

CSWupdate  
JANUARY 2011

# THINKING GENDER

Conference Preview

BY JENNIFER MOORMAN



# january 2011

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**Conference Preview**  
BY JENNIFER MOORMAN

**Liberating Hollywood**  
BY MAYA MONTAÑEZ SMUKLER

**My Great AHA! Moment  
as a Pinay**  
BY KIM MENDOZA

**Avoiding Maternity**  
BY CASSIA PAIGEN ROTH

**Media Representations  
of Michelle Obama**  
BY TAQUESA BRANNON

**Keep it Green!**

**Staff**

# THINKING GENDER 2011

## 21st Annual Graduate Student Research Conference

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2011, 7:30 AM TO 6:00 PM, UCLA FACULTY CENTER

**T**HE UCLA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN is proud to announce our 21st Annual Graduate Student Research Conference, to be held on Friday, February 11, 2011 from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm at the UCLA Faculty Center. The conference highlights feminist research on gender, sexuality, and women across all disciplines and historical periods.

As in past years, this year's conference promises to be an exciting forum for the exchange of ideas on a wide variety of topics. Thinking Gender panelists will be representing a diverse array of academic institutions—student presenters from UCLA and other California schools will be joined by students from across the country and international students traveling from as far

away as Israel and Nigeria. In all, 36 different academic institutions will be represented.

This year, we will be featuring an especially significant number of multi-disciplinary panels. Rather than being organized along disciplinary lines, many panels include presenters who approach similar topics through a variety of different perspectives, disciplines, and methodologies. A panel on “Contested Interventions and the Politics of Rescue,” for instance, includes presenters from the departments of Feminist Studies at UC Santa Barbara, Literature at UC San Diego, Comparative Human Development at the University of Chicago, and Environmental Science, Policy and Management at UC Berkeley. A

panel called “What’s Food Got to Do with It? Women and Disordered Eating” similarly includes panelists from Psychology at Hebrew University, Critical Studies at USC, English at Georgetown, and Education and Human Development at UC Santa Barbara.

The diversity of academic affiliations is matched by the presenters' wide array of topics, including motherhood, historical struggles over women's place, transgendered experiences and representations; and examinations of gender and/or sexuality in relation to normative narratives, the workplace, kinship, cruising, embodiment, pedagogy, technology, media, entrepreneurship, and oral histories. Among these interesting and relevant topics, this

# MAKING IT OUR BUSINESS

*Development, Coffee, Sex, and the Workforce*

**PLENARY SESSION**  
**1 TO 2:30 PM**  
**SEQUOIA ROOM**  
**UCLA FACULTY CENTER**

**MODERATED BY**

**PURNIMA MANKEKAR**

Associate Professor

Asian American Studies and Women's Studies at UCLA

**AND FEATURING**

**'Don't Monopolize the Good': Development Aggression and Subaltern Filipina Women**

**STEPHANIE SANTOS** • Women's Studies

**GenderQueering Coffee: Café Femenino, Morality Prices and the Transnational Production of Fair Trade Femininities**

**EVANGELINE HEILIGER** • Women's Studies

**'Wanda Whips Wall Street': Women Filmmakers and the Business of Pornography**

**JENNIFER MOORMAN** • Cinema and Media Studies

**The Effects of Sexual Orientation and Gender on Hiring Decisions**

**BENJAMIN EVERLY** • Anderson School of Management

the other panels, the plenary session includes a wide array of topics and disciplinary perspectives. The panel will feature the following presentations: "Don't Monopolize the Good': Development Aggression and Subaltern Filipina Women," Stephanie Santos, Women's Studies; "GenderQueering Coffee: Café Femenino, Morality Prices and the Transnational Production of Fair Trade Femininities," Evangeline Heiliger, Women's Studies; my own paper, entitled "Wanda Whips Wall Street': Women Filmmakers and the Business of Pornography," Cinema and Media Studies; and "The Effects of Sexual Orientation and Gender on Hiring Decisions," Benjamin Everly, Anderson School of Management. The plenary session will be held from 1:00 to 2:30 pm in the Sequoia Room at the UCLA Faculty Center.

Please join us for a day of engaging and provocative scholarship, networking, discussion, and fun on February 11. The day begins with pre-registration at 7:30 am and ends with a reception at 5:30pm. The conference is free and open to the public. This year's Thinking Gender is an event you won't want to miss!

**Jennifer Moorman is a Ph.D. student in the Cinema and Media Studies Program at UCLA and Thinking Gender Conference Coordinator for 2011.**

Note: For more information, please visit <http://www.csw.ucla.edu/conferences/thinking-gender/thinking-gender-2011>

year's conference includes several panels highlighting four key issues with regard to gender and sexuality: money, food, invented pathologies, and the academy.

We are especially excited about this year's plenary panel, Making It Our Business:

Development, Coffee, Sex and the Workforce. Purnima Mankekar, Associate Professor of Asian American Studies and Women's Studies at UCLA, will be moderating the panel. All of the presenters are UCLA students, but much like many of

*Liberating*

HOLLYWOOD

**THIRTY YEARS OF  
WOMEN DIRECTORS**

**A**t the 82nd Academy Awards ceremony on March 7, 2010, American filmmaker Kathryn Bigelow became the first woman to win an Academy Award for Best Director. *The Hurt Locker*, the film that she directed, also won an Oscar for Best Picture. It was a contemporary historical moment very much rooted in the historical past of Hollywood and American culture during the 1970s. Bigelow, who attended Columbia University's Graduate School of Film in the 1970s and directed her first feature film, *The Loveless*, in 1982, was presented the award by Hollywood icon Barbra Streisand who in the 1970s also began cultivating her ambition to direct and made her directorial debut, *Yentl*, in 1983. The significance of the 2010 Oscar "first" was emphasized by Streisand's enthusiasm in her presentation of the award to Bigelow: "Well, the time has come [pause] Kathryn Bigelow. Whoahoo!" Off mic, as the music swelled, Bigelow could be heard saying to Streisand: "I am so honored. I am so honored," while Streisand joked about the statue: "Can I hold this?" Although her output as a director has received much acclaim, Streisand has never been nominated for Best Director by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Within this exchange, the legacy of American women directors dating back to the 1970s was acknowledged by the success of Kathryn Bigelow's win, the disappointment in Barbra Streisand's lack of equivalent recognition, and the way in which the two women recognized each other's place in history. As if this symbolism was not enough, the two directors exited the stage as the orchestra played Helen Reddy's 1975 women's liberation anthem "I Am Woman." A clichéd but resonate soundtrack, the song served as a link between women directors of the present, their formative years of the 1970s, and the feminist movement of the same era.

The 1970s was a crucial decade for women directors working in Hollywood as it marked a period of significant increase in their employment statistics compared to previous decades. Between the early 1930s up until the late 1960s, there was never more than one woman making commercially oriented movies in Hollywood or within the independent film communities adjacent to the studio system.<sup>1</sup> By the late 1960s and increasingly—ever so gradually—throughout the 1970s the number of women directing feature films grew. Between 1966 and 1980 there were an estimated fifteen women who had made

feature films targeting commercial audiences, either within the studio system or as independent filmmakers.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the 1970s the feminist movement impacted the entertainment industry in various ways influencing Hollywood's own political consciousness-raising. On-screen the women's movement and its objective of female autonomy were represented by characterizations and narrative themes in several kinds of movies including critically acclaimed studio films (most directed by men) such as *Klute* (1971, dir. Alan J. Pakula), *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974, dir. Martin Scorsese) and *Unmarried Woman* (1978, dir. Paul Mazursky). Off-screen, myriad female industry employees formed various kinds of networking organizations. For instance, Women in Film, a non-political association created by established women in the industry, was formed in 1973; and in 1974 the American Film Institute, a mainstream conservatory for a new generation of filmmakers, still run by an old-guard Hollywood patriarchy, founded the Directing Workshop for Women, a hands-on program that trained individual women to become film and television directors. Several professional guilds, such as the Directors Guild of America (DGA), Screen Writers



**OFF MIC, AS THE MUSIC SWELLED, BIGELOW COULD BE HEARD SAYING TO STREISAND: “I AM SO HONORED. I AM SO HONORED,” WHILE STREISAND JOKED ABOUT THE STATUE: “CAN I HOLD THIS?”**

Guild (SAG), and Writers Guild of America (WGA), were significant in projecting the influences of the feminist movement in the United States on the film and television industries during this period by involvement with sexual and racial discrimination within equal employment debates.

Advocating for their female constituents both the WGA and SAG each formed their own Women’s Committees in 1972.<sup>3</sup> From 1974 to 1976, both guilds compiled statistical surveys that explicitly documented the disfranchisement of their women members;

often linking the data to a specific studio, network and in several cases individual television shows. These efforts were spearheaded by the two organizations’ individual Women’s Committees, which the press reported on widely.<sup>4</sup> The WGA addressed the low numbers of women writers working in film and television, and SAG called for improved roles for actresses. More reticent than its colleagues in matters of public activism, the DGA was late to the era’s feminist awareness not making a concerted effort to address

the low employment numbers of its female directors until the very end of the 1970s. While the DGA was slow to organize within its membership ranks around issues of employment discrimination, ultimately the Guild’s involvement extended beyond just press coverage and into the court of law.

At the end of the decade, in 1979, the DGA Women’s Committee was formed. Original members of the Committee were Susan Bay, Nell Cox, Janet Davidson, Jolene Dobrow, Cheryl Downey, Pat Eyerman, Dolores Feraro, Anne Goodall, Nancy Heydorn, Victoria Hochberg, Ann Kindberg, Valeria Kircher, Flora Lang, Lynne Litman, Lisa Rich, Susan Smitman, Leslie Waldman.<sup>5</sup> Composed of award-winning television, documentary, and feature-film directors, the group was formed because of mounting frustration with their inability to get hired within the industry. Determined to assess their current employment status, the Committee was granted permission from the Guild to examine decades of employment records of studios, networks, and leading independent production companies. Between 1949 and 1979, according to the Committee’s findings, 7,332 feature films were made and released by major distributors. Fourteen—0.19 percent—were directed by women. These statistics were

given to the media to draw attention to tangible evidence of sexism within the industry and to show specific percentages of women hired (or not hired at all in some cases) at individual companies, studios, and television shows.

On June 18, 1980, as a consequence of the DGA Women's Committee's actions in publically addressing industry sexism thirty-two executives from prominent production companies, television networks and film studios agreed to a meet with more than one hundred members of the DGA Women's Committee. Industry representatives included Barry Diller, chairman of the board and CEO, Paramount; Ned Tanen, president, Universal Pictures; Frank Wells, president and co-CEO, Warner Bros.; Steve Bochco, MTM's *Hill Street Blues*; James Brooks, executive producer, John Charles Walters Productions; and programming representatives from ABC, CBS, and NBC. The Committee introduced affirmative-action quota recommendations for studios and networks:



Page Eight

## WOMEN IN

(Continued from Page 7)

Smart cookies all, women who look around in registration lines and change majors. The few who don't are led — or misled — by a passion stronger than native intelligence "and the hope that it won't be closed to you," as one female film student put it.

"A burning, passionate desire to do film leads girls into film school," Kantor explained. "The girls are well aware that there are no places — beds but no places — for a girl in the profession. Most are placed in jobs, USC sees to that, but not in the places the girls want. The typical offer is as a secretary."

Years ago, there were practical reasons for women not working behind

**BETWEEN 1949 AND 1979, 7,332 FEATURE FILMS WERE MADE AND RELEASED BY MAJOR DISTRIBUTORS. FOURTEEN—0.19 PERCENT—WERE DIRECTED BY WOMEN.**



# ON JUNE 18, 1980, AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE DGA WOMEN'S COMMITTEE'S ACTIONS IN PUBLICALLY ADDRESSING INDUSTRY SEXISM THIRTY-TWO EXECUTIVES FROM PROMINENT PRODUCTION COMPANIES, TELEVISION NETWORKS AND FILM STUDIOS AGREED TO A MEET WITH MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED MEMBERS OF THE DGA WOMEN'S COMMITTEE.

for every thirteen television episodes contracted, producers were requested to hire at least one woman director.<sup>6</sup> However, eight months later, discussions between the two sides had fallen apart. Aljean Harmetz, writing for the *New York Times* in February of 1981, reported that “according to the guild’s complaint, each employer ‘unilaterally withdrew’ from a voluntary affirmative-action program.”<sup>7</sup> Each side staunchly opposed the other’s stance on

affirmative-action quotas. Michael Franklin, executive director of the Guild at the time, explained that:

*the DGA was forced into the suit because of Columbia’s [and Warner Bros.] refusal to negotiate...based on a system of numerical goals and timetables.”*

In response, Columbia released a press release stating that “despite [the studios] expressed willingness to continue

negotiations...the Guild refused to...unless Columbia acquiesced in imposing quotas as to the numbers of women and members of minority groups to hire.<sup>8</sup>

While the DGA used statistical evidence documenting the low number of women and minorities actually hired by the studios to justify their demands for the usage of such programs, both film companies held the Guild responsible for those low numbers. Warner Bros. and Columbia cited culpability in the DGA contract which set certain provisions that controlled the hiring process supposedly making it difficult for the studios to access female and minority job candidates.

As a result of this impasse, in 1983 the DGA filed a class-action lawsuit with the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California alleging discriminatory hiring practices towards women and racial minorities: against Warner Bros. on July 25 and against Columbia Pictures on December 21.<sup>9</sup> In 1985, Judge Pamela Rymer ruled in favor of Columbia and Warner Bros., and effectively against the DGA.<sup>10</sup> She stated that the Guild was partially responsible for the small amount of women and minority film and television directors hired due to the way in which the organization’s contract perpetuated the “old boys’

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CLERK U.S. DISTRICT COURT  
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

11 DIRECTORS GUILD OF AMERICA,  
12 INC., )  
13 Plaintiff, )

14 v. )  
15 COLUMBIA PICTURES INDUSTRIES,  
16 INC., )  
17 Defendant. )

83 8311 CBMCA  
CASE NO.  
CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT FOR  
REDRESS OF CIVIL RIGHTS

18  
19  
20 As and for its Complaint, Plaintiff alleges as  
21 follows:

22  
23 1. Jurisdiction. The jurisdiction of this Court is  
24 invoked pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1341 and 1345. Plaintiff seeks  
25 equity to redress the deprivation of civil rights guaranteed  
26 and secured by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as  
27 amended, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000e et seq. ("Title VII"), and by the  
28 Civil Rights Act of 1991, 42 U.S.C. § 1981 ("Section 1981"),  
which are acts of Congress providing for the protection of

6 Attorneys for Defendant

CLERK U.S. DISTRICT COURT  
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIF.  
BY *gh*

7  
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9  
10 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

11 DIRECTORS GUILD OF AMERICA,  
12 INC., )  
13 Plaintiff, )

14 v. )  
15 WARNER BROTHERS, INC. )  
16 Defendant. )

NO. CV-83-4764 PAR (MCx)  
MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF  
MOTION TO DISMISS  
COUNTERCLAIM  
DATE: January 9, 1984  
TIME: 10:00 a.m.

17  
18  
19  
20 I  
21 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

22 As is fully discussed herein, the basic theory on the  
23 instant motion is that the Defendant, an employer, lacks  
24 standing to pursue a claim of employment discrimination.

25  
26 A. Plaintiff's Claims

27 Plaintiff Directors Guild of America ("DGA"), a labor  
28 organization under the Labor Management Relations Act, 1947, 29

IN 1985, JUDGE PAMELA RYMER RULED IN FAVOR OF  
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MINORITY FILM AND TELEVISION DIRECTORS...

**ALTHOUGH TECHNICALLY A FAILURE,  
THE DGA LAWSUIT AGAINST COLUMBIA  
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REGARDING WOMEN DIRECTORS IN TWO  
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TIME THAT THE DGA, AN INFLUENTIAL AND  
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LEGAL ACTION ON BEHALF OF THEIR  
FEMALE MEMBERSHIP. NEVER HAD SUCH  
ATTENTION BEEN DRAWN TO FEMALE  
DIRECTORS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY.**

club” and “word of mouth” hiring practices by stipulating that directors could choose their Assistant Directors and Unit Production Managers.<sup>11</sup>

Although technically a failure, the DGA lawsuit against Columbia and Warner Bros. was significant regarding women directors

in two ways. Primarily, that it was the first time that the DGA, an influential and reputable organization, had taken legal action on behalf of their female membership.<sup>12</sup>

Never had such attention been drawn to female directors within the industry. Furthermore, it was an uncharacteristic

gesture made by an industry organization that was not known for taking overt political positions informed by potentially controversial issues such as feminism, sexism and racism. As DGA member Lynne Littman said in the press before the case was lost:

*The important thing about the action the guild is taking now is that it is being taken by the whole guild, not by the women's committee. The guild is not a notoriously radical organization, and their support for us is a major advance.<sup>13</sup>*

Second, speculation as to why the DGA would take such a drastic action as filing a class action suit against two major studios without precedent set in the Guild's history suggests an effort at self-protection. In a recent interview with me, retired DGA member Barbara Peeters, who belonged to the Women's Committee during the 1980s and at the time of these legal battles, suggested that the Guild made those aggressive demands of the film companies in an effort to prevent their female members from accusing them of similar acts of gender discrimination.<sup>14</sup> The Guild preferred to sue the studios rather than be sued for sexism by its own associates. Ten years after the filing of the suit, Michael Franklin described the impact of the case on the

Guild in a positive light: “Prior to 1978, the Guild had an image of a gentlemen’s club. It didn’t make waves. The lawsuit improved the Guild’s status because the industry recognized that not only did the DGA represent important creative elements within the industry, but it was a strong force for the positive improvement of society as well!”<sup>15</sup> Three decades later, accepting her Oscar last year, Kathryn Bigelow described to the audience how “this was the moment of a lifetime.” This statement is surely true for any filmmaker winning their first Academy Award. The hope for many, and no doubt the founders of the DGA Women’s Committee in 1979, is that it wouldn’t take so many lifetimes to arrive at such a moment.

**Maya Montañez Smukler is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Cinema and Media Studies Department where she is currently conducting dissertation research on women directors in 1970s Hollywood. She is co-editor-in-chief of Mediascape, UCLA’s on-line media studies journal, and has been a part-time faculty member of the New School University’s Film and Media Studies Department since 2002. Maya received a CSW travel grant to interview women directors who worked in Hollywood during the 1970s and 1980s.**

## Notes

1. Dorthy Arzner (studio director) made films from 1927 to 1943; Ida Lupino (independent director working within Hollywood) made feature films from 1949 to 1966; and Shirley Clarke (independent director working outside of Hollywood) made feature films from 1961 to 1967.
2. My current research on this subject suggests this number.
3. Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant & Creative New Generation of Women Stormed Hollywood*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002, 5; David F. Prindle, *The Politics of Glamour Ideology and Democracy in the Screen Actors Guild*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998; 107.
4. Gregory, 7-11.
5. Gail Williams, “DGA Files Sex Discrimination Suit vs. Networks, Prod’n Co’s,” *Hollywood Reporter* 25 Feb. 1981.
6. Morrie Gelman, “DGA Wants More Work For Women: Asks One Femme Director For Every 13 Television Segs,” *Variety* 20 June 1980; Eunice Post Field, “DGA Committee Wants More Women Directing for TV,” *Hollywood Reporter* 20 June 1980.
7. Aljean Harmetz, “Suit Allege Sex Bias By TV and Film Makers,” *New York Times* 25 Feb. 1981.
8. David Robb, “DGA Sues Columbia Over Hiring,” *Variety (D)* 22 Dec. 1983.
9. David Robb, “Directors Guild Born Out of Fear 50 Years Ago,” *Variety*, 52<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary Issue 29 Oct. 1985.
10. Directors Guild of America, Inc., Joelle Dobrow, Luther James, Lorraine Raglin and Cesar Torres, Plaintiffs v. Warner Brothers, Inc., Defendant; Directors Guild of America, Inc., Bill Crain, Dick Look, Sharon Mann, Susan Smitman, and Frank Zuniga, Plaintiffs, v. Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc., Defendant. Nos. CV 83-4764-PAR; CV 83-8311-PAR.
11. David Robb, “Rule Against DGA As Minority Rep In Class Action Suits,” *Variety* 13 Mar. 1985.
12. At this point in my research it seems as if this is the first time a major film studio was sued for gender and racial discrimination by a leading industry organization.
13. Aljean Harmetz, “Suit Allege Sex Bias by TV and Film Makers,” *New York Times* 25 Feb. 1981.
14. Barbara Peeters, personal interview, Ashland, Oregon, 11 Apr. 2010.
15. Joelle Dobrow, “The Man Behind the Women’s Movement at the Guild,” *DGA News* Dec. 1990/ Jan. 1991; 21.

# MY GREAT AHA! MOMENT AS A PINAY

BY KIM MENDOZA



**MY GREAT AHA! MOMENT** in realizing and claiming my Pinay identity came through several revelations through my studies and membership in various organizations. As a Chicana/o Studies major at UCLA, I saw parallels between the histories of colonization in Mexico and in the Philippines. I also began to understand that the term “Chicana” was a political term used to demonstrate both a personal connection to a people’s struggles and a political and social consciousness. I began to think of it as a term that included others, regardless of their homeland. With my new knowledge and self-awareness, I was able to identify myself as a “Chicana.” I also began to identify as a “Pinay,” which means that I am a Filipina womyn but more importantly that I am Filipina womyn engaged in political, social, artistic, and spiritual ways which connects me to my voice, struggles, transformation, and growth as a Pinay.

My transformation to openly identifying as a Pinay led to a transformed understanding of my own community and my activism within it. In the fall of 2009, upon transferring to UCLA from Pasadena City College, I joined the Samahang Pilipino organization. Their meetings, events, and activities allowed me to develop relationships with other Pinays who were at differing levels of understanding and identifying with the term. Nevertheless, we all shared an innate resolve to dismantle the molds that have, historically, been placed upon us and to challenge these molds with activism as conscious, self-identified Pinays.

After several weeks of involvement with the organization, I found myself serving as Samahang Pilipino’s Pinays Coordinator. With this position, I sought to create a space where Pinays could come together to engage in self-reflection, to challenge cultural and social norms that defined what a womyn “should” be, and to establish a

***I also began to identify as a “Pinay,” which means that I am a Filipina womyn but more importantly that I am Filipina womyn engaged in political, social, artistic, and spiritual ways which connects me to my voice, struggles, transformation, and growth as a Pinay.***

sisterhood of support and further transformation. To this end, I established Pinays collectives in the form of womyn's circles. These were open to anyone and everyone seeking to initiate and foster personal development. Concurrently, I also had a great opportunity to work with Samahang Pilipino's Kabalikat Coordinator, who helped shed light on LGBTQ issues in the Pilipina/o community. Together, we attempted to bridge gender and sexuality through workshops and meetings within Samahang Pilipino. We also helped to mobilize youth and students to attend the annual Queer Pina/oy Conference. Additionally, we are currently working on a resource guide. I am hoping it will provide Pinays at UCLA a guide to resources such as womyn's circles in the Los Angeles area, domestic violence and sexual assault therapy groups, and mental health resources.

I continued working with issues affecting Pinays with another organization called SiGAw!, or Sisters of Gabriela, Awaken! This organization is part of a larger network of Pinay-based organizations known as the Gabriela Network and it serves Pinays in the Los Angeles community while recognizing that the issues affecting Pinays in the United States are connected

to problems in the Philippines. Through womyn's mass movement building, campaigns, education, cultural work, and connection with other local organizations such as Habi-Arts and Anakbayan, SiGAw! also seeks to end violence against womyn. I also work with the Asian Pacific Coalition, another organization that helped me identify as an API (Asian & Pacific Islander) womyn.

Despite being fortunate to work on various campaigns and connect with other Pinays and API womyn both in the UCLA and Los Angeles communities, my consciousness and identity are still developing and I am very grateful for each opportunity that allows me to question, feel pain, grapple, create, transform, and most of all, connect to other Pinays. Gloria Anzaldua, a great Chicana scholar, provides great insight into the concept of a "border," which pertains to physical boundaries in race, gender, status, and class. She says that the "border" is merely an illusion, within which lies a space known as the "mestiza consciousness." It is in this consciousness where borders meet, where identities connect, and where a "third space" lies. In my appreciation for the contributions of Anzaldua, I have learned to accept my identity as a Chicana and a Filipina, or as

a "Chicapina," in challenging dichotomies and creating a space and identity of my own.

**Kimberly Mendoza is an undergraduate student with a major in International Development Studies and a minor in Chicana/o Studies at UCLA. She received a Constance Coiner Award from CSW in 2010. Created to honor the memory and continue the work of Constance Coiner, who received her Ph.D. at UCLA, and her daughter Ana Duarte-Coiner and made possible through donations of family and friends, the Constance Coiner Award supports research on feminist and working-class issues and honors excellence in teaching and a commitment to teaching as activism.**

# Avoiding Maternity

## Reproductive Practices in 1930s Rio de Janeiro

AT TWENTY MINUTES TO NINE on the morning of December 13, 1932, garbage collector Tiago Dias finished his daily trash route in the Rio Comprido neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Mr. Dias inspected his cart for overflow trash, and, in doing so, he noticed a small but heavy object wrapped in yellowed newspapers amid the rubbish. Upon unwrapping the item, Mr. Dias found a dead infant swaddled in an old blue dress. The ninth district police station, which held jurisdiction over the neighborhood in question, dispatched a police commissioner to the scene who took the infant to the Institute of Legal Medicine. Details are unknown as to how the police knew to

question Rita dos Santos, a young, black native of Minas Gerais who worked as a domestic servant for a family in the neighborhood. The only clue is in the investigation's final report, when the district's police chief wrote that due to the high probability of a crime and "after various diligences, the mother of the infant was discovered."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Pretoria do Rio de Janeiro, 3 (6Z), N. 16784 (1933). Hereafter cited as BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). All deponents' names have been changed. I transcribed this entire document and then translated it to English. In 1940, the Lisbon Academy of Sciences standardized Portuguese spelling, adopted in Brazil in 1943. Before that time, spelling of words and proper names varied. I use the translated version in the text and cite the written text in the footnotes. I stay true to the spelling variations and mistakes in the documents, marked with [sic]. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

An autopsy of the infant occurred three days after its discovery, on December 16, 1932. Doctors cited cause of death as manual strangulation.<sup>2</sup> While doctors had concrete evidence of an infanticide, police investigators did not know of this fact at the time of Rita's testimony. On December 31, 1932 Rita admitted to giving birth to a

2. The process of 'dosimásia hidrostática pulmonar,' "would say if the infant breathed after birth, or that it would prove that it had been born alive." (95) "For the realization of the exam, it would be necessary that the body of the 'newborn' was not in an advanced stage of decomposition. If, due to the lack of lungs, this exam was not able to occur, it would be difficult to prove the crime of infanticide" Roselane Neckel, Joana Maria Pedro, Vanderlei Machado, Eliana Izabel Hawerth, "Aborto e Infanticídio nos Códigos Penais e nos Processos Judiciais: A Pedagogia de Condutas Femininas," in *Práticas Proibidas: Práticas Costumeiras de Aborto e Infanticídio no Século XX*, Joana Maria Pedro, ed. (Florianópolis: Cidade Futura, 2003), 95.

stillborn infant on December 13: “she felt that she was expelling some voluminous thing through her vagina...and on the floor fell an infant that the witness did not feel move or cry, it seemed to not be alive.”<sup>3</sup> Presuming the child was dead Rita placed the infant in the trash. After performing a routine medical (pelvic) exam that ruled out induced abortion on January 2, 1933, the police decided not to take Rita into custody. While the police did not officially accuse Rita of a crime, after her questioning she did not return to her job. Instead, she took up residence at a boarding house. On January 8, 1933 at seven o’clock in the morning, Rita dos Santos committed suicide by lighting her dress on fire. The official cause of her death was cited as general second- and third-degree burns.

Bureaucratic delays may explain the lag occurring between the date of the infant autopsy and its inclusion into the investigation, but, for whatever reason, the infant’s autopsy was not included in the police report until after Rita’s suicide. The final report concludes: “because there still had not been certainty of the existence of infanticide, she [Rita] was let go under supervi-

3. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “...sentia que estava expelindo uma qualquer coisa volumosa pela vagina; que sair do vaso, abaixou-se e, no chão, cair uma criança que a depoente não sentia mecher [sic] nem chorou, parecendo não estar viva.”

sion, being put up in 77 Rua da Estrella [sic]. There, possibly touched by remorse for the crime committed, the same committed suicide, setting fire to her dresses.”<sup>4</sup> The police chief’s words cannot be taken at face value, however, as we do not know whether she killed herself out of ‘remorse.’ Nevertheless, Rita dos Santos confronted serious choices in her young life without the education, support, or resources to make fully informed decisions.

While this case may seem like an extreme example of birth control methods in 1930s Brazil, infanticide was a method that women were familiar with and employed with some frequency. In a brief look at police investigations in the city of Rio de Janeiro from 1900 to 1933, I discovered fourteen criminal investigations of infanticide, thirty-three criminal investigations of appearance of a fetus,<sup>5</sup> and five investigations of other terms referring to infanticide.<sup>5</sup>

4. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “...já por que ainda não houvesse a certêsa [sic] da existencia [sic] do infanticidio [sic] foi ela posta em liberdade, sob vigilancia [sic], recebendo acolhida na casa n. 77 da rua da Estrella [sic]. Ali [sic], possivelmente tangida pelo remorso do crime que praticou, a mesma suicidou-se incendiando as vestes no dia 11 de Janeiro proximo [sic]...” The police chief erroneously writes that Rita dos Santos committed suicide on January 11, 1933. This was the day the information arrived at the police station. The autopsy and obituary both read January 8, 1933.

5. For infanticide see: BR AN, RIO 0I.2872 (1902); BR AN, RIO T8.1773 (1905); BR AN, RIO 7H.671 (1906); BR AN, RIO 7H.821 (1907); BR AN, RIO T8.2480 (1907); BR AN, RIO CS.237 (1908); BR AN, RIO T8.2697 (1908); BR AN, RIO 7E.1626 (1908); BR AN, RIO CS.488 (1910); BR AN,

My goal here is not to employ quantitative methods to look at the frequency of infanticide as a birth control method. Rather, I hope to situate the practice of infanticide—often overlooked in the scholarship on demographics, population politics, sexuality, and the family—within the social and political changes of the period. Specifically, this case study looks at the criminal investigation of Rita dos Santos in relation to the economic instability inherent in domestic servitude and the invasive nature, both physically and emotionally, of police investigations of infanticide. To understand her decisions, we must consider Rita’s

RIO MW.2634 (1910); BR AN, RIO CR.674 (1912); BR AN, RIO 6Z.105 (1912); BR AN, RIO CS.2047 (1917); BR AN, RIO 6Z.19277 (1936); For ‘appearance of fetus’ see: BR AN, RIO 7C.306 (1900); BR AN, RIO 0R.1578 (1901); BR AN, RIO 0R.1647 (1901); BR AN, RIO 7C.495 (1902); BR AN, RIO MW.737 (1903); BR AN, RIO T7.403 (1904); BR AN, RIO T8.1408 (1904); BR AN, RIO T8.1986 (1906); BR AN, RIO 0R.4460 (1906); BR AN, RIO MW.2162 (1908); BR AN, RIO MW.1852 (1908); BR AN, RIO T8.2682 (1908); BR AN, RIO T8.2701 (1908); BR AN, RIO T8.2727 (1908); BR AN, RIO T7.809 (1908); BR AN, RIO T7.0837 (1908); BR AN, RIO CS.359 (1909); BR AN, RIO MW.2273 (1909); BR AN, RIO 7G.1172 (1909); BR AN, RIO T7.1142 (1909); BR AN, RIO T8.3239 (1909); BR AN, RIO T8. 3254 (1909); BR AN, RIO T8.3280 (1909); BR AN, RIO 7G.1311 (1910); BR AN, RIO 0R.7729 (1910); BR AN, RIO T8.3834 (1911); BR AN, RIO 0R.8181 (1911); BR AN, RIO CR.654 (1912); BR AN, RIO 72.901 (1912); BR AN, RIO 72.1043 (1914); BR AN, RIO 72.1407 (1915); BR AN, RIO CS.2819 (1919); BR AN, RIO 70.1074 (1919); For investigations employing a variation on the terms above, including ‘Concealment of Fetus’ and ‘Fetus’ see: BR AN, RIO MW.440 (1902); BR AN, RIO CS.1391 (1907); BR AN, RIO CS.2225 (1912); BR AN, RIO 72.1412 (1915); BR AN, RIO CS.6819 (1933). Maria Pedro also finds the practice of ‘dumping fetuses’ common in early-twentieth-century Florianópolis. “Aborto e Infanticidio: Práticas Muito Antigas,” in *Práticas Proibidas*, 43.



individual agency in relation to the larger structural forces that governed decision-making.

As many scholars note, the social, economic, and political upheaval of 1930s Rio de Janeiro is crucial to understanding simultaneous transformations in gender and race relations. In 1930, the reverberations from the Great Depression were felt throughout Brazil. Rural to urban migration, labor unrest, and political instability caused elites to feel threatened by inevitable socioeconomic change. Women's roles—as laborers, mothers, wives, and daughters—also changed. To many elite men, 'the modern woman' who delayed marriage, worked outside the home, and leisured in public space, was a destabilizing social force.<sup>6</sup> These men saw traditional women as representing a certain moral stability, one which would preserve a hierarchal social order based on the patriarchal family.<sup>7</sup> Women's chastity, then, was important in symbolic terms, and a sexual double standard existed that required women remain virgins until mar-

6. Susan K. Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 2.

7. Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy*, 3, 5; and June Hahner, *Emancipating the Female Sex: The Struggle for Women's Rights in Brazil, 1850-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 75. See also, Joana Maria Pedro, ed. *Práticas Proibidas*.

riage. Chastity also held economic importance. Sueann Caulfield argues that men and women across social and racial divides saw virginity as crucial social capital to secure a good marriage. It provided women with economic stability and men with legitimate heirs. While scholars have traced the role of sex and honor in a changing patriarchal system, few historians have explored the social implications of unwanted pregnancy. It would be three decades before the Pill became widely available in Brazil, and birth control methods were less preventative and more reactive. In other words, abortion, infanticide, and child abandonment served as retroactive methods of controlling fertility. All three practices were illegal in the 1890 Penal Code, in effect when police questioned Rita dos Santos.<sup>8</sup>

## The Case of Rita dos Santos

In 1930 Rita dos Santos migrated alone to Rio de Janeiro from the state of Minas Gerais. Working in several different homes in the city as a domestic servant, she eventually ended up under the employment of Adelia Reich, herself an immigrant from Argentina.<sup>9</sup> It was at Rita's first place

8. *Ibid.*, 37. Only infanticide, and not child abandonment, was criminalized in the 1830 Penal Code.

9. Interestingly enough, every witness in the case immi-

grated to Rio de Janeiro from other Brazilian states in Brazil or other countries. Rita and the trash collector Tiago Dias both migrated from Minas Gerais, a state bordering Rio de Janeiro to the northwest. Adelia Reich emigrated from Buenos Aires, while her mother was originally from Poland and had arrived in Rio by way of Buenos Aires. Finally, the friend who had accompanied Tiago on his trash route that fateful morning was from Portugal. A simple glance at the persons involved with the case highlights the changing demographic nature of 1930s Rio de Janeiro.

10. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). "...e come ele teve muitos contactos carnisais, fora de casa, nos matos proximos [sic]..."

11. *In Defense of Honor*, 75-6.

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been discharged from the military police for numerous absences.”<sup>12</sup> By the time Rita gave birth, she had not seen Moreno in four months.

Rita mentions no family or friends in Rio de Janeiro. Single, young, and alone, Rita could not rely on her absent boyfriend or distant family to support her during and after a pregnancy. The absence of family had economic repercussions. In her discussion of deflowering cases that ended in pregnancy (twenty six percent), Caulfield argues men could easily shun their responsibilities as fathers:

*Unless she were living ‘in concubinage’ with the father or could prove that he had sequestered her when the child was conceived, a woman and her children born out of wedlock had no way of obtaining material assistance from a father who refused to legally recognize his paternity in writing...<sup>13</sup>*

There was no more permanent manner to damage one’s honor—and ability to marry—as having a child. It was physical evidence of one’s moral transgressions. More importantly, however, single mothers

12. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “...soube que o mesmo tinha sido excluído [sic] da Polícia Militar porque havia faltado muito ao serviço...”

13. *In Defense of Honor*, 112.

faced serious economic barriers, as they could not legally press the fathers for child support. Rita was in one such precarious position, as she had no family to economically support her.

## Domestic Servants

Scholars have noted the dismal employment conditions black and mulata women faced after the abolition of slavery in urban centers across Brazil. June Hahner argues that employment opportunities for black women were strikingly similar both before and after abolition. Women labored as maids, cooks, nursemaids, unlicensed vendors, laundresses, and prostitutes as slaves and free laborers.<sup>14</sup> Sandra Lauderdale Graham cites that Brazil’s high manumission rates during slavery meant that slaves and freed blacks labored alongside each other in similar tasks. During the late-Imperial and early-Republican periods, urban black women most often worked as maids or wet-nurses inside upper-class homes.<sup>15</sup> Forty-four years after abolition, work circumstances had not changed. Rita worked as an unskilled

14. *Emancipating the Female Sex*, 91.

15. *House and Street: The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 5, 31-36.

worker in middle-class homes. She was not guaranteed workers’ rights, as informal domestic servitude fell outside the purview of labor unions.<sup>16</sup> The instability inherent in the life of a domestic servant, especially a young, single, black woman is clear. Loss of a job meant loss of one’s livelihood.

From Rita’s various jobs, it seems that she found new employment somewhat easily. Rita’s testimony does not tell us if having a child would have cost Rita her job. Rita says, “that with fear of her bosses knowing that she was a mother” she wrapped her child in an old dress and placed it in the trash.<sup>17</sup> The case does not tell us the actions Rita’s employer, Adelia Reich took after the infanticide occurred, but after Rita testified to the police, she stopped residing at her employer’s home.

Scholars studying these issues in other areas of Brazil have found that most women charged with the crimes of infanticide held a social position similar to that

16. As Susan K. Besse writes, “Not only did they [domestic servants] suffer from a lack of legal protections, very low pay, and exploitative working conditions, but the nature of their work reinforced disempowering stereotypes of female nature,” *Restructuring Patriarchy*, 8, 150. For São Paulo see, Joel Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men: São Paulo and the Rise of Brazil’s Industrial Working Class, 1900-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

17. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “...que a declarante com receio de que seus patrões soubessem que ela tinha sido mãe...”

of Rita. That is, these women “were widowed, single, born or raised in rural areas, or lived in their bosses’ homes in urban areas.”<sup>18</sup> Caulfield argues that, “...it was extremely difficult for a young woman to support a family alone. Many women lost their jobs when they became pregnant and continued living with their parents, with or without the fathers of their children.”<sup>19</sup> Were women with support networks more likely to keep their child? Did domestic servants resort to infanticide and abortion at higher rates than other women? Did job categories correlate with reproductive choice?<sup>20</sup> Education, race, and support networks played important roles, and these questions require more study.

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18. “Aborto e Infanticídio: Práticas muito Antigas,” in *Práticas Proibidas*, 53.

19. Interestingly enough, Caulfield finds that mothers, and not fathers, usually instigated deflowering accusations against their daughters’ lovers. According to Caulfield, “The difficulties of single parenthood were all too familiar for many of the girls’ mothers, which explains in large part the urgency of mothers’ attempts to force the deflowerers to marry their daughters. In *Defense of Honor*, 135.

20. In Sueann Caulfield’s work, unemployed women filed the most deflowering petitions, at 39 percent. Domestic servants came next with 37 percent. More secure jobs such as factory workers, commerce workers, or seamstresses comprised a much smaller percentage of complaints. White women had the highest number of complaints with parda women at the second highest and black women last. In *Defense of Honor*, 157-159.

## Public Castigation, Invasive Exams, and Legal Proceedings

The 1890 Penal Code clearly punished infanticide by imprisonment. Article 298 of the code cited official punishment as follows:

*To kill a newborn, this being, an infant in the first seven days of life, employing direct and active methods, denying the victim the necessary care for the maintenance of life and the impeding of its death: Punishment – imprisonment for six to twenty-four years. Only exception: If the crime was perpetrated by the mother to hide her own dishonor: Punishment – imprisonment from three to nine years.*<sup>21</sup>

Honor had a profound influence on the severity of criminal punishment. If a woman committed infanticide “to hide her own dishonor,” she faced a greatly reduced prison sentence. It is beyond the scope of this paper to tease out the meaning of honor in relation to criminal punishment and reproductive control.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, a strict reading of the law shows that morality, and not the crime itself, was punished,

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21. José Henrique Pirangelli, *Códigos Penais do Brasil: Evolução Histórica* (Bauru: Ed. Javoli, 1980), 303. Quoted in Joana Maria Pedro, ed. *Práticas Proibidas*, 104.

22. For an interesting discussion of this topic in relation to the legal discourse in deflowering cases, see Sueann Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor*, esp. 108-112.

as the law implied that infanticide committed in the name of honor was a lesser offense than one committed without honorable motives.<sup>23</sup>

Rita does not mention honor in her testimony, only that she feared her employers would find out she had given birth. In fact, Rita’s testimony implies the opposite.

“That not being a virgin anymore, the deponent, having been deflowered in Minas Gerais by her boyfriend there whose name she does not know anymore, the deponent gave herself to the soldier Márcio Moreno.”<sup>24</sup> Rita dos Santos knew how to read, but did she know the intricacies of the law in regards to infanticide and honor at the time of her initial testimony? If Rita had had the support of family who understood the importance of honor in public cases of sexual activity, would she have answered differently?

Rita’s actions were in response to the world in which she was living. In this sense, public opinion served as another form of punishment. According to Rita, public knowledge about and judgment of her pregnancy stopped her from admitting to her actions. For example, after placing the infant in the trash, Rita had gone back to bed. The following day, she went about her work as usual. When “she saw the infant

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23. Neckel, Pedro, Machado, and Hawerth, “Aborto e Infanticídio nos Códigos Penais,” 92.

24. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “...que não sendo mais donzela a declarante, por ter sido deflorada em Minas Gerais por um seu ese [sic] namorado que não mais sabe o nome, a declarante entregou-se ao soldado Márcio Moreno...”

being withdrawn from the trash cart...she had the wish to say that it had been her who had had the child, something she did not do with fear of the scandal that would involve her name.”<sup>25</sup> Rita herself contributed to this public castigation. In Adelia Rech’s testimony, Adelia mentions Rita’s comments on the morning the infant was found in the trashcan: “Rita was at her side and even commented on the courage of the mother that had committed that perversity.”<sup>26</sup> Adelia’s mother, Carmen, corroborates this story in her account of the morning. “Everybody in the street commented on the case, [and] Rita declared that she did not know how a mother could do such a thing as that [and] that for the witness [Carmen] the revelation that the mother of the infant in the trash was Rita came as a surprise.”<sup>27</sup>

We can determine two points from this testimony. To begin with, whether or not Rita actually felt that this act was a ‘perversity,’ she understood that social opinion did. Scholars studying the

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25. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “...e no dia seguinte presenciou a retirada da criança da corroça de lixo, tendo vontade de dizer que fôra [sic] ela que tivera tal filho, o que não fez, com receio do escandalo [sic] envolveria seu nome.”

26. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “[Rita] estava a seu lado e ainda comentou a coragem dam ãe que tinha cometido aquela perversidade”

27. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “...todos na rua comentaram o caso, Rita declarou que nnao sabia como podia uma mãe fazer uma cousa d’aquela que para a depoente foi uma surpresa a revelação de que era maria a mãe da criança que apareceu na corroça de lixo.”

southern city of Florianópolis, argue that social opinion of infanticide expressed in the press used a discourse of brute animalism and perversion.<sup>28</sup> The press conveyed that elite lawmakers and medical practitioners saw infanticide as standing in the way of a civilized, modern nation.<sup>29</sup> Second, as scholars have cited, neighborly condemnation served as an on-the-ground implementation of police surveillance. In Florianópolis, “In the legal proceedings in which doubts in respect to who was the mother of the found fetus hung over the case, the authorities also resorted to the neighbors’ watch.”<sup>30</sup> Even neighborly vengeance appeared as a denunciation motive. This spiteful motive shows up in one interesting Rio de Janeiro investigation.<sup>31</sup> In 1915, two young women were questioned after the area’s presiding judge received an anonymous letter denouncing one woman for having an abortion and the other for helping in the process. The entire process turned out to be a cruel hoax, and the fetus allegedly buried in a hill close to the young women’s homes turned out to be a small doll. This neighborly surveillance is an example of what Michel Foucault calls “the panopticism of ever day.” For Foucault, there is no limit to

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28. Joana Maria Pedro, “Introduction.” In *Práticas Proibidas*, 11.

29. Joana Maria Pedro, “Aborto e Infanticídio: Práticas Muito Antigas,” in *Práticas Proibidas*, 5, 21.

30. Neckel, Pedro, Machado, and Hawerth, “Aborto e Infanticídio nos Códigos Penais,” 90.

31. BR AN, RIO CS.1602 (1915).

legal-judicial practices because they are internalized in its subjects: “What generalizes the power to punish, then, is not the universal consciousness of the law in each juridical subject; it is the regular extension, the infinitely minute web of panoptic techniques.”<sup>32</sup> Whatever the true motives, public surveillance enhanced police knowledge and control.

A third form of punishment pertained to the medical exam. Writes Joana Maria Pedro, “[control over the accused] was done through publicity of the woman’s body and its products.”<sup>33</sup> This occurred on two levels. On the surface, women were forced to hide the physical signs of pregnancy: “Large clothes, tight belts, and little contact with the public, [were methods used] to try to hide the rounded figure.”<sup>34</sup> Rita’s employer, Adelia comments in her testimony that since hiring Rita, “that young woman continually had period pains...[but] apart from being slightly heavily, the witness [Adelia] did not ever suspect that [Rita] had been pregnant, because she seemed very well, and she [Adelia] did not notice any enlarging of

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32....Although the universal juridicism of modern society seems to fix limits on the exercise of power, its universally widespread panopticism enables it to operate, on the underside of the law, a machinery that is both immense and minute, which supports, reinforces, multiplies the asymmetry of power and undermines the limits that are traced around the law.*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 223, 224.

33. “Aborto e Infanticídio,” 46.

34. *Ibid.*, 52.

the belly.”<sup>35</sup> Carmen, Adelia’s mother also tells a similar story: “that apart from the witness herself being a mother, she never noticed in Rita any signs of pregnancy, besides the fact that she noticed Rita was slightly overweight.”<sup>36</sup> It seems that Rita’s weight covered up physical signs of pregnancy. Even Rita ignored the physical signs: “[she] noticed that her belly was slightly larger but she ignored that she was pregnant because she did not feel any symptoms of pregnancy.”<sup>37</sup>

On a more personal level, in cases of presumed abortion or infanticide, a pelvic, or ‘supposed-birth,’ exam occurred. At the time of Rita’s exam, the police delegates’ doctors were looking for signs of an induced abortion. Women did not have a choice to deny the exam, and I have found no cases where women refused.<sup>38</sup>

The autopsy of Rita and her infant also followed normal procedure in determining the cause of death and possibility of sui-

35. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “...que essa rapariga continuamente tinha colicas [sic]...que apesar [sic] de ser um tanto cheia de corpo a depoente não suspeitou nunca que a mesma estivesse grávida [sic], porque a mesma aparentava muito bem, não deixando notar qualquer volume do ventre...”

36. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “que apesar [sic] da depoente ser também [sic] mãe nunca notou em Maria qualquer demonstração de gravidez, não obstante notar que ela tinha o corpo um tanto gordo...”

37. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “...notou que o ventre estava um pouco crescido mas ignorava que estivesse grávida [sic], porque não sentia nenhum sintoma de gravidez...”

38. In her study of ‘deflowering exams,’ used to prove if a woman was a virgin or not, Sueann Caulfield finds five cases out of 250 where women refused to be examined. *In Defense of Honor*, 121, 122.

cide. The presence of suicide proved Rita dos Santos guilty in the eyes of the police. As the police chief wrote, “The accused, however escaped the punishment of her crime through the door of suicide.”<sup>39</sup> In the end, Rita’s own body was used as evidence against her.

## Conclusions

Overall, this case exemplifies the lack of options poor women had to control their reproduction in three ways. On the level of proactive methods, Rita was at a disadvantage. Hormonal birth control methods did not exist in 1932. The most traditional form of birth control, *coitus interruptus*, existed, but it was, and is, male-controlled.<sup>40</sup> Condoms, cervical caps, and diaphragms were sold publicly by the end of the nineteenth century, but more research needs to be done to know the prevalence of these methods of contraception in Brazil during the first decades of the twentieth century. Rita either did not know about them or did not have access. On the level of retroactive methods, Rita

39. BR AN, RIO 6Z.16784 (1933). “A acusada, porem fugiu á [sic] punição de seu crime pela porta do suicidio [sic].”

40. See Fabíola Rohden, *A Arte de Enganar a Natureza: Contracepção, Aborto, e Infanticídio no Início do Século XX* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fiocruz, 2003), 30, 45.

also was at a disadvantage. An abortion required the knowledge of effective herbal remedies or medical procedures, or of midwives who performed the service.<sup>41</sup> If Rita knew of effective abortion methods did she have the time and money to go through with the procedures? Finally, Rita was at a disadvantage after the birth of her child. At that time, many poor young mothers left unwanted children at orphanages.<sup>42</sup> Rita’s vulnerable position as a poor migrant restricted her knowledge about the choices she had. Most interestingly, Rita dos Santos gave birth when child-mother welfare was becoming a central focus of the Vargas welfare state. Yet she did not benefit from these ‘universal’ social services aimed at maternal-child welfare. In the end, not all women were included in the modernization of the ‘Brazilian family.’

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41. Sandra Lauderdale Graham touches on herbal remedies in *House and Street*, 84.

42. *Ibid.*, Between 1859 and 1908 roughly 17,000 children were left at the Santa Casa de Misericórdia orphanage in Rio de Janeiro.

# MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF MICHELLE OBAMA

*From the Angry/Strong Black Woman to the New American Icon*



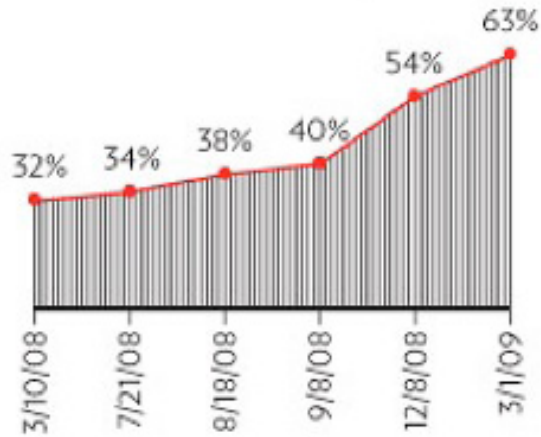
**A**s shown by this excerpt from an article by Jodi Kantor in the *New York Times*, the management and construction of Michelle Obama's image during the 2008

presidential campaign was elaborately orchestrated and meticulously calculated. It was important to create a 'charm offensive' that rivaled the efforts to conjure support for presidential candidates, 'not

***[Michelle Obama] is at the center of a multimedia charm offensive that may be the most closely managed spousal rollout in presidential campaign history. On Monday night, Mrs. Obama delivered a prime-time speech at the Democratic National Convention, preceded by an intricately made biographical video, a touch usually afforded to candidates, not their wives.***

**– Jodi Kantor, *New York Times***

## Michelle Obama's Favorability Ratings



SOURCE: NBC News/  
Wall Street Journal poll

their wives', was a motivated response to negative portrayals of Mrs. Obama that served to threaten Barack Obama's historic campaign. As evidenced by favorability ratings (*shown above*) that nearly doubled in one year from 32% (3/10/08) to 63% (3/1/2009) in the NBC News/Wall Street Journal Polls, these elaborate and carefully crafted attempts to manage Mrs. Obama's image successfully transformed her from a potential threat to an astonishing asset to the campaign.

This essay examines the shift in the construction of Mrs. Obama's image over time,

and postulates that the observed increase in her favorability is related to a change in earlier media representations that emphasized her black, racial identity to later media representations that highlighted her female, gender identity. Building on research in several disciplines that demonstrates that femininity and womanhood are constructs that are highly associated with whiteness (Hull et al. 1982; Goff et al. 2008; Palmer 1983), I investigate how media representations of Michelle Obama have changed over time. Further, I examine how such changes might relate to U.S. understandings of gender that have historically been predicated on particular representations that have excluded and vilified African American women. These questions are informed by the work of Hunt (2005) and Hall (1996) which conceptualizes race in the U.S. through chains of equivalence, a representation of the black-white binary that links blackness with badness and whiteness with goodness.

Merging these insights on race and gender, it follows that whiteness is a construct that is linked to femininity and goodness; whereas, blackness is a construct that is linked to masculinity and badness. The popular media which often contains representations of black females that invoke stereotypes that emphasize traits such as 'an-

gry' and 'strong' reinforce the association between blackness, masculinity, and badness by presenting images of black women that are masculinized and stigmatized (Madison 2009; West 1995; Collins 2005). In the current study, I ask how these stereotypical representations of black womanhood mapped on to Michelle Obama's identity in the media over time. I postulate that media constructions of her identity which are consistent with these stereotypical representations of black womanhood occurred early in the campaign and coincided with an unfavorable public attitude toward her..

By contrast, I propose that media constructions of Michelle Obama's identity which are consistent with white womanhood occurred later in the campaign, when the public's attitude toward her became more favorable. I examine 'ideal mother', 'fashion icon', and the 'first lady role' as representations of white womanhood that are feminized and endorsed in the media (Roberts 1993; Burns 2008). Over time, representations of American womanhood have been mapped on to Mrs. Obama's identity in the media. The change in construction over time has coincided with (and I argue, significantly influenced), the increasingly favorable perception of her by the public, as 2009 NBC News/Wall Street Journal Polls have shown.

For this study, I used content analysis to measure the frequency of representations that have mapped on to Mrs. Obama's racial (i.e., 'angry' and 'strong') or gender (i.e., 'ideal mother', 'fashion icon', and the 'first lady role') identity in both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. In order to assess changes in Mrs. Obama's image, the time frame from February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009 was split into four distinct periods. The first time period is when Barack Obama declared his candidacy for president up until he was elected as the presumptive nominee for president (February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007 to June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008). The second time period is after Mr. Obama is declared presumptive nominee for president up until the election (June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008 to November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008). The third time period is after the election up until Mr. Obama's first six months in office (November 5, 2008 to June 30, 2009). The fourth time period is the last six months of Mr. Obama's first year in office (July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009). Additionally, articles from both newspapers were analyzed in order to observe the presence of the following four possible frames: 1) angry/strong black woman; 2) ideal mother; 3) fashion icon; and 4) first lady role/performance.

Given that as the first African American

**Given that as the first African American First Lady, Michelle Obama is uniquely positioned to shatter black female stereotypes, media representations that reinforce the black-white binary dampen this potential.**

First Lady, Michelle Obama is uniquely positioned to shatter black female stereotypes, media representations that reinforce the black-white binary dampen this potential. Such that constructions of Mrs. Obama's identity that uphold the black-white binary by likening blackness to negative associations and whiteness to positive associations serve to sustain the notion that blackness is bad/inferior, whereas whiteness is good/superior.

The data revealed that the way Michelle Obama was portrayed has changed over time in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. For both newspapers in this study, angry/strong black woman was the dominant frame during the first and second time periods; however, angry/strong black woman was not prevalent within the third and fourth time periods. These findings sup-

port my hypothesis because these earlier media representations of Mrs. Obama as an angry/strong black woman focused on her black, racial identity; her favorability ratings were low during these periods.

During the third time period, ideal mother and fashion icon were the dominant frames for both newspapers. Additionally during the fourth time period, the dominant frame for both newspapers was the first lady role/performance. These findings support my hypothesis that because these later media representations of Mrs. Obama as an ideal mother, a fashion icon, and a favorable first lady focused on to her gender identity instead of her black, racial identity; her favorability ratings were increasing during these periods.

This study showcases how race and gender are conceptualized through binaries in



***In order to make Mrs. Obama more appealing to mainstream Americans, campaign managers accentuated her female identity rather than her racial identity. This was achieved by creating an intervention that would disconnect her from mapping on to blackness.***

the United States, and how these binaries affect the ways in which black women are treated in this country. The racial binary equates whiteness with being good/superior and blackness with being bad/inferior, whereas the gender binary associates maleness with masculinity and femaleness with femininity. It is important to note that these binaries are not mutually exclusive because there are different social meanings attached to what it means to be a white male versus a black male or a white woman versus a black woman in society. Specifically in the case of white and black women, the former have been socially constructed as feminine, whereas the latter has been socially constructed as masculine.

Results from this study further highlights how racial and gender binaries are not mu-

tually exclusive. Earlier media representations of Michelle Obama were linked to black female stereotypes, which emphasized her racialized gender identity. These representations of Mrs. Obama as an angry/strong black woman excluded her from the traditional ideals of white womanhood and these images also mapped on to her black identity because she was viewed as masculine and deviant in the media. Thus, the consequences of these images resulted in Mrs. Obama receiving negative press and low favorability ratings. For example, the portrayal of Mrs. Obama as an angry/strong black woman was the dominant frame for articles in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* from the time Mr. Obama declared his candidacy up until the election (February 10, 2007 to November 4, 2008).

The press is highly influential in shaping the public's opinions and the dominance of these representations in the press played a role in the public's low acceptance of her and campaign managers' urgent need to re-shape her image in the media.

The push to revamp Mrs. Obama's image as an angry/strong black woman bolsters the belief that stigmatized behavior associated with blackness should be controlled and policed in society. Looking back at the chains of equivalence, which links negative characteristics associated with blackness, Mrs. Obama was seen as "African, savage, emotional, inferior, and slave" (Hunt 2005:3) when she was portrayed as an angry/strong black woman. In order to make Mrs. Obama more appealing to mainstream Americans, campaign managers accentuated her female identity rather than her racial identity. This was achieved by creating an intervention that would disconnect her from mapping on to blackness. This intervention involved reshaping Mrs. Obama's image so that she would map on to white womanhood. The underlying problem with this intervention is that it reinforces the black-white binary in which blackness is bad/deviant and whiteness is good/superior. For example, Mrs. Obama was rewarded with ascending favorability ratings and positive press when

she was portrayed as an ideal mother, a fashion icon, and a favorable first lady. This notion is supported by the study's results, which illustrate that the angry/strong black woman frame became significantly less prevalent as the ideal mother, the fashion icon, and the first lady role/performance frames became the dominant frames of articles in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* from the time after the election to the end of the Obamas' first year in office (November 5, 2008, to December 31, 2009).

On the other hand, the framing of Michelle Obama as an ideal mother, a fashion icon, and a favorable first lady in the newspaper articles also broadens society's view of black women and these positive representations of Mrs. Obama serves an opportunity for dismantling negative representations of black womanhood. First of all, this framing of Mrs. Obama as an ideal mother places her in a distinctive position because she serves as a model for helping to shatter the stereotypical dichotomy of showcasing black women as bad mothers and white women as good mothers. Secondly, the framing of Mrs. Obama as a fashion icon is a great feat because this representation has the potential to expand society's vi-

sion of beauty standards. As a fashion icon, Mrs. Obama disrupts the myth that black women are not marketable enough to represent high-end fashion, an arena typically reserved for white women. Mrs. Obama has made history by appearing on the cover of *Vogue*, an elite fashion magazine, and this achievement brings forth the opportunity for more black women to be shown as glamorous and beautiful in the media. Finally, Mrs. Obama's role as the first African American first lady is a major victory because she has been granted entrance into the ultimate embodiment of "True Womanhood" and the high visibility of this role gives mainstream Americans a chance to see her as an exceptional mother, a fashionable trendsetter, and a supportive wife.

**Taquesha Brannon earned her M.A. in Afro-American Studies in 2010. She was awarded a CSW travel grant to present her thesis findings on First Lady Michelle Obama at the National Council for Black Studies conference in New Orleans, LA.**

Photo credit: On page 22, official portrait of First Lady Michelle Obama taken by Joyce N. Boghosian, White House photographer.

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