his diplomatic duties in this sumptuous mansion while the old lady hung her rags on the railing of the bridge contiguous to the embassy. "The two existences, so close, yet so irremediably distant," the woman thought. But she couldn't go into the embassy to ask an employee about the fate of the old lady without even knowing her name. That wasn't possible. But she did have the courage to ask the policeman standing guard at the entrance of the embassy, who answered "'yes,' that he had seen the old lady once or twice, 'crazy, isn't she?' but he hadn't noticed her absence."

Eleanor Rigby, died in a church and was buried alone with her name, nobody came . . . All the lonely people, where do they all belong? The woman sang as she walked along Sánchez de Bustamante, scanning the sidewalks. Was she dead? Just then, as she was losing hope of ever finding Eleonora, muttering insults at anyone who could have harmed the little old

lady for whom she felt strangely responsible, she turned towards the Rivadavia Hospital.

The Hospital had caught her attention for some time now but she had never gone inside because she thought it was closed. The premises were filthy and uncared for. From the sidewalk, she could see the enormous shutters falling to pieces, the paint flaking off, the hinges rusting away. The hospital buildings occupied an entire city block and were all gray and lugubrious. Surely the city had condemned them. But one afternoon, when she was on her way to have coffee in the café El Caballito, on Las Heras Avenue, she glimpsed a guard on duty in the ambulance entranceway. She asked him about the hospital and he told her that "yes, the hospital was open, that there were patients inside, and that the city was in the process of making improvements but it was taking a long time."

So, on that day the woman entered the hospital through the ambulance entranceway, avoiding the barrier that closed the entry to vehicles. She walked along the path that led to the central courtyard where all four of the enormous buildings faced inwards. "How beautiful this garden must have been in its day!" she thought. There were all species of tree, still standing proud, immutable to the passage of time. Only they maintained their splendor. What were once flowerbeds were now tangles of dried weeds, climbing and twisting up and over corroded statues and stilled fountains.

Gray, arid, unattended, it seemed as if all had died there. But that wasn't the case. The woman raised her gaze towards one of the buildings from which the warm aroma of soup wafted on the air. She followed the aroma until she came to some large windows, opaque with grime, but through which she could see kitchen employees preparing a midday meal. It smelled good. In the center of the enormous kitchen, two employees stirred giant pots set on burners. In a corner, another two were cutting vegetables, and close to the window, where the woman stood spying, there were two plump girls pouring broth into soup bowls like the ones used in the old neighborhood taverns.

Encouraged by the aroma of the soup and before the kitchen personnel could become suspicious of her intrusion, the woman quietly drew away from the window and looked for an entrance to the building where the patients' rooms were to be found. It didn't occur to her to check in at the reception desk since the hospital seemed to be virtually abandoned with only a few employees in worn-out smocks entering or exiting the buildings without paying any attention to her.