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APRIL 2013

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speaker series

Elizabeth A. Wilson

Drawing on the resources of biology, evolutionary theory, and the neurosciences to develop new models for feminism and queer theory

april 2013

CSWupdate

LEANING IN TO THE BACKCOURT VIOLATION



LEAN IN

WOMEN, WORK, AND
THE WILL TO LEAD

SHERYL SANDBERG

FACEBOOK CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Sheryl Sandberg's new book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (Knopf, 2013) has been credited with trying to re-start a conversation on the "gender-problem-that-has-no-name" (*New*

York Times, 2/21/13). If you're not already familiar with the book, here's a quick summary: Sandberg recapitulates previous studies by academic researchers and gives them a platform among a certain group of elite power brokers (the evidence: Richard Branson of Virgin Group had her TED

Talk front and center on the Virgin Airlines reservation page for a week in mid-March). Her key message is that subtle, unintended, diffuse, unrecognized forms of discrimination are nevertheless combining to produce systemic effects of gender disadvantage. A 2007 study conducted at Barnard stressed similar concerns and called such diffuse forms of discrimination micro-inequities.

A study Sandberg memorably cites, the Heidi/Howard Roizen study, conducted by Francis Flynn at Stanford goes like this: Flynn's students examined the profile of Silicon Valley executive Heidi Roizen with half the class reviewing that profile tagged to the name "Heidi Roizen" and the other half tagged to the name "Howard Roizen." Despite the same qualifications, Heidi (not Howard) was rated as aggressive, as someone not to be hired, and as someone these students

would not want to work with. Sandberg uses this study and others to forward this fact in the twenty-first-century U.S. context:

*For men, success correlates positively with likeability
For women, success correlates negatively with likeability*

Because people are promoted based on their likeability—not only on their efficacy—women face a structural barrier to becoming (more) successful.

As various criticisms of Sandberg have pointed out, speaking about successful women's disadvantage in the pursuit of even further steps up and across the corporate "jungle gym" does not speak to the majority of women's concerns. Undoubtedly, the controversy greeting *Lean In*

also derives from her focusing on what women do to hold themselves back rather than recommending systematic, institutional changes; the latter—according to her—remain the predominant emphasis of prior policy recommendations. In a recent KFWB radio interview, I called Sandberg “shrewd” in her deliberate appeal to “individual” action: “Men at the top are often unaware of the benefits they enjoy simply because they’re men, and this can make them blind to the disadvantages associated with being a woman,” she writes. Her follow up is: “Once we are aware, we cannot help but change”—but I’m not so sure about that.

Men at the top have continually to be reminded to act concretely to erode gender bias and the ordinary, subconscious—or, here, the better term might be “thoughtless”—ways in which women continue to be subjected to systematic disadvantage. Here, I’m pivoting (sports pun intended) to the recent hiring of Steve Alford as Bruins head basketball coach by UCLA Athletic Director Dan Guerrero. Dan Bernstein, a sports anchor at CBS Chicago, reports that Guerrero either chose to ignore or didn’t find relevant Alford’s past poor conduct with regard to a 2002 scandal that erupted involving his then-star

basketball player, Pierre Pierce, when Alford coached at the University of Iowa. After a fellow female U of I student accused Pierce of sexual assault, Alford reportedly enlisted “the help of close friend Jim Goodrich, the campus representative for [the] Christian group Athletes in Action who. . . [asked] the victim [to attend a] ‘prayer meeting,’ at which she was [then] urged to back off and not cause problems for a basketball program that could overpower her” (<http://chicago.cbslocal.com/2013/03/31/bernstein-ucla-hired-a-scumbag/>). The more temperately worded official report by the U of I investigative committee acknowledges that non-University individuals from Athletes for Action initiated contact with the female assault victim (she did not reach out to them) and that this meeting intended to “informal[ly] resolve” the student’s complaint only “confirmed her fears that the University would act to protect its athlete” rather than to support her (<http://news-releases.uiowa.edu/2003/april/040903skorton.html>).

Alford has defended himself by asserting that the event happened eleven years ago and that he followed the university’s protocols and the guidance of its legal advisor. But clearly the issue isn’t one of Alford’s criminal culpability in relying upon and enhancing “informal” pressures to silence a female

victim of sexual assault. If the U of I had found Alford criminally liable they would have been compelled to initiate legal action. And here’s where the Sandberg book—so differently pitched than this scandal involving sexual assault and the judgment of sports’ coaches and the Bruin athletic and academic male leadership—may offer us useful tools for thinking. The issue once again concerns the diffuse, ordinary ways in which—in this case—women and other victims of molestation are not given the support to voice outrage and grief over their bodily violations. Women are not simply held back by being negatively perceived because of their “success” but are held back because, even when victimized and violated, they are asked to swallow their anger and to prepare for the likelihood that others will turn against them, that “men at the top” will refuse their compassionate grievance alongside them.

“Men at the top are often unaware of the benefits they enjoy simply because they’re men, and this can make them blind to the disadvantages associated with being a woman,” Sandberg writes. What will be the follow-up from our UCLA men at the top, our administrators, faculty, and students, to her prediction that “Once we are aware, we cannot help but change”?

— Rachel Lee



Elizabeth A. Wilson

Drawing on the resources of biology, evolutionary theory, and the neurosciences to develop new models for feminism and queer theory

A self-declared “feminist scientist” or “scientist feminist,” Elizabeth A. Wilson, will be speaking at UCLA on May 7 on “Bitter Melancholy: Feminism, Depression, and Aggression.” Her research draws on the resources of biology, evolutionary theory, and the neurosciences to develop new models for feminism and queer theory.

Wilson is Professor of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Emory University. From 2011 to 2012, Wilson was a Helen Putnam Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard. She earned her Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Sydney and her B.Sc. (Honors) in Psychology from the University of Otago. She has also been an Australian Research

Council Fellow at the University of New South Wales and held appointments in Women’s Studies and Psychology at the University of Western Sydney, the Australian National University, and the University of Sydney.



neers of artificial intelligence in the 1950s and 1960s understood intelligence to involve not just

Her most recent book, *Affect and Artificial Intelligence* (2010), is the first in-depth study of affect and intersubjectivity in the computational sciences. In it, she argues that the pio-

the capacity to think but also to learn, feel, and grow. Making use of archival and unpublished material from the early years of AI (1945–70) to the present, Wilson shows that early researchers were more engaged with questions of emotion than many commentators have assumed. “If you’re trying to build an agent that works with humans on a regular basis, building an emotional robot makes the interaction more flexible and robust,” Wilson said in an interview with *Emory Report*. “These were concerns from the beginning.”

In *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body* (2004), Wilson argues that key evolutionary concepts like coadaptation and organic affinity may in fact hold immense value



for contemporary feminist and queer thinking. In her review of *Psychosomatic* and other recent books in *Feminist Studies* Myra J. Hird calls Wilson's book "engagement with science at its best," going

on to praise the book's central tenet that "soma and psyche do not correspond to different 'realities' of the body." In a review in *symplokē*, Elizabeth Green Musselman also lauds Wilson's approach:

Western feminism has a history of ambivalence about how to handle its culture's entrenched commitment to mind-body dualism... In her fascinating and innovative book, Elizabeth A. Wilson cuts through this Gordian knot [soma/psyche] with a scalpel edge. Wilson turns her critical eye specifically on the conversation—or rather, lack thereof—between neuroscience and psychoanalysis. Neuroscientists, she says, have committed themselves to a nervous system without a psyche, while psychoanalysts (feminist and otherwise) have committed themselves to a non-biologized psyche. Bridging the gap

left by this disciplinary specialization and uncritical acceptance of dualism, Wilson argues provides surprisingly liberatory possibilities.

Wilson's upcoming book, *Gut Feminism*, continues her scholarly enterprise with a feminist analysis of biomedical theories of depression. Looking at medical data about how antidepressants traverse the body, Wilson notes that the effects of such drugs for controlling depression are not limited to the brain but also impact the network of nerves involved in the gut: "Antidepressants don't just go straight to the brain and nowhere else." In this project, she has been looking at both the pharmacology of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and the neurobiology of the viscera.

Rachel Lee, CSW Acting Director, invited Wilson because this current work addresses some issues that CSW's ongoing Life (Un)Ltd research project is exploring this year: food and metabolism. "Elizabeth Wilson's work has been at the intersection of the sciences and the humanities/social sciences," says Lee. "While Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity had introduced a way of thinking masculinity and femininity as not grounded in biological differences, Wilson noticed that one of the effects of Butler's emphasis on a non-biologically foundationalist approach to sex/gender/

heteronormativity was a knee-jerk reaction against delving into biology or using biological evidence. Wilson pushed back against that knee-jerk reaction. She started inquiring into the psyche and mind not just through psychoanalysis, in the Freudian tradition, but also looking at neurology—the material bases of the brain, the neural networks, and so forth. I'm very excited to hear what she has to say about feminism, depression, and aggression."

SOURCES

- "Elizabeth Wilson: Scientist Feminist Creates New Models of Inquiry," *Emory Report*, February 7, 2011, http://www.emory.edu/EMORY_REPORT/stories/2011/02/people_profile_elizabeth_wilson_scientist_feminist.html
- "Feminist Engagements with Matter," review by Myra J. Hird, *Feminist Studies* 35: 2 (Summer 2009), 329-346, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40607971>
- "Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body by Elizabeth A. Wilson," review by Elizabeth Green Musselman, *symplokē* 13: 1/2 2005, 347-349, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40550644>

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS BY ELIZABETH A. WILSON

- "Another Neurological Scene," *History of the Present* 1:2 (2011), 149-169.
- "Underbelly," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 21:1 (2010), 194-208.
- Affect and Artificial Intelligence* (University of Washington Press, 2010)
- Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body* (Duke University Press Books, 2004)
- Neural Geographies: Feminism and the Microstructure of Cognition* (Routledge, 1998)

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2013

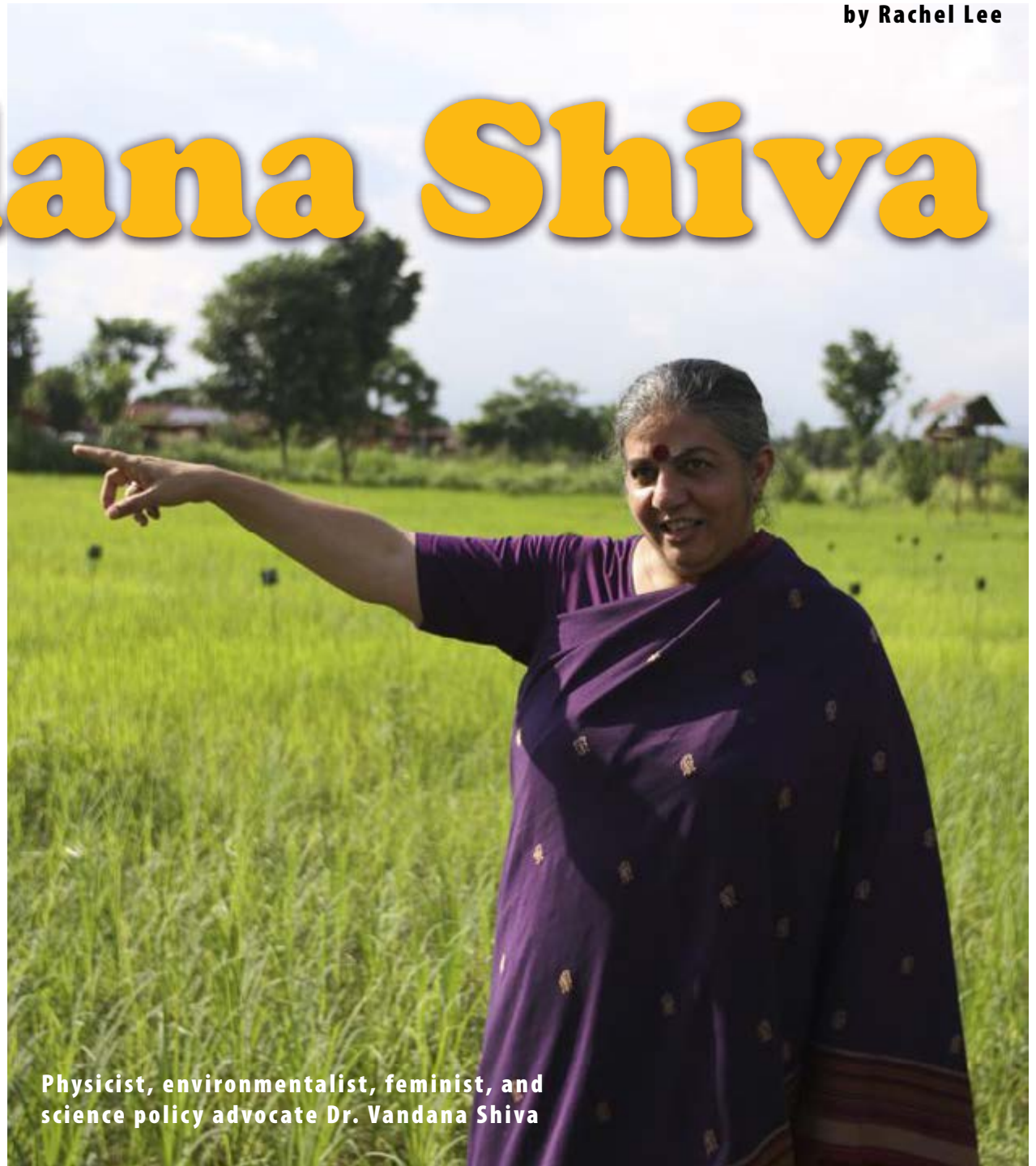


Vandana Shiva with CSW Acting Director Rachel Lee at the International Women's Day Celebration on March 8

Vandana Shiva

**RENOWNED ADVOCATE
ON BEHALF OF THIRD
WORLD WOMEN
SPEAKS AT UCLA
ON INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY**

CSW supports research on women, gender, and sexuality across the disciplines, from the sciences to the humanities, from public policy to psychology, from local studies of the Los Angeles region to comparative investigations of global dimensions. It is precisely this orientation toward the local in the global and vice-versa that made Dr. Shiva a particularly auspicious choice for our International Women's Day celebration on March 8th and as the keynote speaker of the conference "Global Ecologies: Nature/Nar-



Physicist, environmentalist, feminist, and science policy advocate Dr. Vandana Shiva

rative/Neoliberalism” organized by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, a professor in the the Department of English at UCLA, because Dr. Shiva’s work very much attends to those nuances.

Physicist, environmentalist, feminist, and science policy advocate Dr. Vandana Shiva has authored numerous books including *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* (1988, re-released in 2010), *Water Wars* (2002), *Earth Democracy* 2005, *Soil Not Oil* (2007), and most recently, *Making Peace with the Earth* (2012). An acute thinker and activist whose choice topics have ranged from the quantum particle to the seed, Dr. Shiva is perhaps best known for her advocacy on behalf of Third World women whose labor is often concentrated outside market-related or remunerated work and therefore not esteemed as valuable in assessments of GNP. These women are, according to Dr. Shiva, experts of biodiversity, knowledgeable conservers of food nutrients through their non-industrial milling processes, and providers of food security in partnership with other species. Dr. Shiva has eloquently made visible the connections between 1) a (profits-hungry) capitalist system that disrespects nature by looking at the entire planet as raw material for cash-conversion and 2) a masculine “patriarchal” ideology that construes man as owning rather than coming from women or

Dr. Shiva’s International Women’s Day talk is available for viewing on the UCLA YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPKWzly9X-c&feature=youtu.be>

Terra Mater and that would dominate through the destructive force of arms (for example, prey upon and exploit life) rather than cooperate in creative, non-violent reciprocal relations.

In science studies, Dr. Shiva has argued persuasively for the cognitive weakness of knowledge systems that go under the name of a universal science but which Dr. Shiva specifies as an ethnoparticularist science prizing reductionism, fragmentation, context-free abstraction and homogeneity rather than holism, complexity and diversity. But because modern science has become synonymous with the former, we must struggle to make visible once again the salience, importance and cognitive robustness of the latter.

That holism was most recently on display in Dr. Shiva's interview on "Democracy Now with Amy Goodman" on March 8, 2013. Goodman asked Dr. Shiva what her message was this International Women's Day but only after prefacing her introduction of Dr. Shiva with news flashes of the gang rape of a 23-year-old woman on a New Delhi bus last December, which led to mass protests). Dr. Shiva is not one to shy away from noting the "anti-woman values of religious patriarchy" in India that she has linked to a rise in female foeticide starting in the late 1970s after sex-determination tests in amniocentesis became increasingly available.

In her response to Goodman, Dr. Shiva insisted that we look at a local instance of violence against women ('s bodies) in a broad planetary light, as connected to violences through a global capitalist order, manifest as climate change and seed monopolies. "Women," she writes, "are devalued first, because their work cooperates with nature's processes, and second, because work which satisfies needs and ensures sustenance [rather than being aimed at the culling of surplus "cash" profits] is devalued in general" (*Staying Alive*, p. 7).

By creating institutes such as the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology in 1982 and Navdanya (Nine Seeds) in 1991, Dr. Shiva has linked monocultural big agribusiness (and bioengineering) to a specific harm toward women and girls and the diversity of labor, knowledge, food cultivation practices, and social relations of which women and girls are a part and which they continue to steward. At the same time, her outlining of an epistemological/cognitive and ethical ecocritical practice involves acknowledging that "the feminine principle is not exclusively embodied in women, but is the principle of activity and creativity in nature, women and men ... 'creative power in peaceful form.'" Concretely, Dr. Shiva teaches and spreads a movement for "agriculture based on diversity, decentralization and improving

small farm productivity through ecological methods. [This] women-centered, nature-friendly agriculture [is one where] knowledge is shared, other species and plants are kin, not 'property, and sustainability is based on renewal of earth's fertility, and the renewal and regeneration of biodiversity" (*Women's Studies Quarterly* 2001: 14).

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Dr. Shiva's talk on International Women's Day was presented by the Office of Faculty Diversity and Development, UCLA Center for the Study of Women, and the organizers of Global Ecologies and cosponsored by University of California Humanities Research Initiative, Institute for the Environment and Sustainability, and the Canadian Studies Program, the Divisions of the Humanities and Social Sciences, the Department of Gender Studies, International Institute, the Department of English, "Cultures in Transnational Perspective" UCLA Mellon Postdoctoral Program in the Humanities, and the Department of History. All photos of Dr. Shiva in this article were taken by Kartikey Shiva except the photo of Dr. Shiva with Rachel Lee, which was taken by Brenda Johnson-Grau.



Ryan Rhadigan is a MA candidate in the UCLA American Indian Studies Interdepartmental Program with a Gender Studies concentration. He was a panelist at CSW's 23rd annual Thinking Gender Conference, which took place in February 2013.



Vandana Shiva

A STUDENT REFLECTION ON THE ECOFEMINIST'S
INSPIRING LECTURE AT EVENT CELEBRATING
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

BY RYAN RHADIGAN

A PALPABLE ENERGY and excitement radiated from the audience as we exited the auditorium after Dr. Vandana Shiva's talk on International Women's Day. Both Dr. Shiva's lecture and her holistic approach to scholarly critique and political and environmental activism present us with a powerful model

of what interdisciplinary edgework can and should look like.

CSW and the organizers of a two-day conference titled "Global Ecologies: Nature/Narrative/Neoliberalism" jointly hosted Dr. Shiva's appearance at UCLA's Broad Auditorium on March 8. A renowned philosopher and ecofeminist, a

prolific author, and a celebrated environmental activist, Dr. Shiva delivered a talk about global struggles to assert and protect food and seed sovereignty,¹ She also shared stories about efforts to defend ecological biodiversity and advocated for sustainable alternatives to industrialized commodity-driven agriculture.

She compellingly articulated the relationship of environmental issues to broader feminist objectives of decolonization and the dismantling of violent and destructive patriarchal structures, the promotion and advancement of planetary democracy through feminine ethics of caretaking, and the realization of earth rights and human rights as fundamentally interrelated.

The fact that Dr. Shiva's lecture coincided with and commemorated International Women's Day 2013—a day for which the official United Nations theme was “Time for action to end violence against women”²—appropriately reflects the degree to which Dr. Shiva's scholarship and activism directly connects capitalist patriarchal worldviews and destructive agricultural practices of monoculture, uniformity, and homogeneity, with the violent oppression of women and the systematic marginalization of their agricultural work and ecological knowledges.³ In her talk, Dr. Shiva placed special emphasis upon discussing legal patents on seeds and other life forms as tools of patriarchal violence that both facilitate and sanction acts of biopiracy. She explicitly linked intellectual property patenting to the theft of indigenous women's traditional ecological knowledge, and

contextualized contemporary acts of biottheft in a longer history of European colonization, exploitation of natural resources, and forced dispossessions of indigenous peoples worldwide.

As a master's student in American Indian Studies at UCLA, I have found Dr. Shiva's holistic approach to critical reflection, ecofeminist intervention, and environmental activism to be especially useful and inspiring as I think about my own research and scholarship on Native American engagements with science and technology. Dr. Shiva, as her lecture at UCLA exemplified, not only foregrounds intersections of indigeneity, gender, science, and colonization within her ecofeminist analytic frame, but importantly reveals vital relationships between applied scholarly critique and political and environmental activism. Her work as both an academic author and ground-level activist demonstrates how rejecting commodity-driven practices of industrial chemical agriculture, protecting ecological biodiversity, and defending the sovereignty of food and seeds from commercial patents, are all principally feminist projects that depend upon respectful and sustained democratic engagement with indigenous peoples and

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POLITICAL STRUGGLES OF
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.**

indigenous women's environmental knowledges.

In the Q&A following her talk, Dr. Shiva elaborated her views in the context of the audience at UCLA, plainly directing: "There needs to be a much deeper, active partnership with the original inhabitants of this land as teachers."⁴ While Dr. Shiva's admission has long been a guiding truth within the academic communities of indigenous and Native American Studies, there was something I found especially powerful about hearing it articulated through the lens of Dr. Shiva's activism, placed in conversation with her brand of ecofeminist theory, and situated in the broader framework of her lecture at UCLA. Standing in front of an auditorium filled with students, faculty, and community members from a diverse range of fields, professions, and disciplines, Dr. Shiva challenged us to hold our work and ourselves accountable to women, accountable to the earth, and accountable to the knowledges and political struggles of indigenous peoples. In laying bare the deep and fundamental interrelationship of three ethical projects at times approached or regarded as separate, Dr. Shiva reminded us of the highly collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of the work and activism essential to achieving social and environmental justice, improving

democracy, and enabling planetary survival. Dr. Shiva's ecofeminist ethics themselves, while firmly opposed to capitalist patriarchal structures and worldviews, are capacious enough to mobilize both men and women in the broader pursuit of sustainability, justice, and freedom, and strive for the liberation of men and women alike.

Similarly, while Dr. Shiva's scholarly work and environmental activism directly confront issues such as biopiracy, biopatenting, and biogenetic modification, they are not flatly oppositional to scientific practice, nor do they derogate empirical modes of inquiry and knowledge production. Dr. Shiva's larger vision of "earth democracy" firmly resists "the fragmentation caused by various forms of fundamentalism,"⁵ and accordingly questions and troubles the regard for scientifically produced knowledges as the *only* forms of valid knowledge, and the abstract definitions of life enabled and promoted by some scientific worldviews, without attacking or degrading scientific practice itself. As philosopher and historian of science Isabelle Stengers astutely suggests in her own assessment of Dr. Shiva's work: "Hers is a call not for 'an other science,' but for a relevant science, a science that would actively take into account the knowledge associated with those agricultural practices

that are in the process of being destroyed in the name of progress."⁶ For Dr. Shiva, though often deployed to different ends and effects, indigenous women's traditional environmental knowledges and scientifically produced biological knowledges are not inherently adverse or antithetical. Rather than advocating the irrelevance or diminishment of scientific practices, she instead argues for their democratization. Consequently, Dr. Shiva, like Native American science and technology scholar Kim TallBear, importantly unsettles the popular and problematic binary pitting indigenous knowledge against science, rather than reifying it.⁷

Currently I'm enrolled in a graduate seminar taught by CSW's Interim Director Rachel Lee. The seminar, titled "Femiqueer Theory: Affect, Biopower, New Materialisms," has encouraged us to explore intersections between the humanities and sciences. Topics of discussion have ranged from nutritional epigenetics and assisted reproductive technologies to Romantic poetry and the Wordsworthian concept of "natural piety." Throughout all of our readings and discussions, gender and sexuality have remained central to our analysis. While such kinds of cross- and interdisciplinary "edge-work" are often lauded and promoted within the academy—although university funding allocations for interdisciplinary programs and

scholarship may at times speak to the contrary—doing interdisciplinary work *well* is difficult. Edgework almost always risks collapsing into the traditional boundaries or ideologies of one discipline or another. Such problems are especially acute when working between the humanities and so-called hard sciences, where the most intriguing questions develop not through dogmatic ideological stances but through prolonged and often uncomfortable cross-disciplinary engagement. As Elizabeth A. Wilson succinctly reflects: “If empiricism is only ever a regime which one resists or a regime to which one submits, then there has been no interdisciplinary encounter.”⁸

As an aspiring interdisciplinary scholar committed to social justice, I was both encouraged and deeply moved by Dr. Shiva’s lecture. It is safe to say that I was not alone in feeling these emotions. Many in the audience were clearly energized by her talk. Her writing delineates connections between feminism, environmentalism, indigenous knowledges, science, human rights, and democracy, while her activism carries her moral and ethical imperatives beyond the academy into the broader realm of community organizing. Dr. Shiva’s advocacy truly embodies the spirit of edgework in that it not only crosses disciplinary boundaries but also gathers strength, wisdom, and direction from

the social and political movements occurring within and beyond the university walls.

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Photo of Vandana Shiva was taken by Kar-tikey Shiva.

NOTES

1. See the website for Dr. Shiva’s activist network and public interest research organization, Navdanya, <http://www.navdanya.org/>.
2. “International Women’s Day, 8 March,” accessed March 14, 2013, <http://www.un.org/en/events/womensday/>.
3. See Vandana Shiva, “Democratizing Biology: Re-inventing Biology from a Feminist, Ecological, and Third World Perspective” in *Reinventing Biology: Respect for Life and the Creation of Knowledge*, eds. Lynda Birke and Ruth Hubbard (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 50-71.
4. Vandana Shiva, “Global Ecologies Keynote Address / International Women’s Day Lecture, (lecture, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, March 8, 2013).
5. See “Earth Democracy,” Navdanya Trust, accessed March 14, 2013, <http://www.navdanya.org/earth-democracy>.
6. Isabelle Stengers, “Diderot’s Egg: Divorcing Materialism from Eliminativism,” *Radical Philosophy* 144 (2007): 8.
7. See Kim TallBear’s website, Kim TallBear: Indigeneity and Technoscience, <http://www.kimtallbear.com/>.
8. Elizabeth A. Wilson, “Another Neurological Scene,” *History of the Present* 1, no. 2 (2011): 156-157.

life^{(un)ltd}

TUES May 7
4 pm
2355 Public Policy

**BITTER
MELANCHOLY**
**Feminism,
Depression,
and Aggression**

**Elizabeth
Wilson**
Emory U

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“translatability and incommensurability run headlong into each other with a bang”

SHU-MEI SHIH'S SENIOR FACULTY FEMINIST LECTURE ON "IS FEMINISM TRANSLATABLE? TAIWAN, SPIVAK, A-WU"

BY CAILEY HALL

A GOOGLE SEARCH for “Liglav A-Wu” yields only a handful of English-language results, and certainly nothing as authoritative as a Wikipedia page, that ostensible yardstick of Western significance. Such an outcome seems an affront to those of us steeped in the digital age of instantly available knowledge. Had I not attended Professor Shu-Mei Shih’s recent Senior Faculty Feminist lecture, “Is Feminism Translatable? Taiwan, Spivak, A-Wu,” it seems likely that I would have continued in ignorance of

A-Wu, an aboriginal Taiwanese feminist, and her scholarship.¹ At the beginning of her talk, Shih acknowledged as much, explaining that she included Gayatri Spivak’s more familiar name in her title in part because she doubted anyone would attend a lecture on A-Wu, who remains almost unknown in the United States, even in academic circles.

That said, the inclusion of Spivak served a purpose beyond her marquee value because Shih commenced her lecture by describing Spivak’s 2002 encounter with a group of

Taiwanese feminists in a traditional Taiwanese teahouse. What began as a seemingly casual meeting between largely Western-educated Taiwanese academics and the renowned scholar, became, without either realizing, two drastically different experiences. Spivak believed that she had transitioned into lecture mode, while her Taiwanese colleagues believed that they were still in the relaxed, social atmosphere of the teahouse. Unsurprisingly perhaps, one side took offense, demonstrating what Shih labeled as an example of feminism’s “shared horizons of

understanding,” one which exposes a “chasm in mutual comprehension.”

Using this incident as an example of when “translatability and incommensurability run headlong into each other with a bang,” Shih addressed the problem of how “feminists continue to encounter each other across the divides calibrated by vectors of difference,” and tackled what she sees as a potentially detrimental “exhaustion” about feminism that prevents us from having certain necessary conversations about the potentials and the limits of international feminism, and the significance of local and indigenous feminisms.

Even the shared lingua franca of English does not assure mutual understanding, Shih explained, as Spivak spoke a different kind of English than did her Taiwanese colleagues. In other words, we cannot assume perfect comprehension even when we’re speaking the same language, a potentially scary thought. But we cannot fall into the trap of what Shih labeled “benign liberal inclusive relativism,” which is to say that we cannot throw up our hands, group everything together by declaring it relative, and not work towards a greater understanding of *why* that might be the case. Instead, as Ofelia Schutte outlines in her work on “cross-cultural communication,” we need to accept the inevitability of incommensurability.

Incorporating the mathematical concept of the incommensurable (that is, the idea of not having a common gauge of measurement), Schutte argues that: “What I get from the differently situated speaker is the conveyable message minus the specific cultural difference that does not come across...the way to maximize intercultural dialogue would be to devise a way to put as much meaning as possible into the plus side of the exchange, so as little as possible remains on the minus side.”² Shih emphasized the importance of actual encounters, in which the incommensurability produced requires a shift of knowledge on both sides of the encounter. The takeaway is that we must aim for “relational understanding”—the opposite of relativism—that welcomes potentially incommensurable encounters, while hoping for a dialogue, imperfect though it might be.

For Shih, A-Wu’s feminist philosophy offers the perfect framework for understanding the value inherent in these types of encounters. As an indigenous Taiwanese, A-Wu might be seen as representing a tiny community. After all, aboriginals comprise roughly 2% of the country’s population, which is majority Han Taiwanese. While A-Wu’s writing speaks to the difficulties of indigenous feminism, she also addresses the tensions

Although A-Wu’s experiences could justify her dismissing the feminisms that ignore her, she instead demonstrates a remarkable ability to leave room for critical reciprocity. For Shih, A-Wu acknowledges the necessary feminist constant: the imperative to fight for women’s rights, while also highlighting the many different kinds of feminist ethics that contribute to that fight.

between mainstream feminists and indigenous feminists, and highlights the problematic universalizing tendencies of white, western, middle-class feminists. Shih sees A-Wu revising Kimberlé Crenshaw's basement analogy to offer a more hopeful view of how feminists can interact with and assist each other.³ In A-Wu's version, also based on the concept of the house, feminists inhabiting a higher floor in the house can see further, and their perspectives can, in fact, be potentially beneficial to women on lower floors. For A-Wu, indigenous women cannot ignore the foundations set by middle-class feminists, just as middle-class feminists cannot ignore the existence of—and differences between—many types of feminisms. In other words, we need a reciprocal form of criticism that turns the sympathy between middle-class and indigenous feminists into an action item—in this case, a dialogue between the two groups.

Shih expressed an understandable sense of admiration for what she termed A-Wu's "generous spirit." Although A-Wu's experiences could justify her dismissing the feminisms that ignore her, she instead demonstrates a remarkable ability to leave room for critical reciprocity. For Shih, A-Wu acknowledges the necessary feminist constant: the imperative to fight for women's rights, while also highlighting the many different kinds of feminist ethics

that contribute to that fight. If we spend our time criticizing other feminists, Shih concluded, then we end up having less time to take positive action that prioritizes the encounter, and the importance of addressing local feminist issues.

As respondent, Sandra Harding, a professor in UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, took up this call to action in addressing the work feminists have to do in the field of science studies. She specifically addressed the troubling "refusal of educated westerners to recognize that sciences and their societies co-produce co-constitute each other." In other words, our sciences do not spring fully formed from the head of Zeus but are instead shaped by our beliefs and values and, in turn, influence our beliefs and values.

Taking up the concept of incommensurability, Harding depicted it as "an opportunity to learn and think about how what we say is not understood" and posed the question "Do Westerners more often expect to be perfectly understood?" The answer, she suggested, is "Of course." We have to push against these expectations, Harding argued and to "presume partial, difficult, always damaged translatability, to give up ideal of perfect translation."

As A-Wu's books have *not* been translated into English, even—as would be inevitable—imperfectly, we will currently have to content

ourselves with the hope her philosophy allows for the future of feminisms, and seek out incommensurable but potentially productive encounters.

NOTES

1. Shu-Mei Shih, "Is Feminism Translatable? Taiwan, Spivak, A-Wu," Senior Faculty Feminist Lecture Lecture, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, February 26, 2013.
2. Ofelia Schutte, "Cultural Alterity: Cross-Cultural Communication and Feminist Theory in North-South Context," *Hypatia* 13:1 (Spring 1998), 56.
3. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989), 139-67. In this article, Crenshaw establishes what will become known as "intersectionality theory," which addresses the "multidimensionality of Black women's experience" and points out how we cannot just talk about race or gender (139). Instead, we need to consider how "intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (140). Crenshaw uses the analogy of a basement, in which "all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age and/or physical ability... those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that 'but for' the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room... those who are multiply-burdened are generally left below" (151-152). In other words, very few multiply disadvantaged people can ever make it out of the basement because those above rarely understand how the sum of disadvantages is greater than the parts.

Shelby Schemerhorn is a fourth-year senior majoring in Gender Studies and minoring in Labor and Workplace Studies. She is a first-generation college student and strives to be a strong positive role model for her younger siblings. She received the Constance Coiner Undergraduate Award in 2012.



Staying Committed

RECIPIENT OF CONSTANCE COINER UNDERGRADUATE AWARD
IN 2012 REFLECTS ON HER EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES IN COLLEGE
AS SHE LOOKS TO LIFE AFTER GRADUATION

LEAVING BEHIND a distinguished university and an admirable academic division was one of the most challenging decisions I had ever made, but I did it in order to satisfy my mind as well as my soul. Three years ago, I was a freshman at UC San Diego, studying psychology and economics, unaware of the changes that I would soon make. During the summer before sophomore year, I visited a women's studies class and after one lecture decided to change my major and attempt to transfer to UCLA. I had never before participated

in a class that was so intellectually stimulating and yet so relatable. I knew immediately that I wanted to explore the field of gender studies.

Since then, I have focused my coursework, as well as many of my other activities, on the topics of race, gender, class, and labor and their social construction. These constructions create restrictions and obstacles but these obstacles can be overcome through knowledge, guidance, and assistance. I work to combat these limitations and obstacles through my academic study, through my work with high-school students,

and through my participation in community projects.

Academically, I have focused on issues surrounding women and the workplace. I have done research regarding the success of women in nontraditional occupations, as well as research on men who work in female-dominated occupations. Before attending UCLA, I also participated in research on the women's movement in Kenya and conducted research on the slum tourism in Brazil and how the community is affected by its commodification.

This past summer, I had the opportunity—as a corporate research intern—to work with the Los Angeles Black Worker Center on conducting ethnographic research on the four companies bidding to build the multi-billion dollar Metro Crenshaw Line. This project allows for tangible outcomes outside of the world of academia and creates change within our community.

Working with my community and focusing on my former high school is also a way for me to help to mitigate some of the inequalities that are intertwined with the social categories of race, gender, and class. Because I went to a high school where most students do not graduate, let alone go to college, I feel strongly motivated to do what I can to assist current students. Every week I visit my former high school, sharing with the students the value of academics and college, and mentoring students who hope to break the cycles that have hindered their families.

In my community, I founded a free youth basketball camp and continue to run it every summer. Its goal is to provide low-income youth with the opportunity to be in a safe and supportive environment where they gain valuable skills. In 2010 I volunteered to be head coach of the girls' team because I had heard the program was going to be disbanded. This

program provides a place where young women who have the potential to become leaders can deconstruct cultural ideals of feminine beauty and gain a stronger sense of identity.

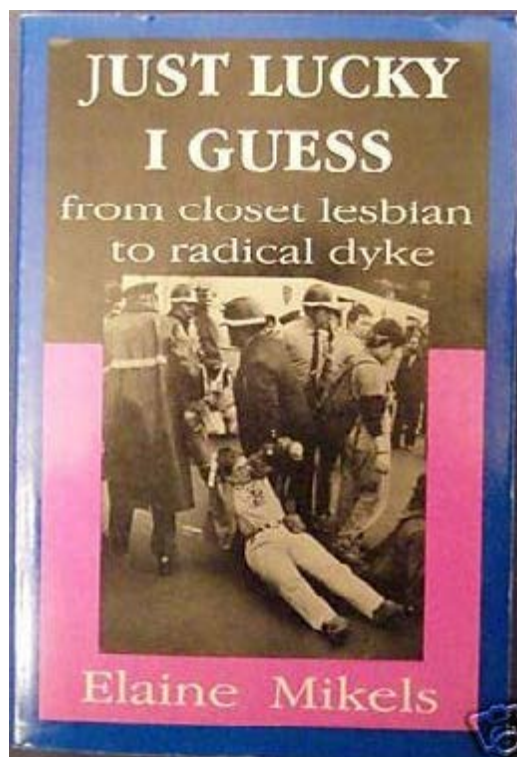
My academic background in gender studies and labor and workplace studies has allowed me to gain a better understanding of the social constructs within our society and how they work to create a divide between privileged and underprivileged people. These categories of privilege apply to race, gender, class, sexuality, physical ability, legal status, education level, and several other social categories. Most importantly, I have learned to acknowledge my privilege and to work to create a positive change on both social and political levels. I am a much different person compared to what I was like when I started college. I am thankful for what I have learned in gender studies and for the personal development it helped me to achieve. I hope to continue to advance in my academic work and to make a difference in my community.

As my senior year comes to an end and I reflect on the types of relationships I have developed here at UCLA, I have a clearer understanding of my own status as privileged. The opportunities that UCLA has given me will influence the rest of my life. I have been able to work with world-class faculty, many of whom

are experts in their fields, and I have been able to form strong personal and professional networks with faculty, students, and alumni mentors.

Considering the opportunities that I have had, I am also saddened to realize that my experience is not the norm and that I am a privileged minority. By reflecting on the circumstances that led to my success, I am able to actively pursue relationships with members of my community, to act as a role model, and to constantly reevaluate my role as a community leader. Understanding the role that my community had in my success has also taught me the importance of giving back. I was challenged and mentored by those around me; today, I challenge myself not to sit back and watch the injustices of the world from the chair of privilege but instead to stay in the fight.

ELAINE MIKELS PAPERS, 1977-1984



One of the processed collections from the June Mazer Lesbian Archives now available for viewing in UCLA Library's Digital Collections is the Elaine Mikels Papers, 1977-1984.

Mikels was born in 1921 in Los Angeles and spent much of her early life there. Like some other closeted women coming of age in the 1940s, she had little concept of how to deal with her own relationships, much less how to build community through shared interests. In the late 1960s, she became, in her own estimation, political. She supported the anti-war movement, joined lesbian-feminist communities in Oregon, and participated in peace actions. In 1976 she

founded the Older Women's Network in order to bring older lesbian feminists together to share resources and achieve their activist goals. She would go on to participate in similar groups and helped to found the group Older Lesbians Organizing for Change. Mikels eventually settled in Santa Fe, NM, but most of the photographic collection represents the years she lived in Oregon and North Carolina.

Most of the collection is composed of about 200 photographs taken by Mikels. Included are scenes of activist gatherings, social gatherings and sports clubs, writing groups. One set of photos, titled "Dyke Olympics," includes photos of women lifting weights, wres-

ting, sprinting, and wearing togas from an event held in 1983. Another includes photos of women working on roofing a house. Softball games are the subject of another series.

Mikels participated in demonstrations including Nuclear Disarmament Rally in 1982, a PeaceWalk from Durham, NC, to Seneca Peace Camp, which took place from June 3 to July 4, 1983, and PeaceWalk from Gainesville, FL, to Key West, FL, in 1984. Also represented in the collection are photographs documenting the Women's Pentagon Action, a two-thousand—woman protest that surrounded the Pentagon in 1981.

Her involvement in the Older Women's Network is documented through examples of the organization's newsletter, which was called *Our Own*.

Contained in the Mikels collection are also photos related to *Feminary*, a newsletter published by an women's collective in Durham, NC, in 1969. In the words of Minnie Bruce Pratt, "we were a group of anti-racist, anti-imperialist Southern lesbians." Photographs of Pratt are contained

within the Mikels collection.

The collection also includes materials related to the publication of Elaine Mikels' autobiography, *Just Lucky I Guess: From Closet Lesbian to Radical Dyke* (Desert Crone Press), as well as a copy of the final published version. Papers, journals, correspondence, drawings, and other personal materials make up the rest of the collection.

It is collections like this one that make the Mazer such a special repository. Having these images from Mikels' life available for viewing on the UCLA Library's Digital Collections means that lesbians, feminists, and researchers from all over the world can get a glimpse of an important time and one woman's legacy of lesbian activism.

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The finding aid for this collection is available for viewing at the Online Archive of California (http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8fx7b5w/entire_text/?query=mikels). Digitized materials from the collection and the finding aid are available for viewing on the UCLA Library's Digital Collections website (<http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002ctf79>). This research is part of an ongoing CSW research project, "Making Invisible Histories Visible: Preserving the Legacy of Lesbian Feminist Activism and Writing in Los Angeles," with Principal Investigators

Kathleen McHugh, CSW Director and Professor in the Departments of English and Cinema and Media Studies at UCLA (on sabbatical from April to June, 2013) and Gary Strong, University Librarian at UCLA. Funded in part by an NEH grant, the project is a three-year project to arrange, describe, digitize, and make physically and electronically accessible two major clusters of June Mazer Lesbian Archive collections related to West Coast lesbian/feminist activism and writing since the 1930s.

This project, which continues CSW's partnership with the June Mazer Lesbian Archives and the UCLA Library, grew out of CSW's two-year "Access Mazer: Organizing and Digitizing the Lesbian Feminist Archive in Los Angeles" project, which was supported in part by the UCLA Center for Community Partnerships. For information on the project, contact Dr. Julie Childers, Assistant Director, UCLA Center for the Study of Women. For more information on this project, visit <http://www.csw.ucla.edu/research/projects/making-invisible-histories-visible>. For more information on the activities of the Mazer, visit <http://www.mazerlesbianarchives.org>



Many grocery stores have begun banning plastic bags or requiring customers to BYOB (Bring your own bags). U.S. alone consumes an estimated 100 billion plastic bags annually. Plastic bags are clearly detrimental to the environment, but paper bags are not a good option either. Paper bags produce fifty times more water pollutants than plastic bags and require significantly more energy to produce. The solution? Reusable bags pave the way for a green future. Canvas bags are inexpensive, durable, customizable, and easy to wash. Once you accumulate a collection, you can fully replace your need for other bags when at the grocery store. Ditch paper and plastic and pick up some reusable canvas bags this spring!

--Rylan Ross

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