Women Who Belong

Women Who Belong:
Claiming a Female's Right-Filled Place

Edited by

Marsha R. Robinson

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

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This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4204-4, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4204-4

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INVERTING HISTORY WITH MICROHISTORY
PREFACE TO THE SERIES

Inverting History with Microhistory is a series of edited volumes in which scholars lead us to question the allocation and appropriation of power by individuals in relationship to their societies. Microhistory has a long tradition of fascinating stories about the past that help us interpret the present and shape our immediate future. Microhistory can be as powerful as macrohistory and, therefore, microhistory makes some people nervous.

The oldest microhistory that I have ever read was that of a great hunter standing up to a charging bison. It was painted on the walls of a Lascaux, France cave some fifteen thousand years ago by prehistoric humans. Actually, I "read" the second edition of the story in a full-size reproduction that was created for tourists like me. Even though it has been two decades since I visited that microhistory, its story is so basic that I have not forgotten it. In fact, I have been inspired by its powerful message. In our lifetimes, events happen in a way that can be described as charging bison that suddenly appear in our paths. What we choose to do at those moments is our contribution to the drama of human history.

The oldest stories that I am aware of are stories about individuals who faced overwhelming challenges in particular places. When the stories were told near firelight or by moonlight, the great story tellers could capture the passing breeze and work it into the story. They illuminated the stages of our imaginations with moonlight and fire flare-ups. They held us in a spell as we waited to hear about the choices the protagonists made and the traumas they endured. We remembered the stories and the life lessons of cleverness and foolishness, of bravery and loyalty, of hatred and love. We came to identify each other by the stories we shared. Our stories are where our communities were born. We were members of small communities in those moments and we told microhistories that we could relate to on a personal level.

Along the way, other storytellers introduced new characters such as Nation and Empire. These giants were invading us or we were numbered with them as invaders. Our stories now featured great monarchs and generals who led us or our enemies into macrohistory and who were justified by the metanarratives written by the victors who broadcast these

bigger histories to larger audiences by daylight in imposing and official public places like schools and stadia.

Behind the waving flags of battalions and nations in marketplaces and military encampments, humans continued to gather around the firelight to hear stories of individuals facing the challenges of ever more complex societies with all of the rules and structures that provide order out of the chaos of masses of people engaged in the art of survival. The micro-level stories grabbed us, comforted us, taught us, inspired us, and identified us as individuals who matter.

Inverting History is a series of edited volumes that contain stories about individuals, the challenges that they faced and the decisions that they made. In our globalizing world, we have a challenge facing us. Will our stories of the past unite us or divide us? Will we fight over limited resources or share our knowledge and creativity to overcome zero-sum game local and regional wars? How will we choose to deploy our power to shape the present and the near future? Our resource desperation is charging at us like giant bison.

Stories and Power

Power is perhaps the most elusive prey in history. The hunt for power seems to be one plot in that oldest recorded story in the Lascaux cave. The quest to capture power from the Other is a plot in discussions about adding marginal individuals and groups to official narratives of history. Stories empower their audiences. So, it may be important to control microhistory if one wishes to limit or expand the number of empowered individuals.

Stories about events along the human trek through time influence the allocation of power in the present. Sociologist and historian Charles Tilly saw this connection. “Social pressures,” he wrote, “are path-dependent. That is why history matters.”[1] Tilly identified three types of constructions of past events: metahistory, world-systems, and macrohistory. Such narratives often imbue the Nation/Empire/State with so much power that only superhuman titans like Octavian Augustus or Elizabeth I could discipline these new characters. Ordinary people seem to follow almost mindlessly in their wake, sucked into history en masse by the riptides and crosscurrents of the charisma and superiority of each titan who is singularly qualified to challenge the charging bison of historic moments and trends.

Sometimes, empowered, mindful, ordinary individuals like Fannie Lou Hamer or Napoleon Bonaparte succeeded and that makes some titans rather nervous. Such individuals, whether born into work-a-day families or

as less-empowered nobility, manage to focus the energies of compatriots into a political wedge that threatens the stability of elite castes. Individuals like Joan of Arc, Sundiata Keita, Sojourner Truth, Vicente Guerrero, Aung San Suu Kyi, Benjamin Franklin, Rosa Parks, and Mohandas Gandhi empower ordinary people through their example. Histories about such relatively ordinary people who stood up to the political bison of their times fall into a category called microhistory. Tilly identified this fourth type of history as microhistory which is the study of "the experiences of individuals and well-defined groups within the limits set by large-scale structures and processes."[2] Stories about these individuals have the potential to reinforce or to weaken the power of the official histories that created a comfort zone for the ruling titans.

One scholar whose words seem to express some trepidation over microhistories of ordinary people is Gertrude Himmelfarb, an American expert on Victorian intellectual history.

> Race/gender/class…any part of that trinity involves a considerable revision of the past, but the whole requires nothing less than its deconstruction,[3]

As far as I know, there were people of varying races, social classes, and genders in the Victorian era and many of them were intellectuals who were featured on lecture circuits and in various gazettes. Queen Victoria graced many of them with an audience. Queen Victoria's audiences confess, to some extent, a measure of the diversity of her imperial subjects by race/class/gender and reflect the diversity of her empire's global trading partners. This reality gave me pause when I read Dr. Himmelfarb's words about "women, blacks, Chicanos, etc." She wrote,

> What they are all "clamoring for" is not a place on the periphery of history—that they always had—but at the center, and not intermittently but permanently.[4]

Himmelfarb's comments suggest that history belongs to white male titans and everyone else is relegated to a dream-like story of standing up to charging bison as painted on the wall of a cave.

What if titans fear ordinary people more than they fear bison? This question arises after reading Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon's summary of microhistory as a movement in Europe. Magnusson was associated with the Center for Microhistorical Research in Reykyavik, Iceland. His essay can be used to map a tense space between Tilly's and Himmelfarb's perspectives on the subfield of microhistory. Magnusson wrote that his entry to microhistory occurred around the time of the Ronald Reagan administration. At this time, Magnusson saw that microhistory was tinged

with the residue of European colonialism. He included the linguistic turn, the contribution of Foucault and Derrida, and the microhistory tension between the French *Annales* school and the post-fascist Italian school exemplified by the work of Ginzburg. "In the final analysis," he wrote in 2003, "so far as I am aware, the ideology of microhistory has as yet failed to make any deep and lasting impression upon the discipline at large."[5] If Magnusson is correct, then from his side of the Atlantic Ocean, microhistory must fail as surely as the Lascaux artist recorded the injury of a human who stood up to the charging bison.

Magnusson's assessment, however, leads me to query the trepidation even further by interrogating the very ancient microhistory in the Lascaux cave. As I understand Foucault and the others mentioned by Magnusson, the question underlying those approaches is this: How in the name of titans' History did the colonized subjects ever find the power to topple European colonial administrations? Titanic histories lose power when microhistories are admitted. Therefore, if Magnusson's assessment is correct, microhistory must fail for its success will open up a Tilly-type path that leads to the democratization of global economic power and a Himmelfarb-type reconstruction of the European-dominated global economic order. (Before I proceed, it is important to reveal that I toured Versailles Palace, emblem of French national and imperial power, before I visited Lascaux.) What if the paintings on the wall of Lascaux's caves are an invocation or a spell rather than a history? What if a shaman wished individuals to take on the spirit of the rampaging or charging bison and dominate the other humans and animals of the region? Given that the territory above the Lascaux cave became a stage upon which Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Louis XIV, and Napoleon launched empires, we should leave a door open to the possibility that the Tilly-type residue of the least microhistory, even the simple yet empowering story of a human standing up to a bison, may change world orders on a Himmelfarb scale over many generations and millennia.

According to the oldest story that I have ever read, the crafting of microhistories is older than the crafting of macrohistories. According to Kathleen Canning, the trinity of race/class/gender was practiced in the field of women's history long before it was discovered by Foucault or Derrida.[6] In this subfield, the great charging bison was white male dominance. Women's history had at least two objectives: "the decentering of the Western white male subject and the reformulation of subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict," and an end to the "historical exclusion of women and the identification of human with male."[7] With their pens, early women's historians claimed a permanent place in the narratives of the

past, just as Himmelfarb described.

Historians who factored for race/gender/class show something rather curious, something that is not always so readily apparent in other history. In African American history, the master narrative centers upon slavery, namely that most African Americans entered the American theater of history as conquered commodities. Microhistories of the plantation experience, including abolition literature, often reinforced the idea that power belonged to white males. However, an early African American practitioner of microhistory, George Washington Williams, used his pen in the late nineteenth century to restore African American soldiers to the stage of macrohistories about American wars when he published his *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880; as Negroes, as Slaves, as Soldiers, and as Citizens.* He claimed a place for them in the victors' narratives just as surely as many African American veterans received their pensions. In the history of the nation of India, European dominance is only the most recent hegemony. In the imperial cycles of Indian history, the elite castes eventually shared power with the invaders. Mrinalini Sinha affirmed this with her observation that in Indian history, "neither feminism nor women are ever articulated *outside* macropolitical structures that condition and delimit their political efforts."[8] Such Indian women, along with many American women, were not standing up to the charging bison of social power. In both of these cases, those who are identified by race/gender/class, some African American veterans and some privileged women in India, claim a share of power in the established Nation or Empire. The subjects of these microhistories wanted to run beside the charging bison called Nation or Empire. They reinforce the macrohistory that Himmelfarb did not wish to see deconstructed.

So, while I think that the images painted on the Lascaux caves are the texts of one of the oldest microhistories, I dare not pretend to give an authoritative interpretation of the text. In the same manner, I do not predict that microhistories will undermine official histories. In fact, some reinforce macrohistories, world histories and metanarratives written in the long twentieth century. Microhistories often privilege the experience of an individual or a small group of individuals against the backdrop of narratives about such historical titans as Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Mao Zedong. In these contexts, microhistories do tend to invert the place of historical actors on the stage of the past but they do not always subvert the hegemony. The microhistories in this series recognize that individuals and groups have the agency to support and to reject systems of organizing society.

—Marsha R. Robinson, series editor

Notes

[1] Charles Tilly, “Future History,” in *Theory and Society* 17, no. 5 (September 1988).
[2] Ibid., 706.
[3] Gertrude Himmelfarb, “Some Reflections on the New History,” *American Historical Review* 94, no. 3 (June, 1989): 668.
[4] Ibid., 664.
[5] Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon, “‘The Singularization of History’: Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge,” *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 701-735.
[6] Kathleen Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience,” *Signs* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 370.
[7] Ibid., 371.
[8] Mrinalini Sinha, “Mapping the Imperial Social Formation: A Modest Proposal for Feminist History,” *Signs* 25, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 1078.

INTRODUCTION

WOMEN WHO BELONG: CLAIMING A FEMALE'S RIGHT-FILLED PLACE

MARSHA R. ROBINSON

What happens when we invert the patriarchal hegemony and center the ordinary woman as empowered owner and hostess to her life story? In this volume, we present narratives of some ordinary women who actively stood up to their local patriarchal social structures and whose societal place endowed them with the right to make those patriarchal systems work for them.[1] In several cases, they also showed many men and women in their communities that patriarchy does not work without women's cooperation. Oftentimes, feminist historians write about women's resistance to patriarchy and this can imply a slow state of war that assumes victimhood as the default mode of being female. In this volume, we find that many ordinary women may not have been as defeated as some of us have been trained to believe. Rather, we present several rather ordinary women who chose when, where, how and if they would cooperate with the rules created by patriarchal men. In this sense we have written an inverted women's history.

Why Bother to Invert Women's History?

Why bother to invert the history of women? We should bother to invert women's history because historians know all too well, as the late Eric Hobsbawm made clear, that history is constructed, historical narratives are rarely objective and often the produced interpretation of the data story is disharmonious with the lived experience of the research subjects.[2] We found this to be the case as we looked for signs of women's power in patriarchal circumstances. Taken as a whole, these chapters show that even under patriarchy, there were obligations that men owed women in exchange for women's cooperation with their own suppression.[3] In an

ordered society, one that had a formal legal code or a cultural tradition, women who properly occupied their place were right to make some demands upon the men in their communities. The key for these women was finding the right clause in that social contract. We found several rights available to such women regardless of their social caste.

- The right to be protected
- The right to transact business
- The right to own property
- The right to personal reputation
- The right to legal redress
- The right to community
- The right to cooperation and support in fulfilling the demand and expectations of their social place

To be sure, we found that few of our female research subjects had all of these rights; however, the ordinary women in the following chapters stood up for their rights by using the same social system that on the surface seemed designed to constrain them. We also found that these women often recruited male allies and frequently faced female enemies.

Our findings affirm a consensus that has been emerging with the end of colonial regimes that privileged the idea of white middling and upper class male superiority. As Chandra Mohanty wrote 1984,

> The connection between women as historical subjects and the representation of Woman produced by hegemonic discourses is not a relation of direct identity, or a relation of correspondence or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up in particular cultural or historical contexts.[4]

So, what are the hegemonic descriptions of women?

> An assumption of women as an always-already constituted group, one which has been labeled "powerless," "exploited," "sexually-harassed," etc. by feminist-scientific, economic, legal and sociological discourses.[5]

It is quite true that many women have been exploited and sexually-harassed. It is quite true that many women have been powerless. It also true that many men have been exploited and sexually-harassed and that they have been powerless. Somehow, we rarely speak of male victims and in doing so we construct images of Man as "always-already" predators. Why are we surprised when some men live up to the constructed image? Is it possible that the category of Woman-the-powerless begets Man-the-predator? [6] A decade ago or so, the literature seemed saturated with Woman-

the-powerless and with Man-the-predator until this binary became a cataract and a callous on my scholarly vision, shoving the oh-so-many male victims I know out of my academic world of the Socratic realm of the Real until the day I sat in an audience composed of ethnic cleansing survivors—men with machete scars on their heads and women with hidden scars. That day, I knew what was always true: Power has no gender.

Teodora Todoroval wrote about peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina, she suggested that,

> Since the end of the war post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina has been plagued with the legacy of the civil war and the urgent tasks of reconciliation and reconstruction. The task of reconstruction has necessitated the need to (re)establish democracy and restore a system of law and order; while reconciliation has required a fine balancing act between socio-cultural remembering and forgetting of the war.[7]

We may not want to remember the crimes of mass rape committed during the civil war when we are tourists and we can ignore these lived experiences because women permit us to do so. Woman-as-victim and Man-as-victim "always-already" have the power to disrupt the civil order by making us remember their pain and a dangerous power it is. Todoroval reminds us that consent to political silence is only an anesthesia leaving the memory festering in the homes of victims, watered with tears until it erupts in the next generation as a new plague of violence.

> Historical over-emphasis on the past violations of one's community can result in a victimhood mentality that serves to neglect responsibility and excuse current acts of violence against others, as was the case with the narrative of Afrikaner suffering during the Boer War being used as a tool of legitimisation for the oppressive apartheid regime in South Africa.[8]

Women have been exploited and sexually harassed but their potential power of speaking the Memories often operates beneath the radar of patriarchal, and even of feminist, history for a generation or even longer. Tordoval reminds us of that which we may not want to acknowledge: the Dayton Agreement was written with red ink on parchment from the female body-field of civil war. Such parchments exist throughout global history.

Feminist scholarship often presumes that women everywhere are struggling against male domination because of public evidence but it may not be fair to continue this assumption. For a decade, when I presented this assumption to undergraduate students, many white male students challenged this statement by stating that in their homes mothers and sisters

dominate men and these student challenges happened year after year. Meanwhile, many female and some male students affirmed that many women and men suffer from domestic violence, including some students of both genders who attended class with fresh, visible bruises. I have also taught male and female victims of rape. There is a sub-culture in the United States that shames rather than supports these victims. For example, in the 2012 American electoral campaign season, Republican Missouri Congressman Todd Akin said,

> First of all, from what I understand from doctors, [pregnancy from rape] is really rare. If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.[9]

Akin's comment is born of a Western sub-culture that believes that males have a right to rape. Darlene Clark Hine wrote about this culture as a product of American slavery.

> Black women's sexual vulnerability and powerlessness as victims of rape and domestic violence […led to the] development of a culture of dissemblance among Black women. By dissemblance, I mean the behavior and attitudes of black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors.[10]

Is dissemblance exclusive to Black women? I do not think so. Journalist Bernard Lefkowitz documented another American sub-culture that brings Akin's philosophy out of the category of race and into realm of social class in his exposé, *Our Guys: the Glen Ridge Rape and the Secret Life of the Perfect Suburb* (1997), in which he found a white middle-class, New Jersey suburb with a sub-culture of not protecting their daughters from gang-rape by high school gridiron (football) warriors.[11] The rape culture that Lefkowitz found in Glen Ridge and other communities across the nation is protected by Akin's definition of "legitimate rape." Dissemblance cannot be exclusive to Black Americans.

So, the culture of violence and rape is not exclusive to the Western enslavement of Africans and unfortunately this truth has to be enunciated because it has too often been anesthetized into the realm of Memory and ignorance. Anna Clark linked violence against women and patriarchy with the rise of the Industrial Age in *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*.[12] Here is a history of a violent domestic sub-culture that some of my students continue to experience. It is a culture that transcends class and religion and it operates within a group that Americans call "white." Sadly, too many of my students related to this

history of gender relations. One white male student wrote on his review essay of Clark's book, "Now I know why Dad beats Mom. Thank you." I cannot forget the solace on his face when I returned his assignment; neither can I forget the bruises on other students who may have risked their lives to get an education as the gate out of a life of domestic abuse. I also cannot forget two incidents in which I witnessed a white man beating a white woman on the sidewalks of London in 2003 and dozens of people who simply walked by and offered no assistance. Nor can I forget the female African scholar who confessed to being beaten by her husband because in her community it was simply a factual condition of being married. Despite these incidents, I know that this is not normal behavior even if it has been normalized for some. Each of these victims wore faces that pleaded for personal peace and relief.

Women's history and feminist history and gender history are insufficient projects if solace is the sole product we have to offer.[13] What is the point of fluency in post-colonial discourse or women's history if we continue to validate sorrow with an abundance of case studies that reify and render patriarchy eternal and universal? Is a global community of empathy sufficient and satisfactory? Absolutely not. The project of women's history should not normalize the oppressor and deflate the victim any more than African American history should perpetuate plantation mentality in the minds of twenty-first century citizens. No, the project of women's history ought to be the recovery of stories of healthier gender relations to validate a younger generation that says "Enough!" to violence against people. It ought to serve a generational change current in the global community. As Myra Marx Ferree phrased it,

> Gender is therefore also part of what is being remade in the current reconfiguration of power relations. As with other aspects of this global reorganization, this restructuring involves women and men in a variety of local and transnational settings. Some of these women's movements are feminist, but others are not.[14]

Women Who Belong: Claiming a Female's Right-Filled Place is a collection of microhistories of women who defied their particular culturally proscribed woman-as-powerless model and chose to pursue peace and power in the middle of societies at various degrees of unrest toward women, women's rights, and women's right to place. Some chapters focus on elite women. Others focus on work-a-day women. These chapters present a diverse group of women from areas across Europe and U.S. The volume includes microhistories from the Renaissance to the Great War era. All of the women pursued empowerment by claiming membership in

particular social groups or classes. That membership provided allies and entitlements from social contracts. In this volume we are de-centering the hegemony and inverting the historical narrative to privilege these relatively ordinary women so that we can understand their view of the world and the political power that they possessed. When we finished our work, we had a collection of microhistories that is less about affirming patriarchal hegemony and more grounded in what may be one of the oldest recorded narratives on the planet—the charging bison and the wounded man as depicted by Neanderthal artists on the walls of a cave in Lascaux, France.[15] (Refer to the series preface that precedes this introduction.) Those themes are:

1. Ordinary women are often unsung heroines who successfully slew the bison of patriarchy as it appeared in their lives.
2. Ordinary life, even when gynocentric, is a tapestry of male-female relations that are not always defined by sexual relationships.
3. So many ordinary men allied with these ordinary heroines so often and so loyally that we must continue to question the idea of universal, eternal patriarchy and look for other ways to analyze male behavior because the foe of the charging bison may actually be a union of men and women fighting and defeating patriarchy.
4. Many ordinary men contended with oppressive patriarchal men to stop the abuse of the female body-field and this happens so often in history that we must wonder if extreme feminist binaries may inadvertently convert some men to patriarchy and allow such feminists to join forces with the charging bison of patriarchal oppressors of women.

These are some of the themes that we found as we attempted to understand the rights that our subjects sought to exercise in places where it would have been easy to overlook such rights.

I feel that I have not sufficiently answered the earlier question. Why should we bother to invert women's history? We should bother because women's studies students often enter careers wherein their clients watched Humanity follow Dignity out of their lives. Should we numb our students by reifying patriarchy as universal and eternal? Or should we teach them to look for role models of women of all social classes who found their personal power within the system at hand? *Women Who Belong* is a collection of narratives about women who did exercise power by demanding the rights defined by their social place.

The Case Studies: Women Who Belonged

The women who are the subjects of these articles each faced similar questions. What is the right way to be female in my society? What kind of power does that role offer me? Can I live within that socially circumscribed role and still be true to myself?

Jenni Shelton brings us Isabel de Jésus who was a nun at the Augustinian Recollect Convent of San Juan Bautista of Arenas (near Avila, Castile) in the early seventeenth century. At the request of her confessor, Francisco Ignacio, she dictated her life experiences, or Vida, to prove her spiritual sanctity and to glorify her religious order. Isabel transformed from a pariah into a venerable madre with the help of God, the saints, and the patronage of male clerics. Isabel's Vida not only demonstrates the importance of patronage in becoming a woman religious, it also reveals the conflict that occurred between male clerics and the laity. The male clerics who supported Isabel went against the wishes of her brothers who wanted Isabel to remarry, as well as those of the town who hurled rocks at Isabel in mocking disrespect. Isabel's Vida functions as an oral history of this conflict between the clergy and the local townspeople.

Jennifer Tobin narrates a life of Alida Livingston, great-grandmother of the revolutionary war-time governor of New Jersey, William Livingston, and a woman who faced dramatic social, cultural and legal upheavals during the seventeenth century. New York, originally colonized by the Dutch, faced tremendous changes as it transitioned from Dutch to English rule. Alida, and many women like her, faced significant challenges as English gender ideals became the standard in New York, replacing the "woman as partner" institution modeled by the Dutch. As feme covert became more and more entrenched, women were no longer expected to serve as their husband's helpmates, but were instead slowly relegated to a more ornamental position that displayed the English ideals of wealth and class. Alida Livingston was one of the last of her kind, a woman who forged a livelihood and acted independently of her husband when it came to financial decisions. A savvy business woman, she was one of the few women who actively and successfully participated in the public realm as the colony completed the transition to English rule.

Meanwhile at the Strait of Gibraltar, my own work examines ordinary women's lives at the Restoration garrison of Tangier and its successor garrison at Gibraltar. The arrival of British military units was accompanied by rapine as a war tactic. This atmosphere could not continue if Britain wished to plant a colony and occupy the Straits. British women as wives and entrepreneurs were actively recruited to move to the region. Such

women became so important part to the military-merchant enterprise at the entrance to Mediterranean trade that they parlayed their economy power into political power as they individually and collectively with male civilians and soldiers demanded the military establishment to support many rights for women. This strategy was remarkably successful in the seventeenth century but, unfortunately, this military support declined during the same era in which Alida Livingston experienced greater challenges with feme covert under the new British hegemony.

Ellen Walsh recovers Victoria Adams, an American missionary and daughter of a missionary. Though the United States Constitution did not accompany the U.S. military intervention in Puerto Rico in 1898, many mainland Protestant missionaries eagerly did. Collaborating with the new colonial state and U.S. commercial interests, these missionaries participated in a broad-based, multi-faceted campaign to Americanize Puerto Ricans. Comprising the majority of missionaries, mainland "consecrated women" engaged in health-care, vocational, and academic training in addition to religion-related activities. This article examines the conflict over the appointment of Victoria Adams, "a trifle dark" Anglo-Armenian, as an American missionary to the island. The conflict reveals the influences of race, gender, sexuality, and nation in the construction of "consecrated women" and the differing notions of white racial superiority within the missionary community and on the island. It also illustrates the varied uses of rhetoric and ideology and alliance-building that a skillful subaltern successfully exploited, taking advantage of the fault lines formed by contradictions within the civilizing project in order to gain admittance to and maintain her "right-filled place" in her chosen field.

Chelsea Griffis takes us to an under-celebrated group of suffragists. Ohio women have a long history of political activism in the struggle for political rights. While at times they failed, at other times the women succeeded. The quest for women's suffrage was no different. Although Ohio passed statewide women's suffrage in 1917 and the Nineteenth Amendment in 1919, the fifth state to do so, women were denied the right to vote by numerous referendums between 1900 and 1917. During this time period, the Toledo Woman's Suffrage Association was active in pursuit of equal voting rights. This chapter discusses the different methods of struggle that the suffragists used. It also analyzes whether those methods changed over the course of the early 1900s. Finally, this chapter analyzes whether the women were influential, whether their voices were heard, and whether, in the end, it was their persistence that paid off.

Tina Kibbe presents a women's movement that questions the application of the term "women's movement." At the beginning of the

twentieth century both the eugenics and public health movements gained tremendous support and momentum in the United States. Eugenic proselytizers sought to strengthen society by eliminating its "defective" elements, while public health officials worked to establish normative personal and public hygiene standards. Both movements emerged as significant forces that shaped public policy as cultural and economic changes threatened long-established gender and class hierarchies. Eugenicists and public health physicians envisioned a superior nation of "fit" citizens. Utilizing the authoritative and powerful language of science and medicine, eugenics experts, and, in perhaps less obvious ways, public health physicians sought to implement means of drawing distinctions between "fit" and "unfit" bodies. This chapter examines the juxtaposition of women as eugenics field workers and as public health nurses who participated in the construction of other women's bodies, thus enabling the eugenics and public health experts to often work in tandem to regulate sexual and reproductive behavior in an effort to direct "fit" women toward marriage and reproduction. Simultaneously, they attempted to constrain "unfit" women from doing so—all in an effort to manage the genetic fitness of the American population and to create a "superior" society.

Morgan Denton takes us across the Atlantic to another "women's movement" that challenges women's right to sexuality and employment in the name of creating a "superior" national identity. As marginal figures on the Irish historical landscape, prostitutes provide a window through which one can investigate gender relations and sexuality within Irish society. Both aspects of Irish life were linked definitively to the power of the Irish Catholic Church in the crucial early years of the Irish Free State and with that state's process of defining Irish identity. The Catholic Church promoted the ideal of motherhood within a married heterosexual relationship as the proper role for Irish women. State legislation increasingly embraced this ideal, seeking to police and to regulate those women who acted outside such norms of behavior. By exploring the daily lives of working class prostitutes in Dublin and Cork, historians can illuminate the ways in which personal ethics practiced on a daily basis diverged from and competed with the quest of the Irish Catholic Church and the Irish state to present Ireland as a unified moral, Catholic nation. The interactions of prostitutes both with state authorities and their surrounding communities reveal how wider issues of class and gender informed not only how prostitutes were defined by others but also how prostitutes themselves reacted to and were at times able to resist such categorization, creating an alternative subculture to the conservative Catholic mainstream.

Collectively, these women pursued their rights using strategies available to them because of their location. Some chose to pursue loyalty to self by staying single and finding organizations that supported their decision. Jenni Shelton and Ellen Walsh show us that Isabel de Jésus and Victoria Adams each found power as single women by embracing a role as a protected daughter of the church, much to the ire of some men who preferred to deprive them of their social right to a measure of political rights. Some found power through marriage. Jennifer Tobin shows that Alida Schuyler Van Rensselaer Livingston insisted on exercising her economic rights as a Dutch colonial wife and she found a way to do so by manipulating English law against British feme covert culture. Chelsea Griffis finds that some female Toledo, Ohio suffragists used their social status as elite wives and daughters to reject their disenfranchisement by being New Women within a Cult of Domesticity milieu. Some women, though, found their membership in social groups to be a surmountable liability. Morgan Denton found some educated women who supported the oppression of these working women. Tina Kibbe reminds us that feminists do not only have to deal with men who act to de-power women. In her analysis of the eugenics movement in the U.S., Kibbe reminds us that some women finally acquired the power if they were willing to turn against other individual white women. Racial and gender unity are not always supported by the lived experience of women, just as Ferree suggested. As a whole, these essays remind us of the significance of microhistory in understanding world history as it happened. Each person is born to a particular social place with proscribed behaviors and options. Women have the individual agency to embrace or reject those roles. Some women acquiesce. Some transform the role to suit themselves. These women acquired and used rights in order to be true to themselves as humans and as women situated in particular social places.

Notes

[1] One of the pleasures of women's history is learning about the variety of gender systems around the world and throughout time. For orientations to world women's history, one might consult: Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; Peter N. Stearns, *Gender in World History* (London: Routledge, 2000); Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001). This volume focuses on Western women and for a context to this discussion, one might consult: Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz ed., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977); Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, eds., *A History of Women in the West* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992,

French version, Pion, 1991, original, Rome: Laterza, 1990); Bonnie G. Smith, *Changing Lives: Women in European History since 1700* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Co., 1989); Marilyn J. Boxer, Jean H. Quataert, eds., foreword by Joan W. Scott, *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World, 1500 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Margaret Strobel, ed., *Expanding the Boundaries of Women's History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness from the Middle Ages to 1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Mrinalini Sinha, Donna Guy and Angela Woollacott, *Feminisms and Internationalisms* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); Philippa Levine, ed. *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Angela Woollacott, *Gender and Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

[2] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[3] For more about this approach, see Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

[4] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (Spring-Autumn, 1984), 334.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Mohanty, 338.

[7] Teodora Todoroval, "'Giving Memory a Future': Confronting the Legacy of Mass Rape in Post-Conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina." *Journal of International Women's Studies* Special Issue 12, no. 2 (March 2011): 4.

[8] Todoroval, 6.

[9] Syndicated columnist Eugene Robinson found a context for Akin's comment. "He's obviously talking about what Republicans call 'forcible rape'…The statutory rape of a child by an adult would not fit the definition the House Republicans tried to impose; nor would the rape of a woman who was drugged, say, or who had limited mental capacity. Never mind the fact that, as far as criminal law is concerned, rape is rape…That 'female body' line is not only a frightening glimpse at the dangerous nonsense rattling around inside the heads of some on the far, far right. It is also—in its sheer, befuddled, clueless anatomical ignorance—an illustration of why we need more women in public office." Eugene Robinson, "Todd Akin's Comment Brings 'War on Women' Back to Prominence," *Washington Post* August 20, 2012, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/eugene-robinson-todd-akin-comment-brings-war-on-women-back-to-prominence/2012/08/20/c4570fae-eafd-11e1.9ddc34d5efb1e9c_story.html.

[10] Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 912.

[11] Bernard Lefkowitz, *Our Guys: the Glen Ridge Rape and the Secret Life of the Perfect Suburb* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[12] Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[13] For definitions that distinguish these projects, consult Antoinette Burton, "'history' Is Now: Feminist Theory and the Production of Historical Feminisms," *Women's History Review* 1, no. 1(1992): 25-39. For questions about the privilege of defining feminism, see Oyeronke Oyewumi, "Conceptualizing Gender: the Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenge of African Epistemologies," *Jenda: a Journal of Culture and African Women's Studies* 2, no. 1(2002): 1-9.

[14] Myra Marx Ferree, "Globalization and Feminism: Opportunities and Obstacles for Activism in the Global Arena," in *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights*, eds. Aili Tripp and Myra Marx Ferree (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 5.

[15] See "Panneau de l'homme blessé" (panel of the injured man) at www.lascaux.culture.fr. (accessed on 22 September, 2012). This is a Stone Age painting of a man confronting a charging male bison and the man is injured and falling backward to the ground. For a more scholarly discussion, see Francesco et al, "Neanderthal Acculturation in Western Europe?: A Critical Review of the Evidence and Its Interpretation" Special issue, *Current Anthropology* 39, no. 2 (June 1998): S1-S44.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM TOWN PARIAH TO VENERABLE MADRE: THE REMARKABLE TRANSFORMATION OF ISABEL DE JÉSUS (1584-1648)

JENNI SHELTON

In 1645, the illiterate, indigent, occasionally mad yet ultimately revered *sor* Isabel de Jésus, obeying orders from her confessor Francisco Ignacio, began to dictate her autobiography to fellow nun Madre Inés del Santísimo Sacramento.[1] Over the next several months the two laboriously worked to produce the lengthy autobiography *Vida de la Venerable Madre Isabel de Jesús, recoleta Augustina en el convento de San Juan Bautista de la villa de Arenas dictada por ella misma y añadido lo que falto de su dichosa muerte.*[2] Books I and II, dictated by Isabel, detail her life story before and after she entered the Augustinian Recollect convent of San Juan Bautista. Isabel's last confessor Francisco Ignacio wrote Book III, the biographical portion of this work, when he arranged for its publication in 1675. That Isabel's life experiences were recorded was not unique. Sixteenth and seventeenth century nuns throughout Spain and the rest of Catholic Christendom wrote or dictated their life stories, which centered on their religiosity.[3]

Why did Francisco Ignacio wait to publish Isabel's *Vida* thirty years after her death? It should hardly be surprising. Publication of the life stories of many women religious occurred precisely because their publication would enhance the legitimacy of their religious orders as well as their confessors.[4] In this case Isabel had prophesied the founding of the Augustinian Recollect convents of Serradilla (Cáceres) and La Calzada de Oropesa (Toledo) which her niece *sor* Isabel la Madre de Dios founded in 1660 and 1676. The Augustinian Recollect order considered Isabel's life story to be historically significant, hence its publication in 1675. Indeed, Ignacio's biographical addition to the publication emphasized Isabel's prophetic abilities, something Isabel herself barely mentioned in her

autobiography.[5] Regardless of what motivated Ignacio to publish his penitent's *Vida*, both the autobiography and biography are qualitatively important sources to the historical field because they provide us with insight on what life was like in seventeenth century Castile. The autobiography/biography also functions as an oral history, showcasing the conflicts between women religious, the laity and the religious orders of peasant communities that existed in early modern Spain.

The analysis of women writers such as Isabel is a growing field among historians and literary analysts of early modern Spain. According to Mary E. Giles,

> In an effort to hear women's voices from the past, scholars are turning to convent archives for letters, poetry, plays, accounts of foundations, biography, and autobiography and to Inquisition files.[6]

The majority of women writers during this period belonged to a convent and wrote to an ecclesiastical audience. Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau found that "few women of the period wrote, but nuns were the great exception to that rule."[7] Between 1500 and 1679, women who belonged to a Hispanic convent published one hundred forty-five religious books (mostly autobiographies), and seventy-four of these works were written by saints later canonized.[8] Hundreds of other nuns wrote or dictated life stories which remain unpublished today. Prior to the 1980s, scholars largely ignored these works and regarded St. Teresa of Avila and Juana Inés de la Cruz as isolated instances of women as major writers.[9] Arenal's 1983 essay, "The Convent as Catalyst for Autonomy: Two Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works," and Arenal and Schlau's *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works* (1989) revealed female writers, including Isabel, who had been left out of the historiography. Prompted by the advent of women's and gender studies as articulated in influential works like Joan W. Scott's "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis" (1986), scholars of the late 1980s and 1990s began to realize the "literary, social, and historical importance" of women's writing as a rich, qualitative resource.[10]

Arenal and Schlau revealed the individuality of Isabel and other women writers. To Arenal, Isabel's

> autobiography reveals…a devotion to private and religious life: how she dealt with her poverty, her intelligence, and her madness, how she developed as an individual, [and] her attitudes towards knowledge and revelation.[11]

In contrast to notarized documents or Inquisitorial records written by elite

men about women, the women themselves voice the cultural practices and processes inherent to their individual experiences in their spiritual autobiographies. Even though male clerics edited women's spiritual writings, these texts allowed these women at least some freedom of expression and from their texts we are able to catch a glimpse of their thoughts and behaviors.

For example, Ruth Anthony El Saffar's *Rapture Encaged: The Suppression of the Feminine in Western Culture* (1994) examines Isabel's life through an analysis of how her identity was formed. In this psycho-analytical literary analysis, El Saffar demonstrated how Isabel's visions allowed her a way to escape her misogynist culture. While works such as El Saffar's shed light onto what life was like for individual women, they do not show the complexity of the relationships between these women, male clerical authorities and their community and families. This scholarship on women is valuable yet the question remains: how did women religious such as Isabel affect their society both during their lifetime as well as after their death? And what information can we glean from these sources about not only the women religious themselves but also about the social, political and cultural practices of their communities?

Spanish historians need to follow the lead of scholars like Natalie Zemon Davis who use micro-histories of lower class people to demonstrate the development of collective identities.[12] How did Isabel form reciprocal relationships of power with men and women in her community and the convent and how did these relationships reflect the society in which they lived? What conflicts arose from those power relationships? What can we learn about the religious practices, gender roles and family life of early modern Spain from her spiritual autobiography/biography? By looking at Isabel's autobiography and biography in a new way, this essay seeks to answer these questions in order to learn not just about Isabel's life and how her society helped formed her identity, but how the nun Isabel used her social power to shape the lives of others and how she used her dictations to record the complexity of the society she lived in.

For the purposes of this study, I chose to focus on Book I of the autobiography which describes Isabel's life from the time she was born to when she entered the Augustinian Recollect convent of San Juan Bautista in Arenas, a small village in the province of Toledo.[13] It details the struggles Isabel went through as she tried with great perseverance to become a *religiosa* (woman religious) and gain acceptance into a convent. It details how Isabel served her fellow villagers as an intercessory between her neighbors and God and how she developed this relationship into a

pivotal role in her community as a person who could heal the sick, cast out demons, communicate God's forgiveness, prophesize, and proselytize God's messages. While Isabel went through a period of her life when she was suspected of demon possession, she eventually became a revered woman religious and a venerable mother to her community. Her transformation from town pariah into a revered member of her community mirrors the relationship early modern Spaniards had with women religious: in this age, society viewed women religious as either agents of God or agents of the devil, either venerated by their communities or treated as criminals. In Book I Isabel describes how the Church and her mother influenced her to become a woman religious and details the trials and tribulations she endured on her journey to becoming a nun for the Augustinian Recollect Order.

Francisco Ignacio claimed that Isabel de Jésus was born in the mountainous village of Navalcán to María Jiménez and Juan Sánchez Agustín in 1586.[14] Recently, historian Eugenio Ayape Moriones located Isabel's birth record in the Archivo Parroquial de Navalcán and discovered that Isabel was born in 1584, not 1586.[15] Isabel's parents were poor shepherds and devoted Catholics. Since Isabel's mother could not afford the dowry necessary for Isabel to enter a convent, she chose to marry her off to a much older man.[16] Isabel's mother, recently widowed, also married Isabel against her will because she was under pressure from her sons who were eager to make commercial ties with a new brother-in-law as well as to find a suitable man who would support their sister Isabel.[17]

Isabel married Sebástian Jiménez in 1599. Isabel described her reaction to meeting her husband for the first time in her autobiography. She relates that she married at the age of fourteen to her "*disgusto* (disgust)."[18] Her husband "*no tiene dientes* (does not have teeth)" and is an old man.[19] At first Isabel despised having sex with her husband but after imagining that he was St. Joseph she was able to endure the process of procreation.[20] During her marriage Isabel had "*tres varones* (three sons)" but none of her sons lived past the age of three. Isabel's husband died in 1623. Despite having lived with her husband for twenty-four years, Isabel devoted only a few paragraphs of her lengthy autobiography to the retelling of this period of her life. Isabel did not mention the names of her deceased husband or their children nor did she devote much attention to the friendships and relationships that she had with her neighbors. Instead, Isabel ignored or minimized the importance of exterior relationships in her life and focused on her interior, or spiritual, relationship with God.

In the text, Isabel and God are the main protagonists and other characters are barely mentioned unless they are people or beings integral

to Isabel's becoming a woman religious such as angels, saints, confessors, bishops and nuns. Isabel's autobiography also does not devote as much space to events and dialogue as it does to her feelings, thoughts, desires, visions and dreams. For example, when Isabel discussed the death of her sons, she devoted much more space to how she was coping with their death (with the help of her faith in God) than how they died or what they were like when they were alive.[21] This is typical of spiritual autobiographies of the period: women religious, at the request of their confessors, were asked to write about their relationship with God rather than about their families and childhood.

The first major event Isabel discussed in her autobiography described her decision to dedicate her life to God. After her husband and children died, Isabel chose not to remarry. Instead, she made the decision to become a woman religious and to begin the process of "leaving the world" or, in her own words, "*iba dexando al mundo*." [22] Her choice caused her great pain as well as made her a pariah to her community. Her brothers wanted her to remarry but she ran away to avoid a forced arranged marriage. Isabel believed that she had to give up her *voluntad* or free will and obey God, even if that meant disobeying her brothers.[23] At this point in the autobiography Isabel showcased the conflict that arose between her, her religious calling and her brothers. When she chose to pursue life as a lay woman religious, or *beata*, Isabel chose a life of homelessness and hardship yet it was a life in which she was no longer under her brothers' control. Isabel's decision to surrender her free will to God purchased freedom and a life in which her brothers (and, conceivably, a future husband) did not control her body or her actions.

Book I also describes the growing hatred Isabel's neighbors had for her. Because Isabel had visions of God and the saints which kept her immobile for hours, she had developed a reputation as the town *loca*, or madwoman.[24] She served her community in her role as woman religious by healing the sick but when she was unsuccessful at healing one of the neighbors' children, her neighbors decided to ostracize her from the community. One day when Isabel arrived at her local church to receive Communion, the church body asked her to leave. She refused.[25] Isabel's insistence on staying did not meet the approval of her confessor and caused a great disturbance in the church. At this time Isabel said the townspeople "*ignoravan mi gran bien*" (did not know of my great goodness) and thought "*me avia traftornado el juizio todo confufion, y alboroto* (I had transformed into a person of unsound mind and judgment during all of this confusion and fuss)."[26] Isabel's confessor then took her to a "*medico del alma*" (doctor of the soul) who then proceeded to perform

an exorcism on her. Isabel's spirit did not respond to the exorcisms at first, but after a while Isabel "*tenia trastornado el juizio* (gained back her sanity)."[27] Her brothers did not recognize that Isabel was now free of demons or spirits. They chained Isabel up by her thumbs, molding her arms into a sign of the cross in an attempt to force the demons out of their sister's body. They then confined her in isolation before deciding to send her to visit a priest in Arenas.[28]

After Isabel's unsuccessful exorcism, her brothers sent her to the Convent of St. Augustine in the village of Arenas.[29] Fray Pedro Sanchez heard Isabel's confession. Isabel told him, "*No necesitaba de conjuros* (I did not need an exorcism)."[30] She then explained to Fray Pedro that she did not need an exorcism because God had told her that He would exorcise her Himself and she did not need a priest to do so. According to Isabel, God spoke to her in a vision, reassuring her of her important role as His messenger on earth: "*Yo obro en ti una de las grandes obras que he obrado defpues de mi Encarnacion* (I am doing in you the greatest work that I have done since my Incarnation)."[31] To support this claim, Isabel said next in the autobiography: "*Todo el pueblo estava efcandalizado, aguardado el dia q me avian de sacar los efpiritus*" (The whole town was scandalized, and looked forward to the day that I would be rid of these [evil] spirits).[32] Looking back on this period of trial and tribulation in her life, Isabel legitimized her standing as a woman religious by claiming that the town would eventually come to realize her spiritual greatness. This passage illustrates that Isabel, though dependent on God, believed she was independent from male clerical authorities because she did not need them to free her of demon possession for that was something God was able to do. Spirit possession was a socially-recognized inoculation that gave Isabel a self-possession that even her brothers could not negate.

Shortly after her exorcism, Isabel attempted to enter the Augustinian Recollect convent of San Juan Bautista in 1623 as a servant but the nuns rejected her due to her history of demon possession.[33] After resigning herself to employment as a servant for the local nobility, Isabel was then able to find work as a lay aide to Discalced Franciscan monks. Isabel described in her autobiography how on her first day of work men in the community hurled stones covered with snow at her.[34] Regardless of these men's hostility, Isabel did not leave her place of employment and she gradually developed a good reputation in the town of Arenas by living a life of piety and austerity and by working hard for her employers.

Despite the antagonism of the townspeople, Isabel was able to enter the convent of the Augustinian Recollects in Arenas in 1626. This nascent order, established by Madre Mariana de San José at the turn of the