

WOO-WOO, WITCH HUNTS, AND WOMEN: BUILDING COALITIONAL FEMINISM
THROUGH WORDS, ACTIONS, AND ACTIVISM

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The Salem Witch Trials of 1692-93 are the most well-known witch hunts in United States history. Yet there are countless other instances of persecution against women that modern feminists should be aware of that mirror the patterns of these historic trials. Whether quiet and insidious like the words we use toward women, or outright murder and torture like the current witch hunts in Africa and dowry murders in India, or somewhere in between as we see in government-sanctioned violence against uterus-having bodies and transgender people, complacency is not an option. Whether victims of these systems are witches, spiritual activists, or neither, I propose that it is imperative to fortify the intersections of feminism by building a coalitional strategy grounded in antiviolence, antiracism, and decolonization.

As a uterus-having person, a feminist, and an abolitionist, this constantly repeating (and increasingly insidious) pattern concerns me. I see the ways that my health, spirituality, and mere existence threaten the powers that be, but rather than cowering in fear, this recognition gives me strength to resist. My lack of fear is likely rooted in my white, heteronormative, and cis-gender privileges, but it also gives me the ability to fight more visibly than some may be able to. While I deeply fear for my reproductive rights I do not fear persecution for my witchcraft or spiritual practices. I am not afraid to “hex the patriarchy” as Ariel Gore calls for us to do.¹ In fact, I hope that this paper serves as a ritual tool to begin dismantling the micro- and macro-aggressions that continue to oppress women and other marginalized genders throughout the world, as well as challenging us all to disrupt our complicity in modern-day witch hunts while mending the rips in our feminism right here at home. May we begin to abolish these patterns through spiritualized transformative justice and community accountability. And so it is.

Words

¹. Burlison, Dani, *All of Me: Stories of Love, Anger, and the Female Body*, 1 online resource vols. (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019).

One of the simplest and most widespread ways that we marginalize each other (especially as women) is through the use of language and words. A term that comes up over and over again in spirituality and spiritualized activism is “woo-woo.”² According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the etymology of “woo-woo” is the sound that a ghost might make, but that is certainly not how it is regularly used.³ The OED goes on to define the word as “Designating a person or group holding beliefs or following practices regarded as unscientific, irrational, or outlandish, esp. [their abbreviation] ones relating to spirituality, mysticism, or alternative therapies. Also (and in earliest use) more generally: Mad, crazy.”⁴ Their example from 1971 is evocative: “She's nuts, out of her skull, real woo-woo, you know.”⁵ Yet there is an insidious throughline with the use of the word that implies a rejection of feminized spirituality that should be examined.

In his review of the book *The Living Energy Universe* by Gary Schwartz and Linda Russek, Marc Berard went so far as to title his review of this book “Woo Woo Science.”⁶ While I would not expect differently from a publication called *Skeptic*, it is still alarming to see this phrase used as if it were a legitimate and universal criticism of phenomena that we cannot explain through traditional scientific methods.⁷ Monica Emerich uses the term in the conclusion of her book *The Gospel of Sustainability* as she discusses LOHAS (Lifestyle of Health and

². Oxford English Dictionary, “Woo-Woo” (Oxford University Press, July 2023), Oxford English Dictionary, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1083368367>.

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. BERARD, MARC, “Woo Woo Science,” *Skeptic (Altadena, CA)* 8, no. 3 (2000): 86–86.

⁷. BERARD.

Sustainability) without wanting to seem “New Age ‘woo-woo.’”⁸ Allison L. Ricket uses the term in her article “Teaching Land as an Extension of Self” as she is describing ecopsychology and its theory of place.⁹ Ricket states: “To [...] ecopsychologists, the love of the Earth, the expansive feeling of bonding with living and non living [sic] organisms is not a woo-woo feeling shared by tree-hugging hippies and nature writers, but an evolutionary-based characteristic deep in every man, woman, and child on the planet.”¹⁰

Emerich’s and Ricket’s perceptions of the term “woo-woo” are not altogether clear as they are both discussing fairly esoteric and spiritual ways of living and interacting with the world, yet it seems that they do not wish to be associated with a certain brand of the same product.¹¹ What exactly separates their work from this “woo-woo” that they wish to be so divorced from? As Berard’s piece is 11 and 21 years older than Emerich’s and Ricket’s pieces, respectively, it seems fair to assume that, in some ways, his definition has influenced theirs.¹² There is also the unavoidable fact that Berard is a man throwing around this term with confidence while Emerich and Ricket both seemingly identify as women (or at least non-men),

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. EMERICH, MONICA M., “CONCLUSION: Toward an Integrative Spirituality of Sustainability,” in *The Gospel of Sustainability*, Media, Market and LOHAS (University of Illinois Press, 2011), 187–204, <http://www.jstor.org/ciis.idm.oclc.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1xcnvn.12>.

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. Ricket, Allison L., “Teaching Land as an Extension of Self,” *The Radical Teacher*, no. 119 (2021): 14–20.

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. Ricket, 4.

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. EMERICH, “CONCLUSION: Toward an Integrative Spirituality of Sustainability”; Ricket, “Teaching Land as an Extension of Self.”

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. BERARD, “Woo Woo Science”; EMERICH, “CONCLUSION: Toward an Integrative Spirituality of Sustainability”; Ricket, “Teaching Land as an Extension of Self.”

and are writing about science in some capacity thus using the term almost preventatively for fear of the contemporary Marc Berards calling their work “Woo Woo Science.”¹³

One example of a well-known victim of the weaponization of “woo-woo” is Marianne Williamson.¹⁴ Williamson began her career as a self-help author and speaker with a strong throughline of spirituality.¹⁵ Raised Jewish, Williamson’s spiritual theories tend to sound monotheistic but do not necessarily preach a right or wrong way to connect with the divine.¹⁶ In fact, it is my opinion that Williamson’s theories are fairly progressive for someone who was raised with quite a bit of financial and social capital.¹⁷ Progressive enough that one of the most well-respected voices in feminism and cultural criticism, bell hooks, cited Williamson more than once in her book *All About Love*.¹⁸ Initially, when thinking back on this connection, I assumed that hooks cited Williamson’s most popular book *A Return to Love* since the content was similar, but hooks was citing *The Healing of America* (now called *Healing the Soul of America* since its 20th anniversary edition with updated content).¹⁹

¹³. BERARD, “Woo Woo Science”; EMERICH, “CONCLUSION: Toward an Integrative Spirituality of Sustainability”; Rickett, “Teaching Land as an Extension of Self.”

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. Fisher, R Michael, “Interpreting the Marianne Williamson Presidential Phenomenon: ‘Flakey’ Problem,” *In Search of Fearlessness Institute*, no. Technical Paper No. 118 (2021).

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. Gordon, Aubrey and Michael Hobbes, “Marianne Williamson - Maintenance Phase,” accessed April 26, 2024, <https://maintenancephase.buzzsprout.com/1411126/9179397-marianne-williamson>.

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. Williamson, Marianne, *Healing the Soul of America - 20th Anniversary Edition (Anniversary)*, 2018.

¹⁷

. Gordon and Hobbes, “Marianne Williamson - Maintenance Phase.”

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. hooks, bell, *All about Love: New Visions*, First William Morrow paperback edition (New York, NY: William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2001).

¹⁹. Williamson.

Chapter seven of *All About Love* is titled “Greed: Simply Love” and covers hooks’s critiques of “‘me’ culture,” or how society has become more concerned with our individual needs than those of the highest need.²⁰ Although Williamson is featured as the highlighted quote above chapter six, chapter seven is where hooks injects her thoughts on Williamson and her work:

Marianne Williamson addresses the widespread cynicism about the sharing of resources, which threatens the spiritual well-being of our nation, in *The Healing of America*. Williamson contends: “There is so much injustice in America, and such a conspiracy not to discuss it; and so much suffering, and so much deflection lest we notice. We are told that these problems are secondary or that it would cost too much to fix them—as though money is what matters most. Greed is considered legitimate now, while brotherly love is not.” Although Williamson is a New Age guru, her courageous willingness to talk about the unacceptable did not diminish her popularity, most readers simply chose to overlook this particular book. In it she challenges us to resist, to dare to change injustice. Without denying that she is privileged, she calls herself and us to task for not sharing the wealth. (118-9)

Although she does not say it outright, hooks does not seem to have much faith in followers of “New Age gurus.”²¹ And yet, her ability to simultaneously critique Williamson’s followers for “skipping” what hooks seems to think is her most important work *and* lift up the theory and words brought forth by Williamson is true feminist praxis.²² Without saying it explicitly, hooks reminds us that a feminism that requires perfection is not true feminism.

It may not be surprising that one of our foremost feminist scholars was able to hold these two truths at the same time, but in the context of other ways that Williamson has been critiqued, it is truly remarkable. On the “Marianne Williamson” episode of the podcast “Maintenance Phase” Aubrey Gordon and Michael Hobbes attempt to hold Williamson accountable for

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. hooks, 105.

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. hooks, 118.

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. hooks, 119.

problematic behaviors, including the ways that her teachings were harmful during the AIDS crisis and, more recently, complicit in toxic diet culture.²³ While there is a comedic tone to this podcast, Gordon and Hobbes are thorough in their research and include sources for all of their claims in their show notes.²⁴ However, their tone throughout the episode does not hold nuance, and instead takes on the role of “prosecutor,” attempting to put Williamson on trial with only 58 minutes to do so.²⁵ In just the opening interaction they poke fun at the concept of having an aura, as well as crystal healing, and by the 1:54 mark the dreaded “woo-woo” is already invoked.²⁶

Gordon and Hobbes’s purpose with the podcast is to make people aware of scams and harm in the wellness and weight loss industries, so their takedown of Williamson is not unheard of. Still, it is also a clear example of how people (even bright, critical thinkers) are capable of using casual misogyny and antitheism when addressing her work.²⁷ In fact, a quick search for news articles with the terms “Marianne Williamson” and “woo-woo” yields seemingly endless results. Even Williamson uses the term when describing how she is perceived, often calling out the inherent sexism in how the word is wielded against her.²⁸ For example, in a 2019 Vanity Fair interview Williamson states: “[...] if I use [the word miracle]—you know, if [Times columnist]

²³. Gordon and Hobbes.

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. Gordon and Hobbes.

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. Shankar Vedantam, “You 2.0: How to Open Your Mind - Hidden Brain Podcast,” accessed April 26, 2024, <https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/the-easiest-person-to-fool/>.

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. Gordon and Hobbes, “Marianne Williamson - Maintenance Phase.”

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. Gordon and Hobbes.

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. Saraiya, Sonia, “Marianne Williamson Explains Her Magical Thinking | Vanity Fair,” July 30, 2019, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2019/07/marianne-williamson-interview>;

28. Williamson, Marianne, “Politics and the Thought Police,” *Amass* 13, no. 1 (2008): 17–19.

David Brooks says something about spirituality, it's considered profound. If I say something like that, it's considered woo-woo. So we can stay away from that word for now."²⁹ Williamson also uses the term in a 2008 article she wrote in support of Dennis Kucinich's presidential campaign: "[Kucinich] is a good man, and a serious one. Some sort of clown? No. New Age woo woo? No way (of course the thought manipulators have labeled me that as well, so some people would say something here about the pot and the kettle)."³⁰

Williamson is not perfect by any measure. She seems to have capitalistic tendencies, and while she has denied the accusations of claiming spirituality and positive thinking could eradicate AIDS, the complexities of how she has wielded her power as a spiritual leader certainly seem muddy.³¹ However, I believe that by continuously using words like "woo-woo" or "flakey" (as Michael R. Fisher wrote about) to describe one of the few progressive women who have made it to the United States Presidential Election Primary ballot we are continuing a pattern of maintaining a widespread bias against spirituality, women, and, essentially, the potential strength of someone wielding the Divine Feminine for the greater good of our nation and the world.

Government

The government of our homeland is sworn to protect us. From our first responders and medical professionals to our elected officials and the literal Department of Homeland Security,

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. Saraiya.

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. Williamson, "Politics and the Thought Police."

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. Christina Cauterucci, "The Gay Divide Over Marianne Williamson," *Slate*, August 7, 2019, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/08/marianne-williamson-aids-crisis-history-gay-community.html>.

we, as Americans, have been promised “liberty and justice for all.”³² However, it seems that we cannot move away from another patriotic text stating that “all men are created equal,” even though it has been debated for centuries who “all men” really are.³³ It is difficult to see our government as inclusive of women and other genders when we have only had one woman even come close to the highest office in the land, and the escalation of misogyny and antitheism reaches a fever pitch when someone like Williamson tries to run for that highest office.³⁴

While I could write about the blatant misogyny directed at Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election cycle by people on all sides of the political spectrum (or similar rhetoric used against Elizabeth Warren in 2020) I decided to focus on Williamson as it seems that people are most turned off by her connection to spirituality and wellness.³⁵ To me, this is troubling as it begins to evoke the patterns of witch hunts in Europe and the United States that were motivated by feudalism and capitalism, respectively, and resulted in the denigration of women as healers, as well as the murders of thousands.³⁶ If we cannot fathom a thin, white, heterosexual, and fairly

³². “Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America | History & Text | Britannica,” accessed April 26, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Pledge-of-Allegiance-to-the-Flag-of-the-United-States-of-America>.

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. “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription | National Archives,” accessed April 26, 2024, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

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. Dickson, E.J. and Sean Collins, “Who Is Marianne Williamson? Her 2020 Presidential Campaign and Policies, Explained - Vox,” January 30, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/2019/1/30/18203811/marianne-williamson-2020-presidential-candidate-policies>.

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. Gorov, Lynda, “Faith: Marianne Williamson Is Full of It – Mother Jones,” December 1997, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/1997/11/faith-marianne-williamson-full-it/>.

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. Federici, Silvia, *Caliban and the Witch* (Autonomedia, 2004); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, & Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2010); Silvia Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (PM Press, 2018).

progressive woman as a Presidential candidate because of her spirituality, we may be closer to the stances held by the ruling class than those of the proletariat.³⁷

In *Caliban and the Witch* Silvia Federici gives a thorough history of how feudalism transitioned into capitalism (although she refutes the concept of it being a transition at all), and how capitalism is largely responsible for the victimization and subsequent mass murder of women, healers, and witches.³⁸ Federici outlines how the systems that facilitated this massacre were fueled by avaricious patriarchy in pursuit of a subservient female ideal, rather than women who lived without men or were actively resisting food price increases, financial oppression, and land theft.³⁹ While the Roman Catholic Church claimed that they were eradicating women who were in league with “The Devil,” they were actually aligning with the government to target women who were, to oversimplify, noisy.⁴⁰

Federici minces no words in terms of who was responsible for murdering these hundreds of thousands of women, naming “the jurists, the magistrates, and the demonologists, often embodied by the same person” as those with the most blood on their hands.⁴¹ She adds: “There can be no doubt, then, that the witch-hunt was a major *political* [her emphasis] initiative.”⁴² Women who were prosecuted as witches were executed for several reasons: some because a man wanted their land and there was no privatization to protect them.⁴³ Some because their sexual

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. Federici, 91.

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. Federici, 62.

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. Federici, 165.

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. Federici, 168.

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. Federici, 168.

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. Federici, 168.

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partners were convinced that they were manipulating their reproductivity by either preventing conception or affecting the man's well-being in general.⁴⁴ But one of the most egregious crimes, as roughly nearly a century of witch hunts progressed, was the claim that women were too powerful in terms of healthcare and healing.⁴⁵

During the European witch hunts, which were roughly between 1580 and 1640, healers were predominantly women, especially in rural parts of Europe, and were well-versed in obstetrics and gynecology, how the body responded to basic care, and how to use natural remedies like native plants to heal peoples' general maladies.⁴⁶ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English profile the role of healing women from the witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries to the 20th century in their pamphlet (turned book) *Witches, Midwives, & Nurses*, noting that (similar to Federici's point) class and rural capitalism were largely to blame for the eventual persecution and subsequent murder of women.⁴⁷ What Ehrenreich and English come back to in each century they cover is how the ruling class has consistently targeted women who practice medicine, while these women were simply doing what their mothers and grandmothers before taught them to do to survive.⁴⁸ This includes spiritual practices as well as medical, as these women were also prosecuted for gathering for the Pagan Sabbaths and chanting incantations over patients.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ . Federici, 171.

⁴⁵ . Federici, 181.

⁴⁶ . Ehrenreich and English, 31.

⁴⁷ . Ehrenreich and English, 39.

⁴⁸ . Ehrenreich and English, 36.

⁴⁹ . Ehrenreich and English, 45.

. Ehrenreich and English, 42-3.

This cycle of persecution is deeply unsettling as it did not end with the witch trials in Europe or the United States, and, on a global level, have not ended today.⁵⁰ While this paper will discuss the literal witch hunts happening right now in the world, I would like to take a moment to draw some parallels to the ways in which the victims of the European and early American witch hunts were targeted and the ways in which our current United States government is using similar tactics on women and non-males at present. These oppressive and intrusive policies not only control the reproductive rights of women (which harkens back to how women were accused of witchcraft for being able to control conception), but they are also impacting the health and lives of transgender children, teens, and adults, as well.⁵¹

The historic overturning of *Roe vs. Wade* by the United States Supreme Court on June 24th, 2022 was one of the most frightening events I have lived through as a uterus-having person who loves and cares for and is supported by numerous other uterus-having people. Women across the country were holding each other in both solidarity and fear; for ourselves, for our children, for our siblings, cousins, and beyond. The ancestral trauma of previous witch hunts bubbled to the surface and we all collectively knew that this is how our foremothers felt. A simultaneous jolt of adrenaline while also quickly connecting to the nonverbal communication

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. Federici, 64.

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. Nina Totenberg and Sarah McCammon, “Supreme Court Overturns *Roe v. Wade*, Ending Right to Abortion Upheld for Decades,” *NPR*, June 24, 2022, sec. *Roe v. Wade* and the future of reproductive rights in America, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/24/1102305878/supreme-court-abortion-rov-wade-decision-overturn>; “See Where Abortion Stands by State Without *Roe*,” *US News & World Report*, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/a-guide-to-abortion-laws-by-state>; “Attacks on Gender Affirming Care by State Map,” Human Rights Campaign, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/attacks-on-gender-affirming-care-by-state-map>.

system that we are all in tune with, knowing that this decision was not “pro-life” but deeply anti-woman.⁵² Our bodies began to remember the fires, the ropes, and the stones.

Yet the inherent misogyny of this decision is not just affecting women, it is affecting trans men and nonbinary individuals just as much.⁵³ In her book *Whipping Girl*, Julia Serano uses the term trans-misogyny to describe the ways that hyper-fixation with genitals and the fetishization of trans people further cause oppression and result in divisions in feminism.⁵⁴ While the majority of Serano’s work is from her perspective as a trans woman and the male-to-female (MTF) spectrum she speaks from, the framework is similar when it comes to the misconceptions, fear, and outright violence directed at trans individuals – including from within feminism.⁵⁵ As Serano mentions many times there is an implicit bias among many cis feminists against penises in feminine spaces, but this resistance to solidarity is not only deeply troubling but also counterintuitive.⁵⁶

If we have learned anything from Federici and Ehrenreich and English it is that these patterns of government will continue to persist until uterus-having people and those seeking gender-affirming care coalesce against the hetero-capitalist-patriarchy.⁵⁷ In an interview for the

⁵². Totenberg and McCammon.

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. Scott, Brianna, “Getting an Abortion as a Trans Person Is Hard — with or without State Restrictions,” *NPR*, October 18, 2022, sec. Health, <https://www.npr.org/2022/10/18/1129736018/getting-an-abortion-as-a-trans-person-is-hard-with-or-without-state-restrictions>.

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. Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Pirai: Basic Books, 2007), 14-5.

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. Serano, 17.

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. Serano, 233.

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. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*; Ehrenreich and English, *Witches, Midwives, & Nurses: A History of Women Healers*; Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*.

book *Feminist Freedom Warriors* activist and theorist Zillah Eisenstein speaks to our need for a coalition in the feminist movement.⁵⁸ However, she also points out the nuances and splinters that prevent this coalition:

What I think is really difficult about coalition work right now is that there are a lot of serious fractures within communities, and the way that you find the ability to make coalition is that you need people who voice the need for it. On some level the people who can voice it least well at the moment are white women. Or I think that many of them think that. (137)

When interviewer and editor Chandra Talpade Mohanty asks “Why?” Eisenstein responds:

Some of it has to do with this idea of ally. In other words, you support but you do not lead. I would agree with that, but at the same time the idea of being enormously invested and involved need not be a position of leadership. These are all very difficult issues that need to be talked about. People need to trust each other enough to work on it. I did some of the work and writing about trying to see Black women, and “say her name,” and mobilize around the violence against Black women, and deal with the structure of patriarchy as well as racism, as Kim Crenshaw, originator of the term “intersectionality” does. It becomes difficult for many white women who do not have an articulated stance. Their idea of being involved is to be supportive but not actually to be an activist. (137-8)

It is difficult to argue with Eisenstein’s assessment as we see white feminists who are new to the anti-capitalist, antiracist movement have a difficult time navigating the power dynamics that we are simultaneously attempting to abolish.⁵⁹ Yet in some ways it is easier than ever to participate in the movement because of hashtag activism like #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName and other online activism developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁰

With that said, it is also problematic for white feminists to be so concerned with being perfect allies that they stay silent on major feminist issues like sexual or gender-based violence in

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. Okazawa-Rey, Margo et al., *Feminist Freedom Warriors*, (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2018).

⁵⁹. Okazawa-Rey et al, 138.

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. Sarah J. Jackson, “(Re)Imagining Intersectional Democracy from Black Feminism to Hashtag Activism,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 39, no. 4 (October 2016): 375–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2016.1226654>.

other countries.⁶¹ This is not how we honor our European ancestors who fought against the ruling classes and died at the hands of capitalism for healing one another, maintaining control of our reproductive rights, and maintaining a life on our own land. If we continue to hold each other to impossible standards of activism, then every Marianne Williamson who runs for office will be dismissed as “woo-woo” rather than welcomed as a leader who understands the complexities of feminized spiritual activism. And the consequences of that crack in our coalitional strategy not only affect us here at home in the United States but affect millions of people abroad, as well.⁶²

Abroad

The state of feminism in the United States is a subject of hot debate.⁶³ While I argue that we need to move toward a coalition of antiracist, anti-capitalist, trans-inclusive feminism, I also understand how easy it is to get distracted by propaganda and pop culture.⁶⁴ However, these tricks of public relations are typically cogs in the capitalist wheel of oppression.⁶⁵ While we are arguing over the merits of Beyoncé vs. Taylor Swift there are dowry murders taking place in India (literally the day of this writing there is a new report of a husband murdering his wife for a larger dowry), and witch hunts persisting in countries throughout Africa.⁶⁶ It is admittedly

⁶¹. Okazawa-Rey et al., 137-38.

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. Federici, 64.

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. Gay, Roxane, “Feminism Is Fine.,” Substack newsletter, *The Audacity*. (blog), June 21, 2022, <https://audacity.substack.com/p/feminism-is-fine>.

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. Gay.

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. Federici, 47.

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difficult not to feel helpless when confronted by atrocities happening far from home. Still, it is my opinion that the typical American feminist's ignorance of or ambivalence to these crimes is related to the fact that our feminism at home is so splintered that speaking out will only cause more fissures in our foundation.

Similarly, Federici claims in her book *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* that Western feminists are too afraid of seeming prejudiced to speak out about these barbaric events.⁶⁷ She states:

More surprising, feminists have not spoken out against [witch hunts in Africa]. They fear, perhaps, that denouncing these witch hunts may promote colonial stereotypes of Africans as a population mired in backwardness and irrationality. Such fears are not unfounded, but they are misguided. Witch hunts are not just an African problem but a global one. They are part of a worldwide pattern of increasing violence against women that we need to combat. Thus, we need to understand the forces and social dynamics responsible for witch hunts. (64)

But in many ways these brutal attacks *are* backward and irrational, and if feminists near and far practiced decolonization and antiracism in their activism regularly, then perhaps this fear would be allayed.⁶⁸ In other words, if we are afraid of each other, then how can we take on these systemic issues of sexual, reproductive, and lethal violence against women together? If we cannot stop our global siblings' deaths, then how can we prevent our own?

The answer may be by resisting distractions like which celebrity is or is not a feminist, and focusing on building community with other local feminists instead.⁶⁹ Eisenstein continues to

. Federici; "Woman Found Dead, Father Alleges Dowry Killing | Lucknow News - Times of India," accessed April 30, 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/woman-found-dead-father-alleges-dowry-killing/articleshow/109736759.cms>; Justin Klawans, "Centuries after Salem, Witch Hunts Persist," The Week, March 7, 2024, <https://theweek.com/culture-life/modern-day-witch-hunts>.

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. Federici, 64.

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. Federici, 64.

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encourage white feminists, especially, to stay aware of our own biases so that we can align with feminisms of color and support each other thoroughly.⁷⁰ She states:

There is a lot of Black power leading this country. There was a Black president. But the point here is that need to find ways of building a coalition that recognizes the complexity of that community, of the community of Black women, of the community of white women. The point here is that the points of coalition cannot be as though we are each homogenous. I do not think we have developed a coalitional strategy. (142)

Mohanty responds that the frameworks we were given by our foremothers were not originally intersectional, so not only were we essentially set up to be isolated but it is now imperative to do the work of desegregation together, and quickly.⁷¹ The consequences if we do not might be as dire as they were for European women in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Conclusion: Coalition

In the opening of this paper, I cited feminist author Ariel Gore in a conversation she had with Dani Burlison for the book *All of Me: Stories of Love, Anger, and the Female Body*. Gore is not only famous for her writing and her slogan “Hex the Patriarchy,” but she also identifies as a witch.⁷² The idea of building a coalitional feminist strategy to prevent and dismantle systematic violence against women began to form in my mind while reading her interview in this book. As she so beautifully says: “You don’t want to excuse people’s willful ignorance, but we need new people. [...] We need people who have not entirely interrogated their own issues, you know.

. Gay, Roxane, “Emma Watson? Jennifer Lawrence? These Aren’t the Feminists You’re Looking For,” *The Guardian*, October 10, 2014, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/10/-sp-jennifer-lawrence-emma-watson-feminists-celebrity>.

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. Okazawa-Rey et al., 142.

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. Okazawa-Rey et al, 142.

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. Burlison, 66.

There has to be a way to be with each other and to be kind of helping each other along, like the newcomers.”⁷³ While cancel culture is useful for removing predators from our inner circles, it can also be harmful for burgeoning activists who want to join but do not want to do anything wrong.

Tonight while working on this paper I saw an Instagram notification that Marianne Williamson was going live on her page.⁷⁴ She was hosting a prayer of protection as news broke of cops in riot gear storming the Columbia students’ encampment as they risk their degrees (and potentially their lives) to fiercely protest the genocide in Gaza.⁷⁵ I watched her video and listened and prayed with her as she asked us to envision a golden light of protection around the students.⁷⁶ I opened my eyes and saw the comments were flooded with people condemning Williamson for not speaking out about this sooner or, essentially, in the ways that they wanted her to.⁷⁷ It breaks my heart that my potential coalitional comrades are spending their time and energy thinking that they are holding someone accountable when they are actually missing the point of her video and riling up her supporters. To build this coalition we must approach each other with care and curiosity. If we do not, there may be dire consequences for ourselves, the movement, and our lives.

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. Burlison, 67.

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. “Marianne Williamson (@mariannewilliamson) • Instagram Photos and Videos,” accessed April 30, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/mariannewilliamson/>.

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. Eryn Davis et al., “Live Updates: Police Arrest Protesters Occupying Columbia Campus Building,” *The New York Times*, April 30, 2024, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/04/30/nyregion/columbia-protests-college>.

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. “Marianne Williamson (@mariannewilliamson) • Instagram Photos and Videos.”

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. “Marianne Williamson (@mariannewilliamson) • Instagram Photos and Videos,” accessed April 30, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C6FoxPlsqO/>.

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