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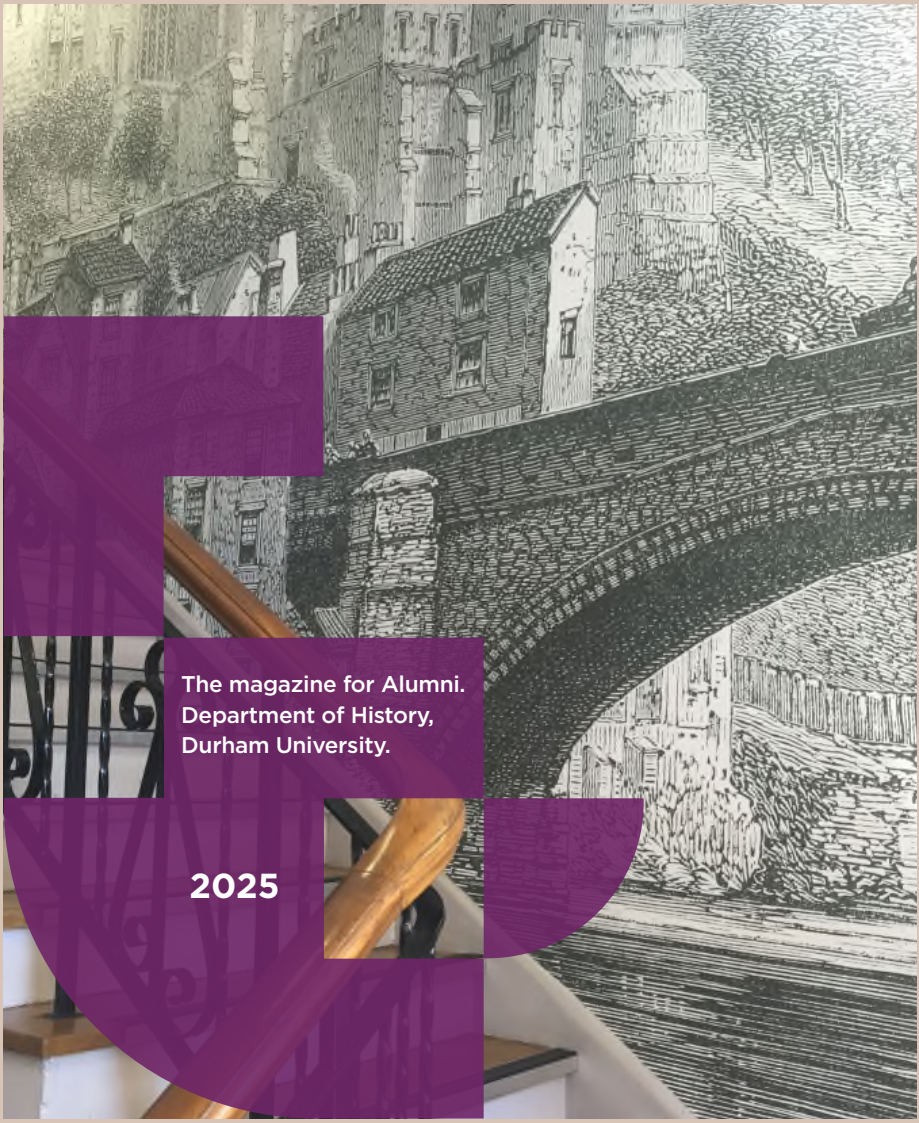

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Power, when filtered through the lenses of gender and race, reveals a complex web of inequalities that govern who gets to speak, who gets to act, and who remains silenced. The theme of this year's edition of *Symeon* is 'Power: Gender and Race.' By tracing the historical interplay of race and gender, this issue of *Symeon* uncovers how power has been defined and distributed—often to the exclusion of women and people of color—and how those excluded have continually surfaced. We are proud to present essays from students, staff, and alumni from Durham's Department of History which insightfully examine the interwoven influence of gender and race on individuals' and communities' experiences of autonomy, and oppression.

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The 'feminine gaze' has interrogated power, especially social hierarchies in different spheres. It has informed engagement with fragmented archives and illuminated marginalized histories. It is not a coincidence that all the articles submitted for this issue have been written by female academicians (except the note about departmental news). These articles explore the complex performance of racial identities and mediated agency through gendered norms. From experiences of Indo-Guayanese women, to Quaker women, to European gaze of Japanese ethics as embodied by samurai objects, this edition of *Symeon* covers a wide range of geographical and historical facets.

Voices of Indo-Guyanese women inform Rosie Lalbachan-Dow's essay. As she mentioned, Guiana was the first Caribbean nation to obtain a shipment of indentured labourers in May 1838. Women found ways to negotiate power within the new social conditions despite gender imbalance. For instance, many of them changed marital structures, through inter-caste and inter-racial relationships. Rosie critiques the misrepresentation of the active role of Indo-Guyanese women. She challenges this view by highlighting stories of resilience and defiance, showing that these women were not simply subjects of oppression, but also agents of cultural and social change. For instance, she shows that the kitchen became a site of cultural preservation and identity-making as Indo-Guyanese women shifted toward domestic labour after World War I. The use of physical space to examine histories of power is present in another essay. Sahava Baranow examines Japanese objects in Europe as it shaped both western view of Japan and Japanese self-perception. Her innovative approach to examine the constructed and fluid notion of *bushido* (the samurai code of honour and moral conduct) reveals a complex interplay between material culture, nationalism, masculinity and identity.

Chantel Chesney has explored the intersection of gender, migrant labour and race through a study of Filipino maids in Singapore in the 1980s. Their identity as foreign and domestic highlights the complicated nature of migrant workers – they were an intimate part of Singaporean homes, yet socially and legally marginalized. Chantel asserts that despite challenging conditions like low pay and limited rights, they were neither silent nor powerless. Their ability to assert agency was restricted by broader historical, political and economic systems, not by cultural submissiveness. Filipino maids negotiated survival and dignity within tight constraints, and Chantel calls for future studies to consider the historical and systemic context that shaped Filipinos' lived realities.

Two articles examine gendered roles within religious movements – and reveal the ways in which social hierarchies infiltrated Quaker faith and Islam. Lily Chadwick illuminates the role of regional context – in sites like Salem and Swarthmoor – to explore Quaker women's agency. Despite influential figures like George Fox's gendered notions, Quaker women exerted authority and autonomy. In a similar vein, Adrianna Charytoniuk argues that religious power and its political expression was transformative for women in Mali and Niger. Through Islamic education and reinterpretation of religious texts, women reshaped Islam itself, which in turn influences the wider society and political structures.

In this edition, we are also pleased to present Rachel Johnson's note about her recent monograph *Voice, Silence and Gender in South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Shadow of a Young Woman*. Her book investigates the life and death of a young black woman, Masabata Loate, during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. She explores the intersectionality of gender, age and race as it shapes historical representation. Like other essays in this edition, her work illuminates the gendered and racial silences in archives. Johnson approaches Loate's story not as a conventional biography but as a 'shadow biography'—a reconstruction from incomplete archival fragments and partial knowledge that reflects how some voices are marginalized, silenced, or misrepresented in historical records. Johnson's methodology draws on a concept of scavenger methodology, which focuses on fragmented, incomplete records rather than attempting to fill in the gaps. Through her shadow biography, Johnson illuminates how archives themselves are a battleground where power is contested—not just by the presence of voices but by the absence of voices too.

Thus, understanding race, gender, and power requires us to look beyond the obvious and the visible, to explore acts of defiance and acts of survival, and to recognize that silences and fragmented histories are often as much a part of power as the voices that echo across the pages of history. The histories of people, especially women of colour are not just stories of oppression—they are stories of resistance, agency, and the ongoing negotiation of power within a world shaped by racial and gendered inequalities. Finally, we would like to thank Tom Hamilton for his note on the interesting year that our History Department has experienced so far.

Image courtesy of Durham University.

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Department news

Tom Hamilton,
Director of Research and Deputy Head of the Department of History

(Image courtesy of Durham University).

On Maundy Thursday, 17 April 2025, King Charles III visited Durham for a grand service in the cathedral. Hundreds of people across the city worked around the clock to prepare the way. They fitted out the city with crochet designs for bollards and post-boxes, banners flying over Saddler Street and the Bailey, fresh grass seed sown on Palace Green and in the Cathedral Cloisters, and much more besides. Cosin's Hall, the Department's building on Palace Green, gained a fresh coat of paint on the front door (and at least one colleague gained a paint mark up their sleeve as a result). For days police examined each man-hole cover and circuit box to check for hidden threats. Security stickers sealed each door with a window facing Palace Green: Julie-Marie Strange and Len Scales – our current and previous Head of Department – were locked out as a result. The bells rang out for hours to call visitors into the city centre. Crowds thronged the route back from the cathedral via Market Square and down to the A690. Pubs and bars across the city bulged for the rest of the day.

Peeling back the security stickers at the start of Easter Term, reality set in on Palace Green and along the Bailey. On many of our desks is a recent Royal Historical Society report on 'The Value of History in UK Higher Education and Society' and it makes for difficult reading. Funding arrangements in place since 2012 mean that tuition fees struggle to cover the cost of higher education. As a result, History departments across the UK are facing cuts to staffing and degree options. At Durham History we are safe from these cuts for the moment, but we are planning for a sustainable future in our teaching and research, and that needs far more than a lick of paint or a fresh crop of grass.

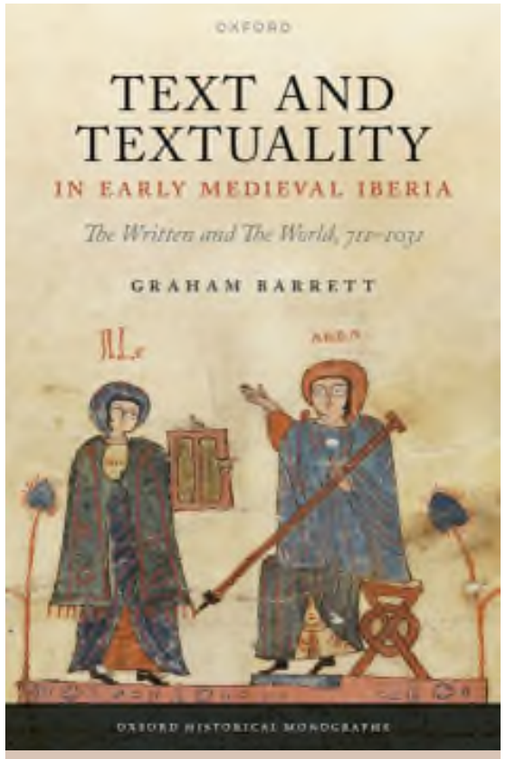
In making these plans we draw inspiration from the popularity of History among students at school, university, and among the wider public. At GCSE and A-Level the number of students studying History is rising. Recruitment in the department remains very strong and we're fortunate to work with such brilliant students. Work continues to embed our Bridging Course and encourage a more diverse range of students to apply, take up their offers, and thrive throughout their degrees. History graduates are highly employable and successful in the workplace, and they're needed more than ever in an era of AI that means the critical arts and humanities skills that students develop in a History degree come into their own.

As a History Department we have no end of ideas about why history matters and how we can best study the past. A great strength of the department is the diversity of perspectives that so many colleagues bring to our discussions. At the start of this academic year we met for an away day at Ushaw College to begin to think about how we might reform our curriculum to make it more expansive and resilient, and to integrate more directly training in the skills that make historical research effective but also transferrable. Our discussions ranged around transformative histories in research, teaching, and public life.

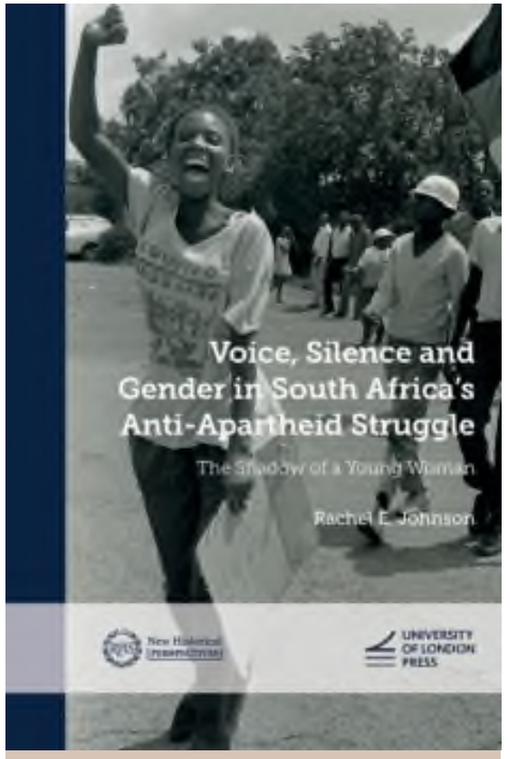
But we can't do it alone. This coming term we're looking forward to a new initiative led by Graeme Small as part of that curriculum reform process, to invite back to the department some of our alumni who are currently History teachers in schools. We're excited to discuss together what it's like to study History right now, so that we can better understand the skills, interests, and perspectives that students might bring to Durham when they start their degree, and how we can help them to flourish after they arrive. We hope these conversations will also generate meaningful collaborations between History teachers at school and university so that we can better understand the state of the discipline together. If you'd like to join the conversation in the future please get in touch: we'd love to hear from you.

Much of the strength in our teaching as a Department is rooted in our world-leading research. In my role as Director of Research I've been fortunate to spend much of my time in the past few years finding out more about colleagues' work that spans a vast range of past human experience across the world, from Late Antiquity to the twenty-first century. Durham historians engage in collaborations across the humanities, sciences, and social sciences to develop innovative research methods and techniques. And they make critical interventions to inform policy and public debate, whether to draw lessons from the past or challenge the use and abuse of history in the present.

Two new appointments in the current academic year exemplify the sheer range of research going on across the department. Graham Barrett arrived from the University of Lincoln as a specialist in early medieval and digital history. His book *Text and Textuality in Early Medieval Iberia: the Written and the World, 711–1031* (Oxford University Press, 2023) looks at thousands of charters to study the functions and conceptions of writing and reading, documentation and archives, and the role of literate authorities in the Christian kingdoms of the northern Peninsula between the Muslim conquest of 711 and the fall of the Islamic caliphate at Córdoba in 1031. David Schley came to Durham from Hong Kong and works on modern American and environmental history. His book *Steam City: Railroads, Urban Space, and Corporate Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore* (Chicago University Press, 2020) examines how the birth and spread of the American railroad—which brought rapid communications, fossil fuels, and new modes of corporate organization to the city—changed how people worked, where they lived, even how they crossed the street.



Graham Barrett, *Text and Textuality in Early Medieval Iberia: the Written and the World, 711–1031* (Oxford University Press, 2023)



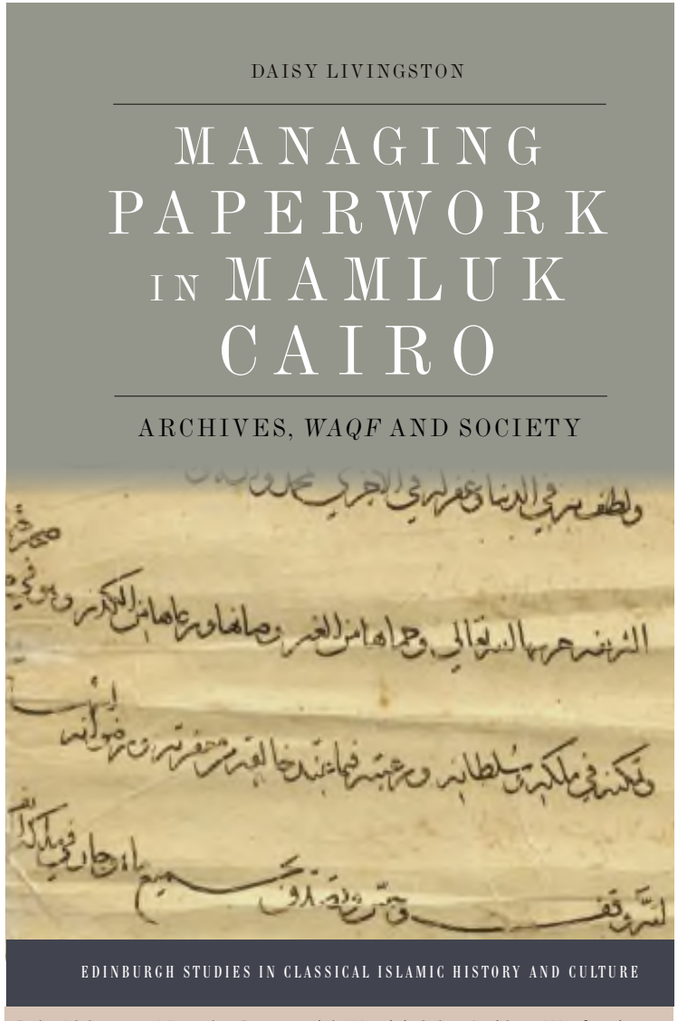
Rachel Johnson, *Voice, Silence and Gender in South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Shadow of a Young Woman* (University of London Press, 2025)

The theme of this issue of Symeon is Power: Gender and Race, and these matters are core to our research and teaching in the Department. Recently we have launched two new research clusters to give colleagues and postgraduate researchers space to discuss work-in-progress and develop ideas informally and creatively. Natalie Mears leads the History on the Margins group to explore hidden and marginalised histories and historians. Christina Riggs leads the group on Museums, Archives, and Heritage to consider these topics as both source materials and subjects of historical research. Colleagues in both groups are actively involved in innovative research projects that are exploring the legacies of enslavement and colonialism, for example Liam Liburd's work on the project 'Absence/Presence of Durham's Black History, which has produced a walking tour and a website (https://durhams-black-history.humap.site/). There is exciting work just getting started too. Alex Barber and Becky Taylor at the University of East Anglia have just been awarded highly competitive funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to create awareness around Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month and investigate what makes a history month successful.

In such a lively and research active department we're fortunate to be able to read a diverse range of exciting new publications. Rachel Johnson's book *Voice, Silence and Gender in South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Shadow of a Young Woman* (University of London Press, 2025) is published recently in the Royal Historical Society's 'New Perspectives' series, which means it is freely available online in Open Access. It tells the life story of Mary Masabata Loate, a witness for the prosecution at the trial of the 'Soweto Eleven' in 1978. And it evaluates how gender shaped the ways in which young black women engaged in the Anti-Apartheid struggle, focusing on the question of who spoke, when, and how in debates about the liberation struggle.

Durham History has long had great strength in African History, which has been recently reinforced by arrival of Daisy Livingston from the University of Hamburg. Her new book *Managing Paperwork in Mamluk Cairo: Archives, Waqf and Society* (Edinburgh University Press, 2025) explores the archival history of one of the most powerful polities of the late-medieval Middle East: the Mamluk sultanate of Cairo. It uncovers a startling culture of document accumulation that was shared by the different social groups involved in founding and managing endowments: sultans and emirs, qadis, legal notaries, and scribes. Emphasising the documents' life cycles from production, to preservation, to disposal and loss, it argues for the use of surviving documents to tell their own archival histories.

Postgraduate researchers in the Department are also leading the research agenda, as the excellent content and production of *Symeon* shows. I'll limit myself to just two recent highlights. Rachel Anderson recently published her first article on care workers and the plague in early modern England in the *American Historical Review*, which is perhaps the most widely read historical journal in the world. And Harriet Strahl published in the *Journal of Medieval History* an article that shed new light on the emotional and societal repercussions of the 1120 White Ship disaster. It offers a compelling view of how a single tragic event impacted not only the royal court but also monastic communities and broader society in twelfth-century England and Normandy. Both articles are freely available in Open Access.



Daisy Livingston, *Managing Paperwork in Mamluk Cairo: Archives, Waqf and Society* (Edinburgh University Press, 2025)

In the current financial climate of UK Higher Education, postgraduate funding is becoming increasingly scarce. Nevertheless, Durham historians have been successful in finding creative solutions. Christina Riggs and Johathan Saha have gained AHRC funding to support a PhD project that investigates images of empire in the photographic archive of the Durham Light Infantry, while Julie-Marie Strange and Dabid Minto have also secured AHRC funding for a PhD project on AIDS, Inequality and Religious Ethics of Care in 1980s and 90s Britain. These are collaborative doctoral awards held in conjuncture with The Story (the relaunched and expanded County Durham Record Office) and the Salvation Army respectively, partnerships that will continue to grow as the projects develop.

I hope this overview of recent activities in the Department whets your appetite for the articles that follow in this issue of *Symeon* and also encourages you to keep in touch and let us know when you're in Durham next!

Figure 1: Women Parliamentarians in Niger meeting Jill Biden in 2016.

How has Islam produced power

for women in Mali and Niger?

Adrianna Charytoniuk

Ada is a second-year undergraduate studying History at Durham University. With a keen interest in the histories of gender and sexuality, they were particularly drawn to questions of female agency while studying the Power in Africa module last year. Ada's work explores the potential malleability of patriarchal structures and the complexities of Islam for women in Mali and Niger, considering it as a dynamic means of negotiating social and political boundaries.

With Muslim-majority populations, both Mali and Niger have been deemed contested border zones against 'Islamic fundamentalism' by the West.[1] Both the targets of neoliberal structural adjustment programs, the countries have undergone significant economic and political change due to Western economic intervention through the International Monetary Fund and World Bank during the late 1980s and 1990s. While this had many negative consequences economically, it has resulted in relative political democratization, which has worked as an 'in' for women into various positions of power in Islam. According to Rosa De Jorio, despite both states being officially secular, Islam is still referenced in politics to convey legitimacy.[2] Islam is thus crucial in the production of power. This essay argues that political iterations of Islam have produced religious, political, and financial power for women in Mali and Niger through education, digital media, increasing democratization, the ability to choose how they conform, and use of the hijab. These factors allow for varied interpretations of Islamic scripture, opening opportunities for female agency and power, which is strengthened through emphasizing female piety.

Women have gained religious power from Islam through Islamic education. In both colonial and independent Niger, Islamic education has received no state funding.[3]

1. Benjamin Soares, 'Islam in Mali in the Neoliberal Era,' *African Affairs*, 105:418 (2006), pp. 77-95, p. 78.
2. Rosa De Jorio, 'Between Dialogue and Contestation: Gender, Islam and the Challenges of a Malian Public Sphere,' *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15 (2009), pp. 95-111, p. 95.
3. Ousseina Alidou, *Engaging Modernity: Muslim Women and the Politics of Agency in Postcolonial Niger*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), p. 75.

Moreover, interventions from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have created wealth disparities in Niger. In a patriarchal state with an unequal distribution of resources, this has resulted in the denial of education to women.[4] According to Ousseina Alidou, the exclusion of women from Islamic spaces has resulted in women creating their own Islamic spaces in which they hold unprecedented power.[5] Indeed, educated, Muslim women like Mallama A'ishatu Hamani Zarmakoy Dancandu have taken matters into their own hands, creating their own female Qur'anic schools.[6] Various grassroots female efforts have also resulted in the opening of alternative *makaranta*, *madarasa* and *medersa* schools, which cater to Muslim girls.[7] Abdoulaye Sounaye rightly highlights the emergence of the title 'Mallama,' as significant for female empowerment, since the term is needed with this newly emerging class of female Islamic teachers.[8] These women have promoted female education, scholarship, and created learning centres for women and girls.[9] Mallama Zahra, for example, has established courses and schools where girls study the Qur'an and learn Arabic, which has helped to lessen the gender gap in education. Upper-class female Islamic teachers aided this campaign by organizing religious teachings at home for newly converted women.[10] Alidou argues that creating female Islamic schools aimed to develop consciousness on gender equality through the framework that was used to suppress it.[11] The lack of female education prevented meaningful objections to the same system that created this absence, but this newly gained consciousness would expose the patriarchal manipulation of Islamic teachings.[12] This is perhaps the most significant form of power that women have attained through Islam, as it allows them to shape religious practices going forward and redefine Islam on their own terms, thus using their current power to uphold their future power.

Women are also using Islam to justify their right to secular education, leading them to increasingly access positions of political power. Mallama A'ishatu argues that according to Qur'anic teachings, women have an equal right to knowledge as men.[13] Furthermore, she contends that secular education would allow women to acquire material means to provide for their families, allow them stability, or fulfil the Hajj.[14] She emphasizes the impact of increasing divorce rates and economic aftermath of French colonialism to justify female employment.[15] Indeed, educated women have access to positions in government, economics, and administration, through which they can gain financial power, and more importantly, continue to shape their vision for their future through their political power.[16] Islam has thus helped women access positions of power through justifying their right to secular education.

Women have also gained religious power through their ability to share Islamic knowledge via digital media. Alongside the democratization movement, more highly educated women started running religious TV and radio stations.[17] This has given them a level of authority akin to that of Muslim men, commenting on religious and non-religious issues. Referencing Islamic scriptures, these women challenged patriarchal interpretations of Islam.[18]

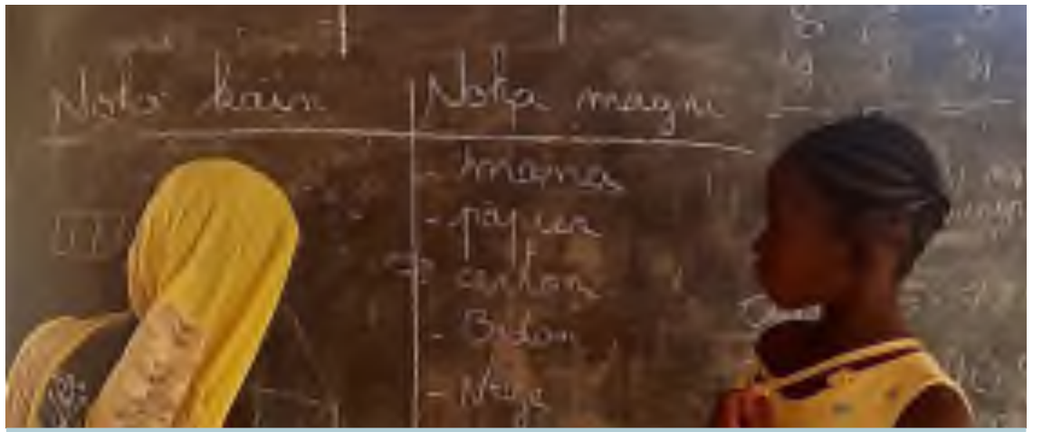


Figure 2: Schoolgirls in Mali.

4. Ibid, p. 81.
5. Ibid, p. 63.
6. Ibid, p. 40.
7. Ibid, p. 81.
8. Abdoulaye Sounaye, '"Go Find the Second Half of Your Faith With These Women!" Women Fashioning Islam in Contemporary Niger,' *The Muslim World*, 101:3 (2011), pp. 539-554, p. 540.
9. *Ibid*.
10. Alidou, *Engaging Modernity,* p. 64.
11. Ibid, p. 82.
12. Ibid, p. 82.
13. Ibid, p. 38.
14. Ibid, pp. 39-42.
15. Ibid, p. 42.
16. Ibid, p. 188.
17. Ibid, p. 163.
18. Ibid, p. 164.

Mallama A'ishatu hosts a radio and TV program for Muslim women, which she was offered after a sheikh admired her knowledge of the Qur'an when she asked him to teach her a poem.[19] Sounaye describes how Mallama Zahra's appearances on national TV have legitimised her authority as a teacher and leader in her community, as well as broadening her audience beyond local communities.[20] Mallama Hawa, similarly, was a preacher on two Nigerien radio stations.[21] Mallama Huda also appeared on national TV, which she used as a platform to emphasize the importance of women's campaigns and Islamic education.[22] Famous performer and political activist Habsu Garba's radio show receives many female callers who share their views on the topics Garba chooses to debate.[23] Through her radio show, then, she provides an opportunity for women's voices to be heard on topical issues. This demonstrates that the Islamic revival in Mali and Niger has resulted in increased power for women, allowing them to publicly speak in favour of women's rights and interests, and disseminate Islamic knowledge to broader communities of women than ever before.

The democratization period that accompanied the Islamic revival in Mali and Niger has created political power for women. Since the United Nation's declaration of 1975 as the 'Year of the Woman,' women in Mali and Niger have become increasingly involved in national and international women's groups, resulting in the increased political impact of the Association of Niger's Women, as well as the Malian Association of Muslim Women (UNAFEM).[24] In 1992, over two thousand women marched for justice to victims of religious Islamist violence in Nigeria, showing the ability for women to confront patriarchal structures within Islam.[25] Habsu Garba was even appointed as a civil worker for the prominence she gained through her activism.[26] Even when working under military regimes, she has centred women's issues in her approach to politics.[27] Evidently, women have been the focus of increasing democratization. In Mali, the 'women's question' has been central to political discourses since 1991.[28] Mass demonstrations followed Traoré's dictatorship.[29] The following president Konaré, however, was a supporter of women's rights and helped create the ministry for women and children's welfare.[30] Additionally, women's organizations struggled for recognition by male Muslim authority prior to the democratization movement of the 1990s.[31] Now, united under UNAFEM, these organizations strive both to

Figure 3: Schoolgirls reading in a Malian school.

19. Ibid, p. 35.
20. Sounaye, '"Go Find the Second Half of Your Faith With These Women!",' p. 542.
21. Ibid, p. 549.
22. Ibid, p. 546.
23. Alidou, *Engaging Modernity*, p. 115.
24. Ibid, p. 164; De Jorio, 'Between Dialogue and Contestation,' p. 100.
25. Alidou, *Engaging Modernity*, p. 157.
26. Ibid, p. 101.
27. Ibid, p. 114.
28. De Jorio, 'Between Dialogue and Contestation,' p. 98.
29. Ibid, p. 97.
30. Ibid, p. 98.
31. Ibid, p. 99.

Figure 4: A female teacher in Niger.

advocate for women's rights and spread awareness about what these rights are, according to Islamic doctrine.[32] Moreover, this democratization process resulted in legislative reform, especially pertaining to female inheritance, where, previously, Islamic law was followed.[33] This demonstrates that iterations of Islam in Mali and Niger have produced power for women to reform Islam itself. Alidou highlights that there is a seeming contradiction here – of women supporting Islamic patriarchal hegemony by using men in positions of power, with the aim of female liberation under a reformed Islam.[34] It must be considered, however, that even with rising women's movements, positions of extreme political power, like presidency, still seem out of reach for women. This is thus a limited but pragmatic approach for women to create the political legitimacy they require to demand more power going forward.

Socio-political iterations of Islam in these regions have also produced power for women to choose how they conform to Muslim standards. When Islamic reformists took power in Niger, they blamed women's bridal gifts as being excessive and representative of 'gluttonous traditions' and 'moral chaos.'[35] While some women complied with these reforms, opting for more humble expenses for marriage gifts, Masquelier contends that most women did not.[36] In this sense, women chose which option was more authentically Islamic – whether reducing or flaunting the bridal gift was preferred, regardless of the requests of male Islamic authorities.[37] Similarly to Alidou, Masquelier highlights how women have gained power through the very structures created to subordinate them.[38] She argues that even when women are not in charge of the debates surrounding Muslim femininity, they can choose how to articulate their understanding of it.[39] In this sense, Islam creates power for women to choose how they conform to Muslim womanhood.

Another way in which Islam produces power for women in Mali and Niger is the wearing of the hijab. Alidou emphasizes how the hijab is used by women as a symbol of their piety to 'legitimate their secular authority.'[40] In this way, they can question patriarchal Qur'anic interpretations without having their devotion to Islam questioned. One Nigerien woman admitted to Masquelier that she felt liberated wearing the hijab in public, as it allowed her to exist without the anxiety of being watched by men.[41] The hijab can thus be seen as a form of protection and reassurance. Masquelier highlights that women still do not control the definitions of 'Muslim womanhood,' but that they are free to express their Islamic femininity and modesty how they see fit.[42] The hijab is a symbol of this freedom, and women use it to enhance their political and religious legitimacy.

In conclusion, Islam has produced power for women in Mali and Niger through Islamic and secular education, digital media, the democratization movement, their ability to choose how they conform, and the use of the hijab. If we consider political power the most concrete power women have gained, then the democratization movement has been the most significant factor. However, while less material, I would argue that women's religious power has been most important, as it lets women redefine Islam, and thus reshape the very values of Malian and Nigerien society – the values that control the political discourses that can take place. It has thus been Islamic education that has been most impactful in producing power for women in Mali and Niger.

32. Ibid, p. 100.
33. Ibid, p. 98.
34. Alidou, Engaging Modernity, p. 150.
35. Adeline Masquelier, *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 180.
36. Ibid, p. 182.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Ibid, p. 205.
39. Ibid, p. 210.
40. Alidou, *Engaging Modernity*, p. 161.
41. Masquelier, *Women and Islamic Revival*, p. 216.
42. Ibid, p. 210.

Breaking the Silence:

Filipino Domestic Workers and the Limits of Agency in late 20th-century Singapore

Chantel Chesney

Chantel Chesney is a third-year undergraduate student studying Ancient, Medieval, and Modern history at Durham University. Her research focuses on uncovering marginalized voices during liminal historical moments at the intersection of race, gender, and class. Highlighting subaltern perspectives during transitional periods between colonial rule and independence, she has investigated the experiences of Dalit-caste women in Maharashtra, courtesans in South Asia, and Évolué women in French West Africa. Drawn to Singaporean history by her familial ties, Chantel's undergraduate dissertation traces the evolution and identity construction of female domestic labour in Singapore.

In 1978, Singapore implemented the Foreign Maid Scheme, facilitating the large-scale recruitment of female Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) from Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka—the first of which serves as the focus of this analysis. Despite their integral contributions to Singapore's economy, Filipino maids found themselves at the intersection of gender and migrant labour exploitation, enduring inadequate wages, harsh working conditions, and frequent instances of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.[1] As Nominated Member of Parliament Shriniwas Rai observed in 1998, FDWs were treated "like slaves".[2] Unlike their mythologized and revered predecessors, the "legendary Cantonese amahs" of the colonial era,[3] Filipino maids instead were paradoxically cast into the marginalizing mould of Edwardian servitude.

An analysis of Filipino maids necessitates an exploration of the intersecting and compounding performativities of identity—race, gender, and class. Underscored through their title, they are "foreign" and yet "domestic"; an intimate outsider who reverses historical anthropologist Ann Stoler's colonial framework of domesticity into a mechanism of local societal power.[4] Simultaneously, FDWs invoke pioneering feminist ideals as independent, working women, whilst also exposing the limitations of a sexual revolution bound to racialized class structures as third-world women.[5] Due to this complexity, this article serves as a preliminary foundation for further investigations, examining whether Filipino maids actively shaped their own power structures through identity formation. To understand the reasons behind their discriminatory treatment, autonomy and identity formation should not be examined as isolated constructs, but as dynamic processes of negotiation, shaped through ongoing dialogues of interaction and compromise between individual self-determination and external regulatory forces. Only by first analysing the level of agency exhibited by Filipino maids can future research begin to explore how they leveraged constructs of gender and race to navigate systemic constraints.

To stimulate future investigations, it is imperative to open a dialogue with current historiography, which unfortunately remains markedly underdeveloped in the context of Filipino maids in Singapore. This lacuna stems largely from the stringent control exerted by the ruling People's Action Party over historical narratives, restraining historians from moving "beyond the 1950s and 1960s", as noted by historian Loh Kah Seng.[6] These constraints were not imposed onto

1. Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour* (London: Zed Books, 2000); Christine Chin, *In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian "Modernity" Project* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); N. Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Rhacel Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
2. Koh Buck Song, "Maid law: Towards a right social ethos", *The Straits Times* (21 April 1998), p. 33.
3. Kenneth Gaw, *Superior Servants: the legendary Cantonese amahs of the Far East* (Oxford University Press, 1988).
4. Ann Laura Stoler, "Matters of Intimacy as Matters of State: A Response", *Journal of American History* 88 (2001), p. 894; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 8-9, 210.
5. Roger Sanjek and Shellee Colen, *At Work in Homes: Household Workers in World Perspective* (American Anthropological Association, 1990).
6. Loh Kah Seng, "Leftists and the Blurring of History", *work class historian* (3 July 2012), accessed 15 January 2025, at https://lkshistory.wordpress.com/2012/07/03/leftists-and-the-blurring-of-history-6/.

Figure 1: Reverend Arotcarena and Filipino maids at the Geylang Catholic Centre.

contemporary disciplines, leading to a substantial body of sociological and economic literature on FDWs in late 20th-century Singapore.[7] While they provided valuable insights into their day-to-day conditions, its presentist focus failed to address the historical structures that shaped FDWs' experiences. Subsequently, this article will engage with a broader historiography on domestic service, widening the geographical and chronological parameters to encompass global studies on colonial servants and migrant domestic workers, as well as local inquiries into FDWs' predecessors like Hainanese houseboys and Cantonese amahs.[8] However, when engaging with this corpus, caution must be raised against the uncritical application of conclusions drawn from disparate regions or time periods to the Singaporean context.

This article directly responds to historian Ooi Keat Gin, who conducted a comparative study on amahs and Indonesian maids in Malaysia. Whilst acknowledging Gin's disparate subject and geographical focus, this study examines the relevance and applicability of Gin's theoretical framework to the Singaporean experience of Filipino maids. Gin concludes that whilst both amahs and maids faced unlegislated employer-employee relations, amahs fared better due to their sisterhood networks, which provided them with a sense of belonging and control over their working conditions through their lodging houses (*coolie fong*), retirement halls, and temples (*Kuam Im Teng*). In contrast, Indonesian maids, lacking such a "safety net", "suffered in silence".[9] Gin thereby attributes the discrimination faced by Indonesian maids to their own lack of agency.

7. Angelia Poon, "MAID VISIBLE: Foreign Domestic Workers and the Dilemma of Development in Singapore", *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17 (2003), pp. 1-28; Hing Ai Yun, "Foreign Maids and the Reproduction of Labor in Singapore", *Philippine Sociological Review* 44, no. 1/4 (1996), pp. 33-57; Janet Arnado, "Localising the Global and Globalising the Local: The Global Households of Filipina Trans-Migrant Workers and Their Singapore Employers", *Reframing Singapore: Memory, Identity, Trans-Regionalism*, ed. by Derek Thiam Soon Heng (Amsterdam University Press, 2009), pp. 229-246; Lenore Lyons, "Dignity Overdue: Women's Rights Activism in Support of Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore", *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 3/4 (2007), pp. 106-122; Pei-Chia Lan, "Negotiating Social Boundaries and Private Zones: The Micropolitics of Employing Migrant Domestic Workers", *Social Problems* 50, no. 4 (2003), pp. 525-549; Shirlena Huang and Brenda Yeoh, "Maids and Ma'ams in Singapore: Constructing Gender and Nationality in the Trans-nationalization of Paid Domestic Work", *Geography Research Forum* 18 (1998), pp. 22-48; Thomas Tan and Theresa Devasahayam, "Opposition and Interdependence: The Dialectics of Maid and Employer Relationships in Singapore", *Philippine Sociological Review* 34, no. 3/4 (1987), pp. 34-41.
8. Claire Lowrie, *Masters and Servants: Cultures of Empire in the Tropics* (Manchester, 2016); Jose C. Moya, "Domestic Service in a Global Perspective: Gender, Migration and Ethnic Niches", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 4 (2007), pp. 559-579; Nitin Sinha, "Who is (Not) a Servant, Anyway? Domestic Servants and Service in Early Colonial India", *Modern Asian Studies* 55 (2021), pp. 152-206; Victoria Katharine Haskins, *Colonization and Domestic Service: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
9. Ooi Keat Gin, "From amah-chieh to Indonesian maids: A comparative study in the context of Malaysia circa 1930s-1990s", in Dirk Hoeder and Amarjit Kaur (eds.), *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations: A Global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries* (Leiden: Netherlands, 2013), pp. 405-25.

At first glance, Gin's analysis of Indonesian maids in Malaysia appears to offer theoretical insights that could be applied to their Filipino counterparts in Singapore. In contrast to amah sisterhoods, Filipino maids were predominantly recruited through employment agencies which treated them as "commodities" and controlled their terms of employment.[10] The allocation of Work Permits further prohibited Filipino maids from retiring in Singapore like their Cantonese predecessors, where if dismissed, they had one month to find new employment or face repatriation.[11] Echoing Gin's conclusions, geographers Shirlena Huang and Brenda Yeoh similarly underscore a maid's acquiescence and lack of power base. In their 1998 anthropological study in Singapore, they conducted interviews with maids and employers of various ethnicities, recording one maid's statement: "An off-day? Yes, I want it...If it's given, I'll take it...If it's not offered, then it's not. It's up to the employer's discretion, not for me to ask".[12] Thus, Huang and Yeoh ascertain that maids "generally prefer to keep silent" to secure their families' future.[13]

This theme of duty is central in the autobiography of Crisanta Sampang, a Filipino maid who worked in Singapore from 1984 to 1988. Mirroring the same ethos of sacrifice, Sampang writes that a maid lives "an indentured life", not to her employers, but to "the expectations of [their] families".[14] Building on this, she recounts the tragic suicide of her friend, Imelda, a Filipino maid who, after enduring abuse and dismissal from her employer, believed she had failed because "her parents depended on her for their livelihood".[15] Although the veracity of Sampang's account is questionable—especially given her absence at the scene of the incident—it seems unlikely Sampang would have exaggerated, due to her apparent bias toward Singapore. Mere sentences after recounting her friend's suicide, Sampang would write: "Singapore wasn't a bad place to live and work in".[16] Sampang, unlike Imelda, did not claim to experience abuse. Instead, her personal recollections remain predominantly positive, where even upon her contract's completion, she returned to Singapore as a tourist and guest in her former employer's home.[17] Her autobiography thus paints two sides of the same economic coin: Imelda's muted suffering and Sampang's complicit blindness. Subsequently, the comparative analysis of historian Gin, the anthropological interviews conducted by geographers Huang and Yeoh, and Sampang's personal experiences, collectively illustrate the apparent reality of domestic workers substituting agency for familial duty, enabling their marginalization.

However, despite what might appear at first glance, Filipino maids did not suffer in silence. At a local level, Filipino maids had access to welfare centres that provided support and mediation services. Sampang identifies two avenues available for Filipino maids to seek assistance in her autobiography: the Philippines Community Centre (PCC) and the Geylang Catholic Centre for Immigrant Workers (GCC).[18] The PCC, established in 1986 by Philippine Labour Minister Augusto Sanchez, can be regarded as a partial successor to the *coolie fong*, serving as both "a temporary home and a place for Filipino workers to gather during their free days",[19] whilst also mediating disputes between employers and employees.[20] Similarly, the GCC, founded in 1984

Figure 2: Crisanta Sampang

by the Catholic Church, aimed to provide refuge and legal aid for domestic workers. Functioning as a hybrid of the *coolie fong* and *Kuam Im Teng*, the GCC sought to address systemic inequalities.[21] This initiative was spearheaded by Reverend Arotcarena, the director of the GCC, who compiled over 500 complaints from aggrieved FDWs into *The Maid Tangle* in 1986, advocating for "further regulations to protect the basic rights of the domestic worker to decent conditions".[22] Whilst neither of these centres were established by Filipino maids themselves, their existence indicates these maids were not entirely without support.

Nevertheless, both the PCC and GCC lacked the influence necessary to effect significant change. The PCC held no authority to regulate wages or working conditions, serving primarily as a support mechanism to mitigate the consequences of labour injustices rather than prevent them. Whilst the GCC attempted to address structural

Figure 3: Filipino maids gathering at Lucky Plaza on a Sunday, Screen capture from Filipino Maids in Singapore—Modern Slavery on YouTube at https://tinyurl.com/y74d926u (2014).

inequalities, its operations were ultimately short-lived; within three years, it was dismantled following allegations of communist subversion.[23] Regardless, these centres provided Filipino maids with crucial platforms to seek assistance, voice grievances, and foster communal solidarity. Therefore, their contribution in partially restoring agency to these maids, despite their limitations in comparison to amahs, should not be ignored. They were not, as historian Gin asserts, entirely voiceless or without recourse.

Subsequently, Gin, Huang, and Yeoh overlook the broader historical and structural forces that constrained the ability of FDWs to command agency. By painting a narrative in which the maids themselves were to blame for their inaction—romanticizing their portrayal solely in terms of their labour for others—this caricaturizes them into one-dimensional figures, depriving them of individual and heterogenous autonomy. The systemic barriers inhibiting their ability to assert their rights—including limited avenues for redress, restrictive work permits, and the dismantling of support organisations like the GCC—all reflect externally imposed conditions contributing to their marginalization.

Figure 4: Filipino workers gathering at Lucky Plaza on a Sunday, "Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore: Social and Historical Perspectives", Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (2016).

Thus, a more nuanced approach which situates FDW's experiences within a historical framework that accounts for macro- and meso-level factors influencing their labour conditions, is required. Whilst their own agency undoubtedly influenced their treatment, it must be understood within the process of negotiation with the larger socio-political landscape that restricted their capacity for meaningful self-advocacy. Resultingly, further investigations into the role of Singapore's paternalistic government, as well as employers' feminized and racialized perceptions of domestic workers as "polluting bodies", prove essential to uncover a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of late 20th-century Filipino maids. However, one thing remains certain: they did not *choose* to suffer in silence.

10. Shirlena Huang and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, "Maids and Ma'ams in Singapore: Constructing Gender and Nationality in the Transnationalization of Paid Domestic Work", *Geography Research Forum* 18 (1998), pp. 21-48.
11. Rev. G. Arotcarena, Thomas T.W. Tan, and Fong Hoe Fang, *The Maid Tangle: A Guide to Better Employer-Employee Relationship* (Singapore: Tak Seng Press, 1986), p. 23.
12. Huang and Yeoh, "Maids and Ma'ams in Singapore", p. 42.
13. Ibid., p. 42.
14. Crisanta Sampang, *Maid in Singapore: The Serious, Quirky and Sometimes Absurd Life of a Domestic Worker* (Singapore: Times Editions, 2005), pp. 119-20.
15. Ibid., p. 10.
16. Ibid., p. 12.
17. Ibid., pp. 119-23.
18. Sampang, *Maid In Singapore*, pp. 94-100.
19. "Community Centre for Filipinos opens", The Straits Times (2 Dec 1986), p. 17.
20. Sampang, *Maid In Singapore*, pp. 94-8.
21. Ibid., p. 99.
22. Arotcarena, *The Maid Tangle*, pp. 112-5.
23. Loh Hui Yin, "The people in the network", *The Business Times* (27 May 1987), p. 16.

Transatlantic Friends:

Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic

Dr. Lily R. Chadwick

Dr. Lily R. Chadwick (she/her) is a social historian of the early modern British Atlantic with an emphasis on intersections of gender, authority/power, religious 'radicalism', and regionalism. Her PhD thesis, *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, explores the effects of regional variations in demography, governance, economy and culture on Quaker women's agency and authority within their local Meetings for business. Lily successfully defended this thesis in June 2024 at Durham University. In 2024, Lily was awarded a W.M. Keck fellowship at The Huntington Library in San Marino, California for her ongoing project, "'Deceit and Covetousness': Re-Examining Indigenous and Quaker Relationships in Pre-Revolutionary America." She has also recently been awarded the 2025 Barra Foundation International Fellowship at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania for the same project. Lily is currently the Programme Coordinator in Quaker History at the Woodbrooke Research and Learning Centre in Birmingham, England.

'[...] for the Power and Spirit of God gives Liberty to all; for Women are Heirs of Life as well as the Men, and Heirs of Grace, and of the Light of Christ Jesus, as well as the Men, and so Stewards of the manifold Grace of God'[1]

This excerpt, from the writings of George Fox, the de facto founder and leader of the religious movement known as Quakerism, advocated for the equality of men and women in spiritual contexts. Fox believed that all people were equal 'Heirs' of Christ's love, and therefore the ministry and participation of individuals in matters of faith could not be limited by sex. Published in 1676, Fox's promotion of the spiritual equality of the sexes was intensely radical and broadly rejected by contemporary English society which typically forbid the speech and service of women in spaces of worship. Even among his followers, the concept of female leadership (or even active participation) in matters of faith became controversial, and oftentimes resulted in a state of tension between the teachings of the nascent faith and the hierarchies of gendered and sexual power that structured daily life in early modern England. In my PhD thesis, *Transatlantic Friends: Gender, Authority, and Regionalism in the Early Modern British Atlantic*, I explored the emergence and ramifications of these tensions as early Quakers moved through different regions of the British Atlantic between 1675 and 1725. This thesis analyses the different avenues available to Quaker women to exert authority and agency within the faith through what came to be known as Women's Meetings–or special committees through which female Friends (as Quakers were also known) would deliberate business on behalf of their community.

Figure 1: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Predikende_vrouwelijke_quaker_Quaqueresse_qui_preche_(titel_op_object),_RP-P-AO-24-19B.jpg

1. George Fox, *This is an Encuragement to all the Womens-Meetings in the World Who Assemble Together in the Fear of God for the Service of the Truth : Wherein they may See how the Holy Men Encouraged the Holy Women both in the Time of the Law, and in the Time of the Gospel, Though Selfish and Unholy Men may Seek to Discourage them : But Go on in the Name and Power of Christ, and Prosper / by G.F* (London, s.n., 1676), 25.

The Gendered Quaker Meeting System

Quakerism in the early modern British Atlantic was a radical sectarian faith that emerged from the turmoil and eschatological fervour of the English Civil War, largely under the leadership of a man named George Fox. As a young man in the 1640s, Fox became disillusioned with the Church of England and set out in search of spiritual enlightenment which spoke to his 'Condition'.[2] After several years of searching, Fox in 1647 reportedly experienced a moment of divine inspiration in which it was revealed to him that the light of Christ was universally present in all human beings.[3] This revelation was particularly radical as it implied that the 'laity' or average person could commune with God and preach divine messages without the intercession of priests or clergy. It also suggested that all people were, in a spiritual sense, equal regardless of race, class, or sex. Indeed, early Friends (at least theoretically) did not acknowledge social hierarchies, which rendered the faith especially radical, if not dangerous, in the eyes of contemporary authorities.[4]

As Quakerism gained followers and expanded over the course of the seventeenth century, it became apparent that some form of an administrative apparatus was necessary to maintain a coherent religious community.[5] The acknowledged founders of Quakerism, which included Fox but also other influential spiritual thinkers like Margaret Fell, advocated for a system of hierarchical meetings at the local, regional, and national levels through which to guide the faith's membership.[6] Critically, Fox and Fell encouraged the development of separate meetings for men and women, claiming that while women were 'heirs of Christ' as well as men, each were better suited to address different matters of concern facing their communities by nature of their prescribed gender roles in society:

'So the Women in the time of the Light, Grace and Gospel, are to look into their own selves and Families, & to look to the training up of their Children; for they are oft-times more amongst them then the Men, and may prevent many things that may fall out, and many times they may make or marr their Children in their Education'[7]

Here, Fox outlines what he perceived to be the appropriate domain of Quaker women's business within their Meetings: to oversee community business which pertained to their families and the upbringing of children. Indeed, equality of the sexes did not mean men and women shared in the same labour on behalf of their community, rather that men and women had equal space and recognition to carry out that labour which was perceived to be appropriate to their gender. Fox further clarified this point in his treatise, *This is an Encouragement to all the Womens Meetings in the World*:

'[…] and women many times know the Condition more of poor Families, and widows, and such as are in distress more then[sic] the men, because they are more conversant in their Families and about such things'[8]

According to Fox, because women were supposedly more 'conversant' about such things in their households, i.e. because of their traditional labour in domestic settings, he believed women were more likely to have knowledge of individuals 'in distress' and were therefore better suited to certain kinds of business than men. The labour of women in their Meetings was therefore intended to mirror their domestic labour as mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters. They were caregivers to children, the poor and the needy, and expected to serve as exemplars of good feminine comportment and to correct indecent behaviour among the women of their community. They also were involved in 'investigating' marriage proposals within their communities and approving or rejecting those potential unions as they saw fit. The spiritual equality of the sexes meant Quaker women were granted Meetings as well as men. The scope of business attributed to each, however, and the kinds of authority and agency available to Quaker women were heavily constrained by contemporary gender roles ascribed to their Meeting—a circumstance that is very different from what we might recognise as gender equality today.

Figure 2: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Drawings_of_Quakers_by_J_J_Willson_-_4.JPG

Figure 3: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lilias_Skene_Aberdeen_1677.jpg

The Effect of Regional Variation on Gendered Authority and Agency

But most critically, the core of this thesis argues that, despite prescribed gendered constraints, Quaker women's experiences of authority and agency within Friends' Meeting system were relatively diverse and heavily shaped by variations in their regional circumstances. Unlike other studies of early Quakerism and women, of which there have been several wonderful and insightful works, *Transatlantic Friends* situates Quaker women's experiences within their regional contexts, challenging extant depictions of female authority and agency within Quakerism that portray women's experiences as static or uniform.[9] I argue that the experiences of Quaker women within their Meetings were uniquely shaped by the circumstances of their local communities, paying particular attention to how variations in demography, governance, culture and economy influenced female Friends' place within their local gendered Meeting system.

This project is transatlantic in scope and analyses the minutes of Quaker Women's Meetings in four unique locations across the early modern British Atlantic: in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where Quakers dominated the political and socioeconomic scene; in Salem, Massachusetts, where the spectre of witchcraft and looming threat of colonial warfare heightened a pervasive suspicion of the 'other'; in Swarthmoor, England, where traditional manorial hierarchies combined with spiritual leadership to further entrench structures of socioeconomic power in the region; and Barking in East London, where Friends continually negotiated the demands of national Quaker leadership in central London with the needs of their own fledgling community. These Meetings were selected for the specific sociopolitical, economic, and cultural environments in which each were established, allowing for nuanced insight into Quaker women's agency and authority within the gendered Meeting system across different early modern contexts. *Transatlantic Friends* challenges static depictions of women's place within the early Quaker faith while also making a significant contribution to scholarship on gendered labour, authority, regionalism and identity in the early modern British Atlantic more broadly.

2. H. Larry Ingle, 'Fox, George (1624–1691), a founder of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB].
3. Ingle, 'Fox, George (1624–1691)', *ODNB*.
4. Keith V. Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects,' *Past & Present*, no. 13 (1958): 44, 47-48.
5. Clare J.L. Martin, 'Tradition Versus Innovation: The Hat, Wilkinson-Story and Keithian Controversies,' *Quaker Studies* 8, no. 1 (2003): 7-8.
6. Martin, 'Tradition Versus Innovation,' 12.
7. Fox, *This is an Encuragement to all the Womens-Meetings in the World*, 20.
8. Fox, *This is an Encuragement to all the Womens-Meetings in the World*, 79-80
9. One notable exception is Naomi Pullin's, whose book analyses the differences Quaker women experienced in their Meetings as a result of regional variation; see: Naomi Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 103. Other examples of excellent scholarship on early Quaker women include: Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley; Oxford: University of California Press, 1992); Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1700-1775* (Chapel Hill; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Elizabeth Bouldin, *Women Prophets and Radical Protestantism in the British Atlantic World, 1640-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

An estate of one's own:

Wulfthryth of Wilton, land, power and gender in tenth-century England

Nicola McNeil

Nicola McNeil is a final-year, AHRC-funded doctoral student in the departments of Archaeology and History. She is interested in the relationship between gender and early English landscapes (c. 600- 1000). Her thesis uses an innovative, spatio-textual approach to explore the interplay between gender and territoriality in seventh to tenth-century England.

Women feature in early English charters from the form's inception in the seventh century. They appear in various roles and for various reasons. Most transactions involving women record the giving and receiving of land. Women are named—or sometimes not named at all—as beneficiaries, receiving land for the foundation and running of monasteries; as willing benefactors in wills; unwillingly, as convicts having had land confiscated and as victims of land seizure. Others appear in transactions related to land tenure: receiving privileges, implicated in disputes, and subsequent settlements or as witnesses to the king's confirmation of land grants and privileges.

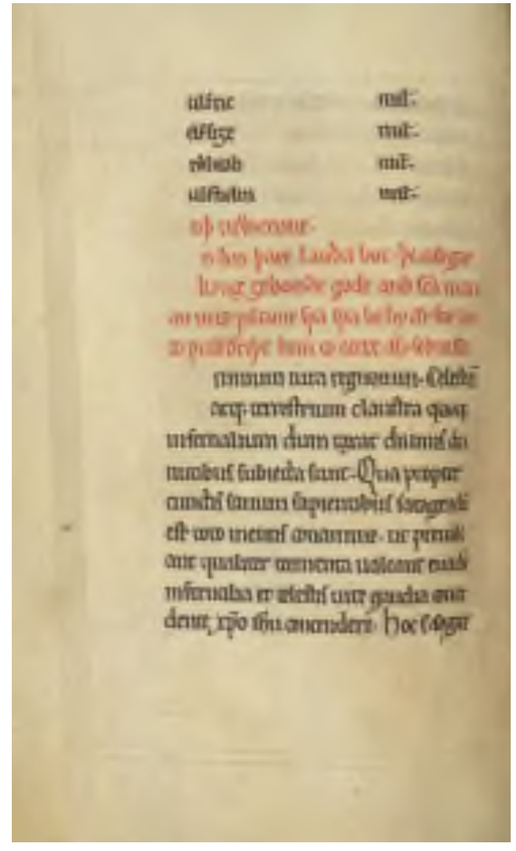
They are recorded and act in their capacity as religious women: abbesses, nuns, and *ancilla Dei*; in royal and aristocratic roles, as queens and regents, noble ladies, or *matronae*; members of the kin, as wives and widows, sisters, daughters, and aunts or as seemingly independent or otherwise unrecorded actors. In one instance, Mildred, a seventh-century beneficiary, appears as a relic in an eleventh-century charter when her remains are granted, along with land, by King Cnut to a religious community in Canterbury.[1]

In this way, early English charters have much to tell us about Anglo-Saxon women's agency. Certainly, early twentieth-century scholars saw landholding as proxy for socio-economic status and the early English woman's place in land charters as evidence of a 'Golden Age' of 'rough equality', but this view has been questioned increasingly.[2] To this end, one woman in particular leaps from the folios of early English cartularies. Crucially, her story reveals the complexities and contradictions inherent in perceptions of early medieval, gendered power.

In one instance, Mildred, a seventh-century beneficiary, appears as a relic in an eleventh-century charter when her remains are granted, along with land, by King Cnut to a religious community in Canterbury.[1]

Wulfthryth of Wilton (d. c. 1000) emerges from the sources as a Kentish noblewoman, onetime wife—or concubine—of King Edgar, mother of St Edith, abbess and subsequent saint.[3] She is, however, perhaps best known as a point in an infamous early medieval love triangle. According to the eleventh-century chronicler Goscelin of St Bertin, the young king reputedly chased and subsequently abducted Wulfthryth's cousin Wulfhild from the nunnery of Wilton with the help of her aunt. When his pursuit proved futile—so horrified by Edgar's advances was Wulfhild, her biographer claims, she fled through the abbey's sewers to escape the king—he settled on her kinswoman, Wulfthryth.[4]

Shortly after their daughter's birth, we are told, Wulfthryth entered the nunnery at Wilton in Wiltshire, where she later became abbess.[5] Crucially, it is unclear whether Wulfthryth entered the nunnery of her own accord or was placed there by Edgar following his repudiation of her. Most of what we learn about Wulfthryth comes from later medieval chroniclers and so is replete with their respective biases. Whilst Goscelin and John of Tynemouth assert that she left voluntarily, having felt the pull of the religious life, some have seen Wulfthryth's entry into the nunnery as a sign she was discarded by the king in an all-too-common pattern for early medieval queens.[6] The answer to this question has important implications for our understanding of early English women's agency. Through the lens of the land grant, we can shed light on this contentious question.



1. S 990. Charters are cited according to their 'S number' in P. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968), available online as The Electronic Sawyer: Online Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Charters, accessed 1 April 2025, at https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk/.
2. F, M. Stenton, 'The Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies: the Place of Women in Anglo-Saxon Society' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 24 (1942); D.M Stenton, 'The Anglo-Saxon Woman', in *The English Woman* (Abingdon, 1957); Shiela C. Dietric, in Barbara Kanner ed., *The Women of England from Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present* (Connecticut, 1979). c.f. Janet L. Nelson, 'Women and the Word in the Earlier Middle Ages', *Studies in Church History*, 27 (1990); Pauline Stafford, 'Women and the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4 (1994), 221-249; Janet L. Nelson, 'The Wary Widow, in Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (eds), *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1995).
3. For an overview of Wulfthryth's life see: Barbara Yorke, "Wulfthryth [St Wulfthryth] (d. c. 1000), abbess of Wilton", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2024), accessed 1 April 2025, at https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093.
4. Mario Esposito, 'La vie de Saint Vulfhilde par Goscelin de Cantorbery', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 32 (1913) pp.10–12.
5. Goscelin de St. Bertin, 'The *Vita* of Edith', trans. Michael Wright in Stephanie Hollis ed., *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius* (Turnhout, 2004), p. 27.
6. Goscelin, '*Vita* of Edith, p. 27; John of Tynemouth, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed., Carl Horstmann (Oxford, 1901); Pauline Stafford, Queens, *Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens, 1983), 179; Barbara Yorke, 'Sisters under the Skin' Anglo-Saxon Nuns and Nunneries in Southern England, *Reading Medieval Studies*, 15 (1989) p. 99.

Charter S766 confirms Wulfthryth's ownership of numerous estates in Wiltshire as well as her subsequent gift of them to Wilton Abbey.[7] Though the original charter recording her receipt of these lands does not survive, some have speculated whether these estates were a gift from Edgar by way of apology or penance.[8] In the charter's dispositive clause, Edgar states that he had indeed granted the lands in question to Wulfthryth earlier. Tellingly, Goscelin suggests that Edgar made similar reparations to Wulfhild, granting her land in Barking, Essex, and at Horton in Dorset.[9]

Five estates totalling fifty-six hides comprise Wulfthryth's grant and gift. Whilst the relationship between hideage and value remains unclear, the mean and most common tenth-century land grant was ten hides, so this bequest was substantial.[10] Plotting the boundaries to three of these estates on modern maps and undertaking retrogressive cartography reveals approximately 18km^2 of high-value, chalk downland, arable, and woodland on Salisbury Plain.[11] *Domesday* assessments for the same estates in the following century reinforce this picture. The returns record twenty-one and a half plough teams together with an extensive 214 acres of pasture and 240 acres of woodland, valued, collectively, at twenty pounds and sixty shillings in 1086.[12] The returns on these considerable resources would certainly have enhanced Wilton Abbey's wealth.

Indeed, we are told that Wulfthryth was able to purchase sought-after relics—a nail from the true cross, no less—and finance ambitious building projects during her tenure. Goscelin recalls how Edith's vision of a new church dedicated to St Denis was realised alongside her mother's wish to enclose the nunnery by high, stone walls.[13] Although his words sound suspiciously like hagiographical hyperbole, Goscelin's tales of exotic animal menageries, fine textiles, and hot baths at Wilton under Wulfthryth might be based in some truth.[14] On the eve of Conquest, Wilton was the wealthiest nunnery in England.[15] Its cartulary, moreover, reveals that over a quarter of the estates that comprised this wealth, mostly bequests from kings, were acquired during Wulfthryth's abbacy.[16]

As her ability to attract royal investment indicates, Wulfthryth enjoyed considerable influence in her new role as abbess. We are told how her intercession on behalf of a robber rendered royal officers blind and the thief forgiven 'through favour of the king.'[17] To this extent, Wulfthryth perhaps held more influence than as a onetime royal concubine or even queen consort. Her bequest, however, secured not only her own future but also that of other women. As well as the stage for the story of Edgar and Wulfthryth and subsequent home and resting place of their sainted daughter, Edith, alongside her step great-grandmother and step great aunts, Wilton had been the retirement for earlier reputedly repudiated queen, Ælfflæd, and, likewise, for Edith, Edward the Confessor's wife, later.[18] Like early medieval nunneries more generally, Wilton has been seen as refuge for aristocratic, Anglo-Saxon women, in particular, vulnerable widows and young women.[19] William of Malmesbury notes that Wulfthryth herself entered Wilton out of fear of marriage in the first place.[20]

In this way, then, it would be difficult to dispute that Wulfthryth both gained and exercised power and that possession of land was pivotal to this power. It is certainly tempting to see her bequest as evidence of shrewd forward planning: an indication she chose to leave and was preparing for her future, even if pushed, evidence she pre-empted this eventuality or, at the very least, used the compensation to secure her and her daughter's future and, by extension, that of other early English women. Her daughter's biographer certainly portrays her as powerful in the following century. Goscelin likens her to the Old Testament heroine, 'Judith the Valiant', characterised in the contemporary, eponymous poem and early medieval cultural imagination as the 'female Beowulf.'[21]

Historians, however, have problematised examples of women's power and agency in early medieval England as exceptional and indirect. Rather than evidence of widespread emancipation and equality, as their predecessors believed, the female figures cited in support of this 'Golden Age' are revealed as royal or otherwise socially superior women working within rather than

subverting gender roles, as wives and mothers of kings, finding loopholes or 'room for manoeuvre' within an institutionally androcentric rather than egalitarian society.[22] Certainly, Wulfthryth's narrative is no different. Though she received substantial landed resources, and her subsequent bequest demonstrates forethought and agency, she may well have been pushed and 'paid off', cast aside for another wife as a pawn in system inherently precarious for royal wives—certainly no 'Golden Age' for women![23] Her aristocratic background and family connections to the abbey, meanwhile, might have made her a dead cert for the abbacy. No doubt the bequest would have otherwise bought her the role: an option unavailable to the wife of a *ceorl*.

Wulfthryth's narrative has a happy ending. She succeeded to the extent that her role brought her influence and helped other vulnerable women by endowing her *alma mater*, Wilton Abbey. In their role as refuges, however, nunneries like Wilton, were paradoxical places, standing testament to the precarious position of otherwise 'powerful women.' Repudiated royal women, casualties of succession politics and dynastic disputes, continued to be deposited there decades later, in a long tradition that we have seen likely included Wulfthryth herself. Alongside Edward the Elder's wife a century earlier Edith, Edward the Confessor's queen, found herself within Wulfthryth's walls at Wilton unwillingly. Crucially, her extensive landholdings did not stop the king attempting to cast her aside. Instead, she was placed in a nunnery precisely because of her family's landed power and the threat it posed to the king.[24]

By the same token, nunneries made convenient repositories of eligible brides for kings and contenders to the throne. In addition to her cousin's infamous abduction, Wulfthryth's own seizure from Wilton is suggested by Malmesbury, who describes her as 'snatched away' from a convent.[25] Earlier admonishments from Saint Boniface to Æthelbald of Merica for seducing nuns suggest the prevalence of similar practices in previous centuries, meanwhile, Matthew of Alsace's abduction of abbess and King Stephen's heiress, Marie of Romsey, in 1160 reveals it continued into the post Conquest period.[26] On the surface, then, though these glimpses of purported feminine power make it appear glittering, closer consideration reveals that this 'Golden Age' for women was perhaps only gold-plated.

7. S 766, *The Electronic Sawyer*.
8. Yorke, "Wulfthryth"
9. Esposito, 'La vie de Saint Vulfhilde', p.11.
10. See: Martin J. Ryan, 'That 'Dreary Old Question': The Hide in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan (eds), *Place-names, Language and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 207-224.
11. For mapped solutions to S766's boundary clauses see: G. B. Grundy, 'The Saxon Land Charters of Wiltshire', *Archaeological Journal*, 26 (1919), pp.268-9, 274-6 and G. B. Grundy, 'The Saxon Land Charters of Wiltshire', *Archaeological Journal* 2nd series 27 (1920), pp. 109-11, 268, 277. Not all estates included in the grant could be reconstructed.
12. *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation*, ed. and trans. G. H. Martin (London, 2003), pp. 171-172.
13. Goscelin, 'Life of Edith', p. 53.
14. Ibid., p 41.
15. Elizabeth Crittall, 'Houses of Benedictine nuns: Abbey of Wilton', in R. B. Pugh and Elizabeth Crittall (eds), *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume 3* (London, 1956), *British History Online*, accessed April 1, 2025, at https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol3/pp231-242.
16. *Registrum Wiltunense*, ed. J. I. Ingram (London, 1827)
17. Goscelin de St. Bertin, 'The *Translatio* of Edith', trans. Michael Wright in Stephanie Hollis ed., *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius* (Turnhout, 2004) p. 73
18. Barabra Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1995), p. 206.
19. Yorke, 'Sisters under the Skin', p. 101; Barbara Yorke,
20. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, I, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1998), p. 261.
21. Goscelin, 'Life of Edith', p. 27; Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (New York, 1981), p. 36.
22. Stafford 'Women and the Norman Conquest, p.241; Nelson 'The Wary Widow', pp. 82-83; Victoria Thompson, 'Women, Power and Protection in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England', in Noel James Menuge ed., *Medieval Women and the Law* (Woodbridge, 2003), p.3. Andrew Rabin, 'Female Advocacy and Royal Protection in Tenth-Century England: The Legal Career of Queen Ælfthryth', *Speculum*, 84 (2009) pp. 288.
23. On the precariousness of early medieval queenship see: Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, pp. 62-92.
24. Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Hoboken, 2001), p.280.
25. Malmesbury, GRA, p. 261.
26. 'Boniface, 'Letter of Admonition to King Aethelbald of Mercia (746-7)', in *The Correspondence of St. Boniface*, trans. and ed. C. H. Talbot, accessed 1 April 2025, at https://origin-rh.web.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/boniface-letters.asp; Linda D. Brown 'Inaudito exemplo: The Abduction of Romsey's Abbess', *Historical Reflections*, 42 (2016), pp. 23.

Guarded Encounters:

Japanese Arms and Armour in Western Collections and the 'Way of the Warrior'

Figure 1. Suit of armour given to Captain John Saris of the East India Company in 1613 by Tokugawa Hidetada. Most likely the suit that Sōseki saw at the tower of London.

> All of the weapons were well polished and gleamed brilliantly. Back in Japan, the weapons in history books and novels had never captured my interest, but it was a delight to see them laid out like this before my own eyes...

Sahava Baranow

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In 1905, Sōseki Natsume (1867–1916), often considered Japan's greatest novelist, wrote a short story entitled 'Tower of London'. In it, the narrator stumbles upon a suit of Japanese armour on display:

'All of the weapons were well polished and gleamed brilliantly. Back in Japan, the weapons in history books and novels had never captured my interest, but it was a delight to see them laid out like this before my own eyes... [The beefeater] pointed out an old suit of Japanese armor, asking with his eyes if I'd seen it. I nodded in silence. He explained to me that it had come to Charles II, as a tribute, by way of Mongolia. I nodded a third time."

Though fictional, the Japanese armour described in this passage is real. Sōseki likely saw it during his time in London (1900–1902). These were difficult years for him; he famously called them 'the unhappiest two years of my life,' feeling alienated and inferior in unfamiliar surroundings.[2] Social customs confused him, and he was ridiculed for expressing common Japanese sentiments, such as commenting on the beauty of the moon. This dislocation seems to have fostered a sense of internalized orientalism, colouring how he regarded his own appearance and body.

In this fraught context, the display of Japanese objects in Europe had the power to reshape Japanese self-perception. The narrator, indifferent to such objects at home, is struck by their display abroad—the implication being that exhibiting objects renders them valuable. In the Tower, the armour is contextualized within a European tradition of chivalry, aligning Japanese martial objects with ideals of an ostensibly noble masculinity that resonated strongly in Victorian Britain.

What did Sōseki see? Most likely, one of two suits given to Captain John Saris of the East India Company in 1613 by Tokugawa Hidetada, son of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who had founded the mighty Tokugawa dynasty ruling Japan between 1603 and 1867. The suits were probably presented to King James I, though no record survives. As Japan closed itself off to the outside world shortly thereafter, they were likely the first Japanese armours seen in Britain. Their provenance, however, quickly became muddled. In 1649–1651, they were inventoried for the sale of Charles I's possessions as 'Indian Armor,' and sold for £10. By 1662, they were incorrectly listed as gifts to Charles II from the Mughal Emperor. This misattribution seems to have endured, as it is the explanation Sōseki's narrator receives. As late as 1916, the suit was confused with another in the Royal Armouries, originally given to Philip II of Spain.[3]

Whilst the Tower's suit was exceptional for its early arrival, it was far from the only Japanese weaponry on view in Europe by the late nineteenth century. The Victoria and Albert Museum houses a suit given to Queen Victoria in 1860 by Tokugawa Iemochi, the penultimate shogun. Likely assembled specifically for diplomatic effect, it was a display of craftsmanship, martial prestige, and political overture.[4]

Though rare and valuable gifts were usually reserved for royal collections, a wider popular collecting culture emerged. Universal Expositions—or World's Fairs—brought Japanese swords, armour, and notably also images of Japanese warriors into European and American museums and private collections. These exhibitions

1. Natsume Sōseki, *Tower of London* (Sōseki Project, 2019), p. 6f.
2. Ann-Marie Dunbar, '"Three leagues away from a human colour": Natsume Soseki in late-Victorian London,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46:1 (March 2018), pp. 221–236; Natsume Sōseki, *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*. Ed. Michael K. Bourdaghs , Atusko Ueda, and Joseph A. Murphy. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) p. 48.
3. Royal Collection Trust, Armour (*dōmaru*), Iwai Yozaemon (RCIN 71611) accessed 5 April 2025, at https://www.rct.uk/collection/71611/armour-domaru; According to the National Archives' historical currency converter tool, £10 would correspond to approximately £1,050 in today's money or roughly to the price of a horse. The National Archives, 'Currency Converter,' accessed 5 April 2025, at https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/
4. A.R. Dufty, *Exhibition of Japanese Armour* (London, 1965) p.5, Cat.19.

Figure 2: Hand-coloured portrait of a Japanese man in armour by Raimund von Stillfried, 1881, via Wikimedia Commons. *Public Domain

often presented Japanese culture in binary terms: exotic yet refined, ancient yet enduring, masculine yet aestheticized. Samurai imagery was central to these often-contradictory impressions.

In earlier exhibitions, notably in 1862 in London and 1867 in Paris, the Japanese establishment struggled to project a singular representative voice on the exposition grounds. At the 1873 Vienna exhibition, however, things changed. The Meiji government that had come into power in 1868 mobilized a whole apparatus of officials to control the image Japan presented to the world. Nonetheless, the proliferation of private photography enterprises proved difficult to rein in. Photographers like Raimund von Stillfried and his student Kusakabe Kimbei produced staged portraits of men in armour, offering aesthetic pleasure tinged with ethnographic spectacle. Despite the official 1868 abolition of the samurai class, these images suggested a timeless, noble Japaneseness. Armour became symbolic, a performance of masculinity, otherness, the beautiful in the form of a new and admired commodity.

Growing external fascination coincided with internal debates about Japan's national identity. Figures like Ozaki Yukio (1858–1954), later known as the father of parliamentary politics in Japan, linked *bushidō* (lit. the way of the warrior) to British ideals of gentlemanliness. Ozaki argued that Victorian naval officers embodied virtues Japan needed: discipline, integrity, and service. Samurai, then, were reframed not as feudal remnants, but as moral exemplars for the modern age.[5]

Notably, *bushidō* had never truly been codified during the Tokugawa period. Its principles were posthumously assembled from household codes and moral guides—instructive treatises that were aspirational in tone and often failed to account for the lived reality of the time. Rather than rediscovered, *bushidō* was invented, shaped by modern anxieties and Western influence.[6]

Nitobe Inazō's (1862–1933) 'Bushidō: The Soul of Japan' (1900), written in English and influenced by Christian ethics, popularized this idea abroad. He described chivalry [bushidō] as 'a flower no less indigenous to the soil of Japan than its emblem, the cherry blossom,' casting it as a moral and spiritual force aligned with chivalry.[7] In Japan, however, Nitobe's work arrived late. His fame owes much to his Western reception, and to the influence of his American wife, Mary Elkinton Nitobe (1857–1938), whose Quaker values and editorial hand shaped the book considerably.[8]

Nitobe's vision of a civilized masculinity rebutted Western arrogance whilst maintaining social Darwinist hierarchies. He echoed Rudyard Kipling alongside his racist and gendered language in arguing for the 'Brown Japanese Man's burden' —to rescue an 'effeminate' Korea, depicted as lacking ambition and strength. Such rhetoric placed Japan higher in the racialized global order, as its superior position rested on chivalry as an indigenous Japanese trait.[9]

As Japan navigated modernities full of potential, competing visions of masculinity proliferated. The Western-style gentleman, in suit and silk hat, was idealized by some, whilst others, including the populist People's Rights Movement, found such figures effeminate and disconnected from Japanese values. Young radicals known as *soshi* embodied a defiant masculinity: ripped kimono, long hair, and open aggression. Satirical magazines caricatured the divide, using appearance to critique politics and identity.[10]

Even hairstyles carried ideological weight. The cropped *zangiri* cut, often seen as Western, was originally linked to outcast groups but later reclaimed as patriotic.[11] Through these bodily performances, the tensions between modernization, nationalism, and gender were enacted and debated across both the corporal and intellectual landscapes of the Meiji era.

However, the modern anxieties over carving out a place for Japan in global hierarchies exposed the contrast between imagined tradition and historical reality. According to 'The Military Mirror of Kai,' a key Tokugawa text on the matter, the difference between warrior and commoner lay in birth, not behaviour. There had been no consistent code circumscribing warrior values. Prescriptive texts existed but were routinely ignored. Edicts to commoners often contradicted the directives issued to nobles, belying the illusion of an innate and universally Japanese warrior ethos during the Tokugawa period. Far from a unified codex, *bushidō* was fragmented, flexible, and often mocked in its contemporary literature.[12]

By the twentieth century, however, *bushidō* was increasingly mobilized for nationalist purposes. During the Pacific War, the obscure eighteenth-century text Hagakure was revived for its line: 'The way of the warrior is in death.' What was once a loosely defined ethic, became a tool of state ideology. Western writers, too, picked up on this discourse. Ruth Benedict's influential 'The Chrysanthemum and the Sword' (1946) treated *bushidō* as part of an essentialized Japanese character, downplaying its historical contingency in favour of sweeping cultural generalisations. The samurai, once a figure of elite privilege, now rendered a national archetype.

Figure 3: A samurai visits a latrine while outside, his three attendants hold their noses against the smell via Wellcome Collection. Hokusai Katsushika. 1834.

5. Yukio Ozaki, *Seiji kyōiku ron [On politics and education]* (Tokyo: Kōronsha, 1913).
6. Oleg Benesch, *Inventing the way of the samurai: Nationalism, internationalism, and bushido in modern Japan*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
7. Inazō Nitobe. *Bushido: The soul of Japan*. 10th rev ed. (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1905), p. 1.
8. George M. Oshiro, 'Mary P. E. Nitobe and Japan,' *Quaker History*, 86:2 (Fall 1997), pp. 1–15.
9. Initially Nitobe travelled primarily as a journalist, but he later settled down in Geneva as Under-Secretary-General of the League of Nations from 1920 until 1927.; Inazō Nitobe, *Thoughts and Essays* (Tokyo: Teibi Pub. Co. 1909), p. 120.
10. Jason G. Karlin, *Gender and nation in Meiji Japan: Modernity, loss, and the doing of history.* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), pp. 48–61.
11. Suzanne G.O'Brien, 'Splitting hairs: History and the politics of daily life in nineteenth-century Japan,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 67:4 (2008-11), pp.1309–1339.
12. In Hiraga Gennai's 1771 essay 'On Farting,' the straight man country bumpkin samurai character remarks that incident 'Flatulence, is, after all, a personal matter and should not be aired in public. Any proper samurai would be mortified to the point of suicide if he were inadvertently to let, uh, fly in polite company.' Gennai is ridiculing the overdone honour ascribed to the warrior class, suggesting that even a fart could be enough to warrant suicide, if the guides were to be believed; Gennai Hiraga, *On Farting - Hōhiron, 1771*. Ed. William F. Sibley and Howard Hibbett (Hollywood: Highmoonoon, 2009). p. 170. Further notable examples that lampooned the loftiness of samurai edicts are Jippensha Ikku's Shank's Mare (1802–1822), which details the adventures of minor warriors Kita and Yaji, who drink, play and gallivant from Kyoto to Edo, and Katsu Kokichi's work Musui's Story (1843), the autobiography of a ne'er do well samurai, written for his son.

Resilience and Identity

Stories Challenging the Absence of Indo-Guyanese Women's Histories

Rosie Lalbachan-Dow

Rosie is a third-year History and Spanish student. Her dissertation was inspired by her family background and upbringing. Through her research, Rosie aims to incorporate the histories of Guyanese women into wider Caribbean and feminist scholarship and her methodology is informed by a determination to tell their stories from their authentic, original perspectives as far as is possible.

Modern Guyanese society is marked by its ethnic diversity; a culturally syncretic nation made up predominately of African and Indian-descended people but also largely populated with Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch, and Indigenous American individuals. A former sugar producing British Caribbean colony, African and Afro-descended people endured enslavement for a further twenty years after the British assumed control of Essequibo, Berbice, and Demerara from Dutch colonialists and consolidated the three colonies into British Guiana. The panicked frenzy by plantation owners and colonial authorities to replace the masses of unfree, exploited labour with its nearest equivalent led to the emergence of the Indian indenture system and Guiana became the first Caribbean nation to receive a shipment of indentured labourers carrying nearly two thousand men and fourteen women in May 1838.[1]

The primary decades of Indian indentureship were characterised by a gender imbalance, attributed largely to British patriarchal assertions regarding the inefficiency of female labour and customary restrictions that limited women's access to recruitment. The experience of indenture was a dizzying and emotionally distressing experience, marked by 'caste death'; separation from families; and gruelling ship and plantation conditions. Kidnapping, deception, and deceit were common tactics used by recruiters and yet many women sought out indenture of their own accord. Women indentured labourers were predominately single women, including widows, and Dalits; a product of the British assumption that the ostensibly industrious and docile Dalit work ethic would better suit the arduousness of plantation labour. Yet many took advantage of indenture to escape social marginalisation, marital abuse, and sexual oppression.[2]

1. The spelling 'Guiana' and 'Guianese' refer to state and people prior to independence in 1966, whilst 'Guyanese' is used as the post-independence term and the one chosen by the Guyanese people themselves; Aliyah Khan, 'Protest and Punishment: Indo-Guyanese Women and Organized Labour', *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, 12 (2018), p. 281.
2. Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (Hurst & Co, 2013), p. 26.

BLOODSHED AT PLN. LEONORA.

Police Compelled to Fire on Mob.

Three Labourers Killed and Four Injured.

Fusillade of Jugs, Bottles, Bricks and Other Missiles.

Official Communique Issued.

Figure 1: An extract from an article published during the Leonora Plantation strike which mentions the death of Sumintra and other striking labourers.

Indeed, many women who signed contracts to labour for a small wage in Guiana utilised its nature as a migratory system to liberate themselves from sexual, social, and cultural oppression and, in doing so, made the decision to sacrifice their reputations, family connections and, for many, caste identities.[3] Brahmin widows formed a notable percentage of female indentured labourers; often driven by the determination to escape social alienation.

Acts of bravery by women who independently sought out and endured the indentureship system were often idolised in Guiana and accompanied with a valorised social status amongst Indian-descended communities. One example of a young infant, who arrived in Guiana with her parents in 1871, became a renowned matriarch following her journey from India. Revered by her descendants due to her family history of resistance, the woman became a symbolic figure of fortitude, rooted in her parents' decision to sign indentureship contracts to protect their daughter from female infanticide.[4] Legacies of bravery became embedded in the stories of Indian women who had migrated to Guiana within indentured communities, shaped by narratives of resilience, tenacity and audaciousness that were admired and respected by following generations of Indo-Guyanese female kinship networks and families.

Women negotiated a social and sexual power within the new casteless and gender imbalanced spaces following arrival in Guiana. Men were the primary gender

3. Ibid., p. 92.
4. Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (Hurst & Co, 2013), p. 48.

demographic in the first decades of indenture, and women actively and successfully took advantage of the newfound sexual and economic power that the imbalance inadvertently provided. The disparity in gendered demographics altered the pattern of partnership and women gained a greater autonomy in the selection of their own partners. It was not uncommon for women to have more than one partner and, characteristically of partnerships amongst Indian indentured labourers across British colonies, many were inter-caste and -religious. Mixed-race partnerships also became relatively frequent as women left Indian partners to reside, often in the long-term, with white overseers.[5] Amongst men, partnership and cohabitation with women became a sign of social status and comfort so much so that the dowry system reversed.[6]

Interracial relationships between Indian women, both during and post-indenture, and white overseers became a frequent occurrence, arising such anxiety amongst Indian indentured men that colonial authorities imposed restrictions on mixed-race relationships where the woman was labouring on the same estate as the overseer. Whilst sexual assault was routine on sugar estates, there is evidence to believe that there existed cases of women who consciously chose long-term partnership with white men. Alexander McEwan, the manager of Friends Plantation, was revealed to have been the father of two children whose mother, a woman named Parbutteah, was born in India in 1859. Indeed, a long-term relationship does not itself prove evidence of complete free-will on Parbutteah's behalf, however, that McEwan erected a tombstone outside his house following her death in 1898 which read 'Gone But Not Forgotten' would indicate a degree of affection enough to honour Parbutteah in the same residency the manager shared with his own wife.[7] Similarly, John Gooding, an overseer at Friends under McEwan, was known to be living with an Indian woman named Cantooh in Sisters Village, Berbice. An important detail in the couple's relationship which pointed to an authentic emotional connection was that they attended an Indian wedding together, perhaps suggesting both a willingness to be seen publicly and Gooding's social engagement in his partner's culture.[8]

Yet, despite evidence of Indian women's wilful engagement in interracial relationships, sexual abuse at the hands of overseers and managers marked the female experience of indenture. Historiography is yet to comprehensively challenge the assertions of colonial and early Caribbean scholarship that Indian women passively endured such abuse yet the protests that took place on sugar estates at the turn of the twentieth century provide stories of resilience and solidarity, marked by women's defiance. A strike on Nonpareil estate in 1896 was, according to oral accounts and ambiguous colonial records, triggered by 'relations' between an overseer, Gerad Van Nooten, and a woman named Jamni.[9] Based on oral accounts, Jamni and Van Nooten were not in any form of relationship as the former was married to another labourer named Jungli, but rather on one occasion, Van Nooten had abducted and attempted to rape her. In combat, Jamni used her *berwas* to strike him in the face.[10] It is unclear whether Van Nooten was defeated following Jamni's defiance yet after the event she reported to have been capable of defending herself.[11] Whether successful in doing so, this incident was not an isolated assertion of strength and independence on behalf of the women labouring on estates.

A protest on Plantation Leonora, Demerara, in 1939 over working conditions and pay witnessed the death of four workers at the hand of colonial police, one of whom was a weeder named Sumintra. Her death, raised by a subsequent report by the Enquiry Commission appointed by the Governor to investigate the deaths, appears as a brief matter of discussion, seemingly to exonerate the police opening fire on the protestors. Yet, a notable detail mentioned in the report was the physical location of Sumintra's death; she had been advancing through Georgetown and towards the Royal Commission house a notable distance ahead of the rest of the protestors.[12] Whilst this may not stand as evidence of Sumintra as a protest leader, as has been suggested by some historians, her position at the front of the marching protestors corroborates women's courageous willingness to join strike actions and Sumintra's individual death exemplified that colonial police deemed her as a threat serious enough warrant her immediate death.[13]

5. Steve Garner, *Guyana: 1838-1985: Ethnicity, Class and Gender* (Ian Randle Publishers, 2008), p. 57.
6. Ibid., p. 54.
7. Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (Hurst & Co, 2013), p. 139.
8. Ibid., p. 133.
9. British National Archives, CO 111/500, Correspondence from Individuals on matters relating to British Guiana, 1897.
10. Heavy mental bangles worn by women.
11. Rampersaud Tiwari, 'The October 1896 Non Pareil Uprising: The Unknown Story', *Man in India*, 93 (2013), p. 40; Aliyah Khan, 'Protest and Punishment: Indo-Guyanese Women and Organized Labour', *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, 12 (2018), p. 279.
12. Modern Records Centre Warwick, British Guiana, report of the Lenora Enquiry Commission, 23 March 1939 (TUC/A/12/972/29), pp. 11-13.
13. Aliyah Khan, 'Protest and Punishment: Indo-Guyanese Women and Organized Labour', *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, 12 (2018), p. 271.

Figure 2: A bowl of pholouries, fried savoury snacks made of split peas and spices.

Yet such resilience and independence were exhibited by Guyanese women beyond the confines of sugar estates and, as Indo-Guyanese women's labour shifted significantly towards the domestic sphere after WW1, the kitchen emerged as an increasingly creative and female-orientated space and a site of cultural negotiation and identity-making.

Indeed, some historians have argued Guyanese culture was formed in the home by women, who preserved, transculturated, and adapted traditional recipes to new diasporic societies.[14] Carrying spices in their voyages with them to Guiana allowed a reproduction of traditional north and east Indian foods and dishes by labourers and provided a comfort and rootedness in the isolating and displaced experience of indenture. Whilst the transportation of spices was not solely a female act, the amalgamation of an Indo-Guyanese cuisine that emerged over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries holds a distinct female legacy. The turmeric and cumin in pholouries, the peppercorns in Essequibo Chicken, and the cinnamon in salara buns take their origins in the Indian spices brought over by Indian indentured labourers and particularly those from east India. Notwithstanding, the culinary agency of Afro-Guyanese culture was key in the process of modern-Guyana's cuisines. The transportation of foods such as okra, plantain, and yam by enslaved individuals form essential ingredients of staple Guyanese foods, such as foofoo and metemgee, and have too been sources of bonding and identity-making as both Indo- and Afro-Guyanese women have learnt to cook generationally from their mothers, grandmothers, and other elder female relatives.

> The kitchen emerged as an increasingly creative and female-orientated space and a site of cultural negotiation and identity-making.

14. Brinda J. Mehta, *Diasporic Dis(Locations): Indo-Caribbean Women and Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani* (University of the West Indies Press, 2000), p. 107.

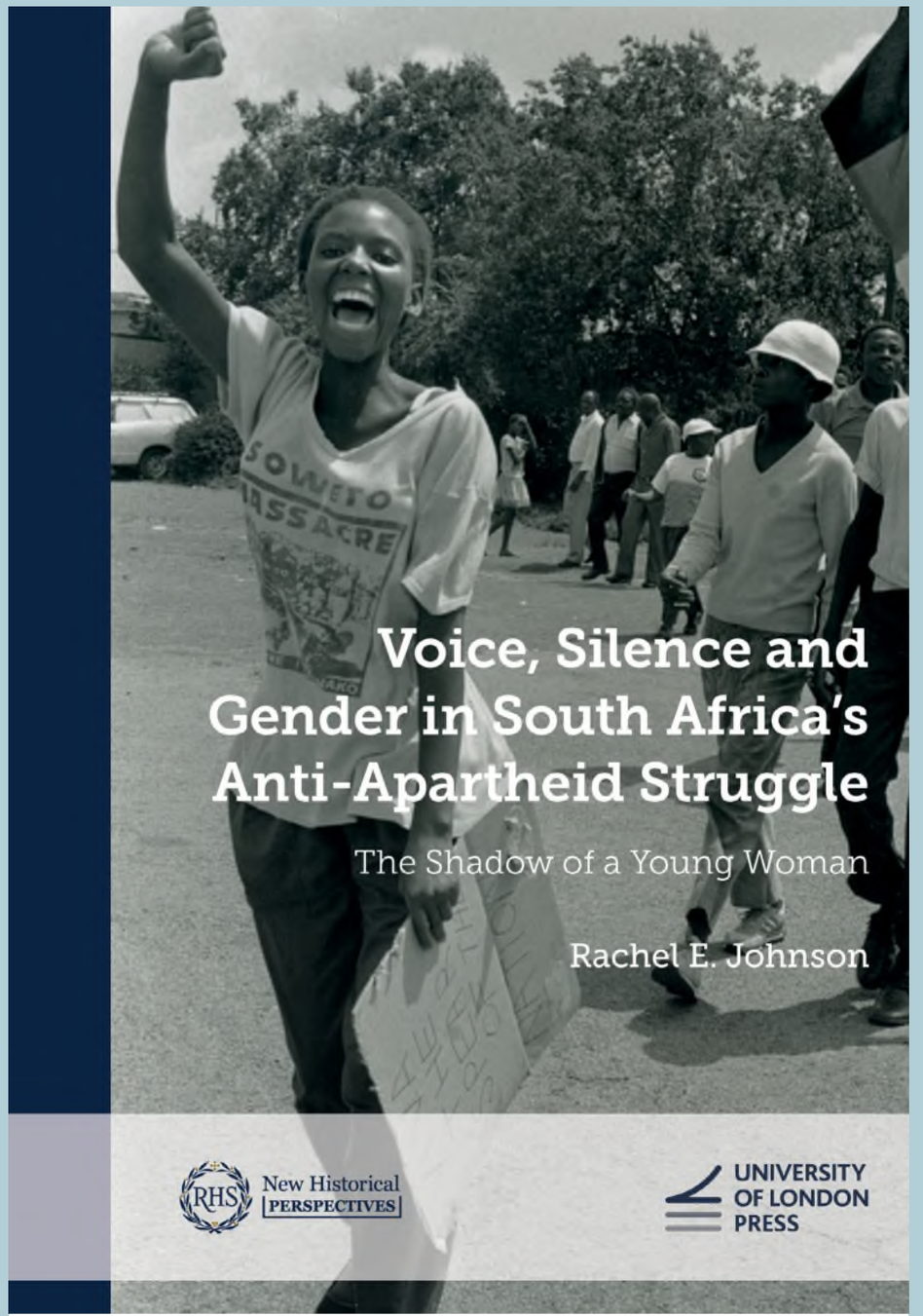

Figure 1: Book is available open access via https://uolpress.co.uk/book/voice-silence-and-gender-in-south-africas-anti-apartheid-struggle/

Chasing a shadow in the archives:

One young black woman within South Africa's anti-apartheid liberation struggle.

Dr. Rachel E Johnson

Dr. Rachel Johnson is an Associate Professor (Modern African History) in the Department of History. Her research focuses upon South Africa in the final decades of the Apartheid State, the transition to democratic government in the 1990s, and follows the politics of institutional change into the Twenty-First century. Before joining the History Department in Durham in 2014, she was educated at Durham Johnston Comprehensive School, the University of Sheffield and SOAS in London.

The intersectional dynamics of race and gender shape what can be said, how, and by whom in many times and places. Age, too, is hugely significant in shaping participation in public and political life. In my research on the anti-apartheid liberation struggle in twentieth century South Africa I have explored how race, gender, and age mediated political participation in the final three decades of the fight to end the white supremacist apartheid system.[1]

When I started researching and writing *Voice, Silence and Gender in South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle* I did not intend to write a biography.[2] Yet, as I tried to find out more about the young black women who had participated in the groundswell of anti-apartheid activism driven by school students in mid-1970s South Africa, one person kept re-appearing, often in unexpected ways within the archives. She was at times hyper-visible and at others half-forgotten, her name misspelled, easy to miss and dismiss as insignificant. It became clear to me that whilst this young woman, Masabata Loate, was in no way typical of those young people mobilized by the anti-apartheid cause, her appearances in the archive were emblematic of the ways in which gendered narratives of those struggles had been made, reinforced, and circulated. So, whilst I lacked the materials to write a conventional biography of this young woman, I could write something else – a shadow biography as I came to think of it. One which traced the fragments of her speech and image caught in the archive as a way of thinking about how and where speaking was recognized as voice, how collective voices of youth and women were forged in the struggle, and how silences, including Masabata Loate's, were made in the process.

The book is an attempt to think about the place of speech and voice within South Africa's liberation struggle. The liberation struggle was, in one sense, a struggle for voice – a political voice for all South Africans irrespective of race, against a state that recognized only the white minority as legitimately having such a voice. Speech is also one of the principal ways historians have of knowing about that struggle. I argue that grasping the gendered dynamics of speech in, and about, the struggle is important for unpicking the nature of political participation and the historical record it leaves us.[3] I adopt an approach to working with archival fragments *as fragments*. Resisting the urge to fill in the gaps between the fleeting glimpses of Masabata Loate that existing archives contain. This underscores

1. Apartheid literally means 'apartness' in Afrikaans. It refers to a system of laws introduced from 1948 in South Africa by the Afrikaner nationalist governing party, the National Party. These laws built on an already segregationist system to entrench and enforce the separation of racial groups and their differential, unequal treatment by law. South Africans were 'classified' as one of four racial groups - white, Indian or Asian, Coloured, or black African - and this classification dictated all aspects of life: where they could live, go to school, what they would learn, what jobs they could hold, where they could travel, whom they could have a relationship with or marry, where and if they could own property. For a concise overview of the period see: Saul Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948-1994* (OUP Oxford, 2014).
2. The book is now available to read open access at: Rachel E. Johnson, *Voice, Silence and Gender in South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Shadow of a Young Woman* (University of London Press, 2025), https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.27374552.
3. Others too have noted the ways in which speech has been so integral to histories of the struggle, See: Jeremy Seekings, 'Whose Voices? Politics and Methodology in the Study of Political Organisation and Protest in the Final Phase of the "Struggle" in South Africa', *South African Historical Journal* 62, no. 1 (2010): 7–28, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02582471003778300; Sean Field, 'Turning up the Volume: Dialogues about Memory Create Oral Histories', *South African Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (1 June 2008): 175–94, https://doi.org/10.1080/02582470802416393.

Figure 2: Anti-Apartheid Protest, Paul Weinberg (between 1980-1990). This photograph is an example of the visibility of young men as actors within urban unrest in 1980s South Africa. Paul Weinberg, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

the importance of noticing where and how she is recorded. In doing so I've been influenced by many other historians including Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Sadiya Hartman and Carolyn Steedman.[4] My approach has a lot in common with what has recently been elaborated by Sophie Marie Niang as a 'scavenger methodology'.[5] In this way, Loate emerges as a shadow within the narratives of the masculinized politicization and mobilization of the youth – a shadow that throws these processes into sharp relief.[6]

The book explores Masabata Loate's appearances in the archive: first in court in 1978 as a state witness testifying against her fellow student activists; thereafter as a beauty queen with the society pages of the *Rand Daily Mail*; then as a defendant on trial herself on charges of terrorism in 1982-3; and finally, as a murder victim in 1986. The final chapter reads the many different accounts of her death that can be found in contemporary newspaper reports both local and international, within post-apartheid memoir, and as recounted at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's public hearings. It argues for the need to read these retellings of her death alongside the emergence over the same period of women's voices from within the liberation struggle as way of hearing the simultaneity of voicing and silencing.

In writing this shadow biography of Masabata Loate I make the case for the explanatory power of incomplete, partial knowledge about this young woman. In doing so I hope to offer historians of other times and places ways to negotiate race, gender, and power in the archive.

4. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History, 20th Anniversary Edition*, 2nd Revised edition (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2015); Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14, https://doi.org/muse.jhu.edu/article/241115; Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1987).
5. Sophie Marie Niang, 'In Defence of What's There: Notes on Scavenging as Methodology', *Feminist Review* 136, no. 1 (1 March 2024): 52–66, https://doi.org/10.1177/01417789231222606.
6. For more on these processes, especially in 1980s Soweto see: Emily Bridger, *Young Women against Apartheid: Gender, Youth and South Africa's Liberation Struggle* (Suffolk; Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2021).

Figure 3: 'A Woman's place is in the struggle', ANC Women's League poster, Digital Innovation South Africa Archive, available via South African History Online. This poster captures the place accorded to women within South Africa's transition to democracy in the early 1990s.

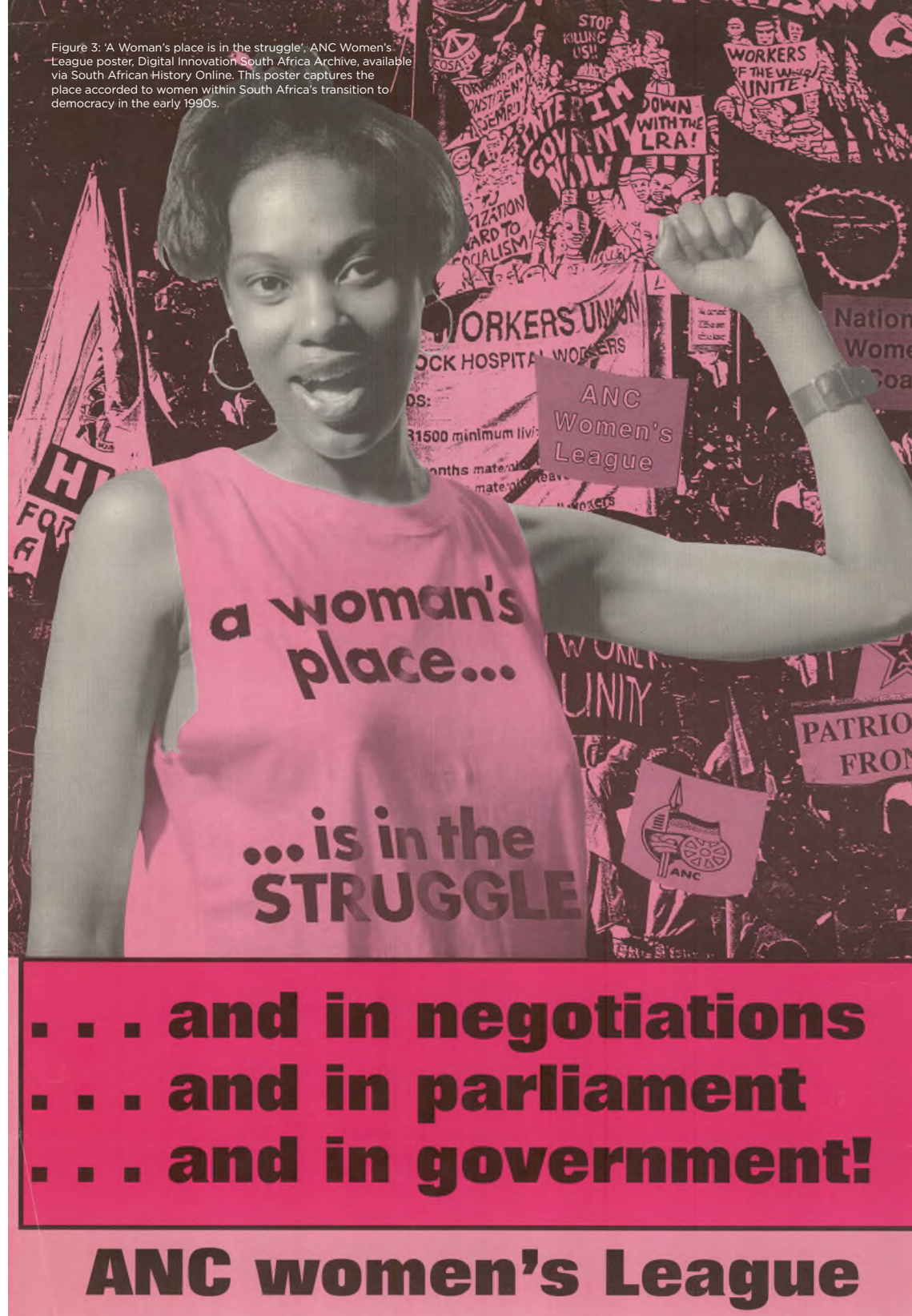

Image courtesy of Durham University.

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