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“Gender at the Root of Everyday Life”: Equity, Activism, and the Perspectives of Diana J. Fox

By Goutam Karmakar¹

Abstract

This in-depth conversation with Diana J. Fox, Professor of Anthropology at Bridgewater State University, Massachusetts, United States, and a cultural and applied anthropologist, scholar-activist, and documentary film producer, puts emphasis on how Fox’s research demonstrates that a decolonial feminist viewpoint inspires and even necessitates that Indigenous feminisms be at the center, and that researchers from the global north have a responsibility to do so. In this interview, Fox talks about how, as a feminist decolonial/anticolonial anthropologist, she has worked for global gender justice and equality throughout her career, especially within the Anglophone Caribbean, which is where the bulk of her work has focused. The interview highlights how the *Journal of International Women’s Studies* (JIWS), for which she is founding editor, consistently demonstrates decolonial practices in the realm of knowledge production and distribution. In a broad sense, the interview focuses on Fox’s continued research and activism, in which she effectively strives to address pressing problems surrounding gender equity across myriad demographic groups and community organizations, through issues such as water rights and forest management, climate justice and environmental sustainability, gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS education and stereotyping, evolving narratives of ethnicity and culture, Maroon sovereignty and reparations, LGBTQ+ discriminatory practices, and anti-racism.

Keywords: Decoloniality, Women, Gender, Activism, Ideology, Diana J. Fox

Notes on Diana Fox

Dr. Diana J. Fox is Professor of Anthropology at Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts, United States. She is a cultural and applied anthropologist, scholar-activist, and documentary film producer. Her research focuses on the Anglophone Caribbean, particularly Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, where she studies gender and sexual diversity, women’s social movement activism for environmental sustainability, women’s human rights, and transnational feminisms and activism. She serves on a number of boards and committees, including the Sexualities Working Group of the Caribbean Studies Association (CSA), the international advisory board of the Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation

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Project (FACRP) in Trinidad and Tobago, and is the Founding Editor of the open-access, online *Journal of International Women's Studies*. Because she is especially interested in forging collaborations with the communities she studies, her educational and activist films were produced to serve their goals, while educating the wider public. *Earth, Water, Woman: Community and Sustainability in Trinidad and Tobago* and *Many Loves, One Heart: Stories of Courage and Resilience* each tell stories of people striving against the odds to protect their livelihoods, well-being, and identities. *Many Loves* focuses on the burgeoning LGBTQ movement in Jamaica by highlighting courageous members of the community and their allies. The film shows the movement's struggles and achievements, particularly the hopefulness and resilience of its young activists, whose bravery and desire to live in the Jamaica they love challenges the dominant narrative that most LGBTQ Jamaicans are trying to leave their island. She is the recipient of four Fulbright awards and many other grants and has published a number of books and articles.

Text of the interview

Goutam Karmakar: The phrase, “Gender at the Root of Everyday Life,” has been borrowed from your 2010 book, *Cultural DNA: Gender at the Root of Everyday Life in Rural Jamaica*. This book was released in 2010, and we are now in the year 2022. What changes have you observed in terms of gender and everyday life in these years?

Diana J. Fox: The first thought that comes to mind when you ask me about that ethnography—before I even get to your question—is that there are so many things I would have done differently in that text from my present standpoint; however, it is also joyful to assess my own development and growth in my perspectives and approach to research. I have many colleagues, collaborators, friends, and relatives to thank for that. This question gives me an opportunity to reflect on one disappointing review I received of *Cultural DNA*. First, there were some factual errors that neither I nor the reviewers/press picked up regarding the location of the Leeward and Windward Maroons—descendant communities of self-liberated enslaved Africans. The Windward Maroons live in the East of the island of Jamaica, while the Leeward Maroons are in the West. I said the opposite and that error remains in print to my great embarrassment. At the same time, no scholarly work is ever error-free, and so I've had to continually work to psychologically release my emotions around that and other more minor errors. I mention this here as a sort of encouragement for younger scholars to be kind to themselves in the too-often harsh, judgemental, cutthroat world of academe. Second, the review said that I largely borrowed the idea of gender systems from Eudine Barriteau and Patricia Mohammed, two of the architects of Indigenous Caribbean feminisms. To that I would say, yes with no apologies. The reviewer commented that I was not original enough in my theoretical framework. That is both true and not true. Over the last decade I have immersed myself more deeply in decolonial feminisms than I had when I was writing that book in 2007-9 (it took me a long time because I had a small child, I was coming up for tenure, and I experienced the typical constraints that a woman professor with small children experiences in work-life challenges). A decolonial feminist perspective encourages and even mandates that Indigenous feminisms are centered and in fact, scholars from the global north have a responsibility to do so. The value system of always striving for newness and innovation is an overstated and problematic one. My platform supported Caribbean feminist thought, while also weaving in the notion of gender systems as a form of cultural DNA—using DNA as a metaphor for change that underscores both the strands of continuity and change that co-exist in all societies. As the brilliant and pioneering historian of Caribbean history, Elsa Goveia observed, “Knowledge of the past must play a part

in liberation from the bonds of the past. Our history is not dead knowledge. Its significance for us is vital and immediate" (1959). Gender systems simultaneously reflect continuity and dynamism; they are foundational to human sociocultural, economic, and political organizing.

Knowing that the concept of "gender" is constructed, all human societies have recognized physical differences in men and women and have woven women's capacity to give birth and breastfeed into cultural meaning and social structures. This has happened in ways that are that overlap across societies, but which are also context specific reflecting another anthropological insight that all societies embody both human universals and human cultural specificities. The meanings, roles, power dynamics, etc attributed to human biological sex are no different. In some societies, women are divine creators, powerful, the organizers of resources and their deployment. In others, they are servants, the enslaved, chattel. But these should not be regarded as reductionist binaries; women have various forms of power and limitations in its exercise in all societies. I was trying to get at those with respect to rural Jamaican society. Because rural life is not static (contrary to popular notions of "timeless" and "unchanging" nostalgic depictions). Since I did my fieldwork in rural Jamaica in the early 1990s, cell phones have proliferated rapidly, there are far more cars and busses on the road, out-migration of women has increased, leaving men to care for households, and women have advanced in higher educational participation and in middle management and high level leadership positions. The LGBTQ movement across the island has grown stronger in spite of persisting discriminations, evangelical Christianity has burgeoned as a regressive force, and more traditional forms of Protestantism have declined. Global economic relations of neoliberalism have decimated regional markets, while at the same time there is pushback with more localized economies emerging. Climate crisis is destroying the regularity of a predictable rainy and dry season cycle. All these factors and more have influenced rural daily life and gender dynamics. Fatherhood has been impacted by global messaging that offers more flexibility in definitions of masculinity; more men are rejecting "Mama boy" categorizations when they cook and care for children.

Yet, patterns of multiple partnership also persist in ways that are problematic for all, and new forms of discrimination and expressions of misogyny have emerged such as cyberbullying and increased trafficking of girls in rural areas. The community I researched is now wired to the Internet. Gangs have proliferated and declined. Global health impacts—not just Covid but HIV/AIDS, Chikungunya, Malaria...still, many of my observations and the truth of the foundational feature of gender systems as building blocks of society, their ideological power, their deployment in daily life persist. Gender systems are complex, unfolding, emergent, persistent with continuities from previous eras. Please note, I haven't done systematic fieldwork in rural Jamaica for some time, so these are observations based on my ongoing relationships and informal observations and readings.

Since 2017, I've served as an academic advisor to a group of Maroons from across the region. I've worked closely as a partner in assisting their unfolding social movement for self-determination and sovereignty as Indigenous descendants of Africa with other academic team members. The Maroon women (including from Suriname, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Belize, Dominica) who are leading this movement are strategically brilliant, cognizant of their history and the possibilities and limitations of the international human rights system. Transnational feminist organizing is key to this regional movement. Women have always been leaders in the Caribbean, navigating stubborn patriarchies, reviving more equitable gender dynamics of First Nations and calling on Maroon notions of freedom—radical historically and firmly situated within the history of the Black Atlantic. They call on historical memory for survivance of spiritual practices, infusing those memories into future goals, while experiencing ethnogenesis—the emergence of new cultural forms. For me personally, the theoretical

framework of cultural DNA infusing the ethnography continues to inform my thinking about women, gender, and sexuality.

GK: This mentioning of Jamaica transports us immediately to the West Indies and to the fact that you will soon be there. Can you explain your new role and your goals and objectives pertaining to women and gender issues there?

DJF: My official title, from Sept 1, 2022 to August 31, 2024, is Interim University Director, Institute for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies. I'll be based in Jamaica at the Mona UWI Campus. The IGDS was created by pioneering Caribbean feminists and started off as the Centre, not Institute, for Gender and Development Studies. Let me share a little of my background in Jamaica, why I accepted the offer to apply for the position, and what my general goals are--general to maintain the confidentiality of my future staff and purviews that are not yet fully public--prior to taking on the position!

As a feminist decolonial/anticolonial anthropologist, I have been committed to global gender justice and equity throughout my career, especially within the Anglophone Caribbean which is where the bulk of my work has focused. Since 1991, I have pursued fieldwork in Jamaica, and since 2004 in Trinidad and Tobago; I have taught at UWI Mona (2004, 2006 Fulbright awards) and St. Augustine (2005, 2007 Fulbright awards) campuses when IGDS was the Centre for Gender and Development Studies. I also taught at Arthur Lok Jack International School of Business (2016-2018). In these roles and throughout my career in public higher education, I have nurtured a commitment to inclusivity, social justice, and high impact learning practices, advancing innovative pedagogy and curriculum around intersectional gender equity.

My ongoing research and activism in the region continue to involve me in the pressing problems around gender equity across multiple demographics and community groups, through issues such as water rights and forest management, climate justice and environmental sustainability, gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS education and stigma, emerging discourses of indigeneity, Maroon sovereignty and reparations, LGBTQ+ discrimination, anti-racism.

I have served in many kinds of leadership roles both within the university setting and beyond, including as Department Chair for the last eight years. Prior to that I served as Program Director of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Bridgewater State University where I have taught since 2000, and before at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (1995-2000) where I ran the Susan B. Anthony Women's Center. Building on close to three decades in higher education leadership and administration, robust collaborations, scholar-activism, program-building, and teaching, I hope to continue to build the profile of the IGDS in the region as a beacon of problem solving and innovative programming for the enormous gender justice challenges that impact all levels of society today. I will draw on my many networks across the region to advance the mission of the IGDS, supporting the UWI strategic plan. I will strive to involve the culturally and academically diverse talent-base of faculty and students in all three IGDS departments and in the five satellite campuses supporting creative-collaborative research projects that shape gender policy initiatives and publications. I also aim to help faculty move through their promotions, deepen hands-on educational opportunities with surrounding communities, and link the IGDS to regional and international women's and gender studies programs and initiatives regionally and internationally.

GK: You are the producer of the documentary *Film, Earth, Water, Woman: Community and Sustainability in Trinidad and Tobago* (2013). Can you share your knowledge of working on this project, and do you think social and women activists should adopt more initiatives like this to help raise awareness of women's issues?

DJF: Documentary film with a lens that centers the community/people whose story a filmmaker is telling is a valuable educational tool for consciousness raising, inspiration, and empathy building. It is part of a wider genre of art movements that offer visual imagery as a powerful mode of conscientization. Shorter films as this one is (23 min) are useful for classroom screening allowing time to pause during the film and for post-film discussions. The community NGO, the Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation Project (FACRP), the focus of the film with its co-founder Akilah Jaramogi, was a partner in its making, along with filmmakers Sarah Feinbloom and Swati Guild, the videographer. We all worked as a team to share our editing ideas and we included the community in rough cuts as well as colleagues and friends to offer broad lenses and constructive critique prior to a final cut. The process of creating the film was fully interactive with Akilah and Kemba Jaramogi, FACRP Technical Director because the community also uses the film—still now years later—as do many university classrooms worldwide. The issues are still relevant—it's about community forestry, working up and down levels of society from grassroots groups to state governments, and of course it's about climate crisis and biodiversity, as well as a woman-led forestry organization. While at community levels throughout the globe, women are managers of forest resources and have great knowledge of plant and water systems, the professionalization of these roles in state institutions has been dominated by men—a common pattern historically for many of women's folk practices. So, the film is also a gender equity film as well as a model for community engagement with environmental issues. These are problems and topics that will long be relevant, and the participatory model of filmmakers and community members is critical for both feeling ownership and commitment to a project.

Specifically, the film opened at the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival and has since screened at over 20 film festivals globally. Akilah Jaramogi—a co-founder with her late husband of the community NGO, is featured in the film. Since then, I have written about the community, in 2017 publishing [Stewards of their Island: Rastafari Women's Activism for the Forests and Waters in Trinidad and Tobago—Social Movement Perspectives](#) In *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* with a graduate student. My collaboration with the FACRP has led to establishing Bridgewater State University's (BSU) first international interdisciplinary field school there. Both graduate and undergraduate students have travelled with me on four separate occasions to date, publishing their research on the community's women-led sustainable agriculture rooted in their knowledge of the forests and waters.

GK: You are the executive producer and co-director of *Many Loves One Heart: Stories of Courage and Resilience* (2018), which is about the LGBTQ rights movement in Jamaica. As a cultural anthropologist and activist, what kind of private and public space do you envision for LGBTQ communities?

DJF: Private and public spaces should be free of discrimination, bias, and exclusion. There's a long way to go in achieving that vision, everywhere. In some societies there have been great strides, but a decolonial lens recognizes that there have been great losses as well. The matrilineal, matrilocal, gender diverse societies, spiritually guided by female deities in many Indigenous North American societies, for example, have been distorted by patriarchal Christian, colonial intrusion—although ongoing resistance and efforts to reclaim those roles have rebirthed some of those arrangements; still colonial structures are still prominent, and the work is ongoing. The keys are multipronged approaches—education and equity efforts—funded, implemented, sanctioned when ignored, in all public institutions. Spiritual strength-building through the arts, ceremonies, and rituals are crucial as well.

I believe in equal marriage and adoption of children by lesbians, gays, trans persons. Gender identity and sexuality are not implicated in parenting skills, and there are plenty of

heterosexual parents who are poor at parenting, poor at relationships. Simply put: All the rights, privileges, and protections (employment, housing, hospital visitations, marriage, inheritance, adoption, etc.) should be afforded to all people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Education should be broad and inclusive of sexually diverse family formations. Peoples' private beliefs are their own, but they should not affect others' capacities to live their lives freely. As the saying goes: your rights end where mine begin. Thus, the goal of our film is to build compassion and awareness, to challenge discrimination through knowledge and empathy. Also, it's worth pointing out that the claim that anti-equal marriage conservative activists make, that marriage has always been between a man and a woman, is just plain wrong. Both anthropologists and historians are aware that marriage, while an institutional human universal has occurred in many forms globally and in "the West," definitions, rights, and obligations continually shifting, reflecting many factors from definitions of gender and sexuality to legal rights of men, women and non-binary genders, to various economic and subsistence patterns. It's false and reductionist to argue otherwise. In that sense, marriage equality reflects more accurately historical and cross-cultural variation than "one man, one woman" does!

In 2015, I began—in collaboration with J-FLAG, The Jamaican Forum for Lesbians, All Sexuals, and Gays—to raise funds to produce and co-direct the film as an advocacy film. I secured grant funds to attend J-FLAG's second pride week in 2016 with a film crew, filming [*Many Loves, One Heart: Stories of Courage and Resilience*](#). I reached out to Dane Lewis, Director of J-FLAG at the time to determine, together, what kind of film would be useful. A previous film, *The Abominable Crime* (reflecting the anti-sodomy laws still in place in Jamaica) had been released in 2013 focusing on LGBT Jamaicans leaving the country to seek asylum. J-FLAG's own campaign, "We are Jamaicans" sought to foster acceptance through awareness, empathy, and compassion. This became the focus of *Many Loves*. This film, as with *Earth, Water, Woman*, has been screened in over 20 film festivals globally, from many US cities to India and Australia.

GK: Your work, particularly *The Challenges of Women's Activism and Human Rights in Africa* (1999) and *Women's Activism for Gender Equity in Africa* (2009), explicates in a very methodological and empirical way aspects relevant to women's activism and violations of human rights in various African nations. Do you agree that a decolonial humanist and ethical approach can help subalterns overcome their challenges?

DJF: Certainly. That article and book project are 23 and 13 years old, respectively, but society changes slowly and the central issue that I was concerned about—the ways in which ethical relativism is often harnessed by governments and dominant groups as an excuse for challenging women's human rights (and the rights of girls) remain scapegoats. One of the issues at hand in these publications were harmful cultural practices which are worldwide, but problematically, in the human rights discourse, generally confined to "developing" countries. That's a problem. A decolonial humanist and ethical approach can be valuable in unpacking the ways in which the discourse of harmful cultural practices has been directed outside of western societies with fingers pointing to so-called traditional societies. Decoloniality is both about reviving practices that have been systematically undermined throughout colonial and neocolonial periods (which include present neoliberal policies embodied in decades of so-called "development" projects) and reclaiming those that can have relevance and value in contemporary societies. To do this we must ask: Were old ways of knowing and being completely destroyed? How do formerly colonized peoples understand, describe, and explain their worlds before settler-colonial and imperialist structures? How do contemporary peoples around the world see themselves and understand their experiences as a result of either being colonized or benefitting from being a

part of colonizing powers? How do we disentangle the production of knowledge from a primarily Eurocentric episteme? How do we challenge our own ways of knowing and make room for other ways of knowing? These are decolonial feminist, ethicalist questions that can be introduced in meaningful ways—and which, in fact are in Indigenous social movements globally as people organized to challenge extractive, capitalist economies rooted in gender divisions of labor that privilege literally insane wealth inequities that privilege men. They are insane because they contradict the facts of ecological sustainability and those cultural norms and beliefs that can work in tandem with natural systems, seeing humans as part of those systems. The absence of voice and lack of power that creates subalterity are due to these inequitable, extractive, systems of modernity; however, at the same time we should take care to avoid nostalgia and romanticism assuming that all precolonial conditions were fully equitable and humane. There's much we don't know in terms of the capacity of individuals to exercise agency, to live fulfilling, lives when we are examining deep history, although a recent book, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, by the brilliant late anthropologist David Graeber and David Wengrow (2021), imagines pre-modern, Indigenous life as embracing greater freedoms and experimentations in human social arrangements that open our imaginative possibilities for the future. Ultimately, envisioning and implementing sociocultural and economic arrangements that are non-fossil fuel based, that de-gender decision-making power, that challenge hierarchies based on discriminatory constructions—these can offer people the opportunity anew to create themselves and their sociocultural arrangements in ways that value a complex multiplicity of social, cultural, economic, and political arrangements. While hegemonic ideologies of wealth accumulation reproduce profound inequalities, decolonial, humanist and ethicalist discourses will remain marginalized to the sociopathic nature of corporations and the increasing spread of authoritarian neofascist regimes, they will remain ideals on a macroscale, ideas that we must nevertheless continue to promulgate and apply, from our own self-reflexivity, to family, community, societal, and transnational levels; to work those ideas into wider consciousness and to unite them with social movement activism and change initiatives wherever possible. What other choice do we have?

GK: While discussing subaltern identity politics, the subtleties of Third World and South Asian feminism come to the forefront. In this context, can you share your experiences working on divergent issues related to women in South Asia?

DJF: I have been fortunate to meet South Asian social movement actors through the JIWS, through the WCWS, through colleagues and through grant and travel opportunities. I am currently engaged in writing a chapter titled "Representations of Cis- and Trans Women's Agency and Gender Relations in Oral Traditions and Performative practices in Kashmir: A Study of Digital Folklore" with Dr. Shazia Malik for a book on Kashmiri futures. We aim to identify and analyze cis- and transgender women's agency—the capacity to act independently and make free choices—as expressed in Kashmiri women's wedding song performances. Having met at the 5th World Conference on Women's Studies in Bangkok, Thailand in 2019, Shazia took an immersive graduate Folklore course with me in Fall 2020 about anthropological folklore theories and practices which led to this joint work. Our study focuses on women's wedding songs of this region, part of the rich folk tradition of Kashmir's oral literature, created and performed in women's traditional household and kin-community spaces (courtyards, wedding halls), but informed by the tumultuous political contexts that impact social and cultural life.

In early 2019, I travelled to Nepal for my sabbatical research, to study an exciting, burgeoning art movement inspired by many women artists, both those trained in the fine arts and folk artists. As I wrote in a recent Academic Letter:²

Since the 2006 end of the bloody, decade-long Maoist-led civil war, however, both formally educated women artists in Kathmandu and women trained in Mithila folk art from Janakpur in southern Nepal, are challenging pervasive, de facto inequalities: menstrual taboos, child marriage, sexual violence, gender literacy gaps, caste discrimination. Their art critiques social, political, religious, and economic hierarchies entrenching discrimination and limiting opportunities, for women, Dalits and other marginalized groups. Artists draw on the historical, aesthetic, and thematic traditions of Hindu and Buddhist mythology and Indigenous design, blending them with modernism, abstraction, surrealism, and realism. By using the power of art to connect individuals empathetically to Nepali social structural inequality, they strive to usher in a new era of liberation that eradicates oppression without destroying the aesthetic beauty and skills of Nepal's art history. They also critique the idea of art solely as beauty.

In late 2019, I traveled to Japan on a Fulbright Specialist grant to conduct workshops on feminist research methodologies at Tokyo Gakugei University, to study Japanese feminisms and to conduct research with Education Professor, Suzuki Naoki and U.S.-based health educator Vivian Clark-Bess, on gender roles in Japanese Physical Education classes. We performed a content analysis of gender and sexual diversity in national middle school health textbooks. I learned about the revival of the Japanese women's movement, *ūman libu*, women's liberation of the 1970s when women embraced the idea of feminism, seeking to define and achieve their political, economic, cultural, personal, and social rights; there's a growing LGBTQ movement. I met with Japanese feminist and gender studies specialists. The research led to this publication: "[Gender and Sexuality in Physical Education and Health Curricula in Japan: Feminist and Human Rights Perspectives](#)" In *The Handbook of Research on Education as the Driving Force of Equality for the Marginalized*. Edited by Dr. Jacquelynne Anne Boivin and Dr. Heather Pacheco-Guffrey.

This exposure has broadened my awareness of the great energy and diversity of women's social movement activism in South Asia as well as the varied stages of those movements. A recent issue in the [Journal of International Women's Studies | Vol 24 | Iss 2 \(bridgew.edu\)](#), entitled *South Asian Feminisms and Youth Activism: Focus on India and Pakistan*, highlighted the distinctions among different spaces across Asia due to distinct circumstances such as caste and religion. The article, "[Fiery Sparks of Change': A Comparison between First Wave Feminists of India and the US](#)" by [Shoba Sharad Rajgopal \(bridgew.edu\)](#) highlights the long and internal history of women's activism and feminist consciousness in India, while "[A History of Ecofeminist-Socialist Resistance to Eco-crisis in India](#)" by [Gowri Parameswaran \(bridgew.edu\)](#) also offers a lens into women's ecological leadership.

My own research into Dalit activism both through board membership on Friends of ADAWAN (Association for Dalit Women's Advancement), through my own research into Dalit women's activism, through special issues in the JIWS' have alerted me to the ways in which women are addressing inequities and oppressions at multiple levels, cognizant of international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), their own constitutions and global feminisms, especially Black feminisms and Standpoint theory.

² Fox, D. (2021). Social Movements for Gender and Sexual Diversity: Case Studies from Jamaica, Nepal, and Japan. *Academia Letters*, Article 253. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL253>.

Women and non-binary gender activists harness music and literary forms, pop-up art exhibits, street theatre as discussed in [“Performing Dalit Feminist Youth Activism in South India: Rap, Gaana, a” by Pramila Venkateswaran \(bridgew.edu\)](#); as well as important feminist critiques of feminist movements, such as in this article, [“Feminists as Cultural ‘Assassinators’ of Pakistan” by Afiya Shehrbano Zia \(bridgew.edu\)](#) demonstrate the robust nature of Asian feminisms. In fact, the term “Asian”, while a reaction against the orientalist Oriental, is also problematic in its collapsing of complexity and flattening of diversity, a diversity which I am highlights the creativity that women and increasing numbers of men as allies across the region are harnessing to deepen awareness, challenge biases, build safe spaces, and experiment with various ways of being and thinking. It’s tremendous.

At the same time, we cannot lose sight of overlaps, of the ways in which simultaneous conditions co-exist: a shrinking globe through communications and social media but also the vastness of locality as human beings experience their conditions in real time. Buddhist women in Himalayan Nepali communities, in the tea plantations of Sri Lanka, in the urban clubs and brothels of Thailand; evangelical Christians of Seoul promoting regressive and conservative lifeways against a struggling LGBTQ movement—these women are not connected with each other. It is academics, artists, musicians, poets, storytellers, b/vloggers, performers, NGOs, and protest organizers, who tease out the similarities and differences, probing for ways in which global capital, communications, the far reaches of white supremacy, multiple and intersecting patriarchies, global human rights movements link people across these spaces either in overlapping oppressions, shared visions of freedoms, or the ways in which women can embody and promulgate hegemonic oppression against other women. Some anthropologists in the height of postmodernism asserted that all assumptions of patterns are imposed and insisted on a radical subjectivity. That is false. There are certainly patterns of oppression, and common lived experiences, but we should never claim to be knowledgeable of the possibilities of innovative ideas that emerge in the moment that women harness to address their conditions. The human condition is both shared and subjective; that’s a truism, but one worth repeating, because it impresses upon us the dualism we live with: the effort to know one another and also to recognize that our capacity to do so is limited. That is why people in their own locations must be the leaders of their own movements, and why there is a responsibility of social movement actors to forge connections across all kinds of borders to continue to build transnational feminisms. These can help us discover how we can support one another and work together but also sustain our profound respect for local knowledge.

GK: You have long served as the Chairperson of the World Women’s Studies Conference, one of the most significant events in the world related to feminist studies. In your opinion, does this conference promote women’s issues and encourage scholars and academicians to share their views on this global platform?

DJF: Absolutely. We have worked hard to weave in opportunities into the conference beyond conventional conference presentations—the delivery time, by the way, has been increased to 20 minutes from an initial 10 when I first started—to include “rapid fire” presentations that are brief summaries intended to provoke conversation; storytelling platforms that center the personal as political (a central feminist tenet); publication workshops, as you know since you participated in one, highlighting feminist writing praxis and other venues that offer participants the opportunity to forge connections, to build relationships, to foster collaborations through the conference. I have also personally sought to infuse the conference with warmth, care, and love. Too often, we separate these emotions from scholarship. We simply cannot afford to reproduce dry, overly formal, impersonal platforms that are all too common in academia. Feminisms are social movements and social movements must have multiple prongs that build relationships to

solidify the very difficult transformations that they seek. In other words, trust and interdependence are key variables. Women's Studies conferences, in my view, are one prong of feminist social movements that can help cultivate global feminisms. They don't exist without struggle, without commitment, and without personal stake. I have sought to model that as best as I can, and I believe that for those who take up the opportunities, many cross-cultural bonds have been created, ideas exchanged that play a role in the construction of global feminisms, of implementing real change, of shaping research and policy agendas by forging allyship across our differences.

The founders of the conference, Isanka Gamage and Oshadee Withanawasam from Sri Lanka are visionaries who created the conference platform, The International Institute for Knowledge Management (TIKM) as a progressive space for including Sri Lanka in the global dissemination and cultivation of ideas through conferences about women, gender, sexuality, public health, climate, education, arts, and the like. Together with them and some of the participants from the WCWS, such as Maheesha Dilshani we created the [Asian-African Association for Women, Gender, and Sexuality \(AAAWGS\)](#), which is the central organizer now of all women, gender, and sexuality related conferences by the organization.

GK: As we are discussing the World Conference on Women's Studies, it is important to note that you have provided the wonderful opportunity of publishing conference presentations as research articles in your journal, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, one of the most prominent open-access journals that believes in and works for the decentralization of knowledge. In this regard, can you share your visions regarding the ethics and objectives of JIWS in the coming years?

DJF: In 2008 at the eve of the JIWS' 10th anniversary, colleague Katherine Side (an early review editor of the journal) and I [wrote a short piece](#) about the JIWS, its goals and vision for the future. One of those goals was to offer some bilingual issues and translations. We've done some of that including two volumes of a bilingual issue in Spanish with [Volumes 1](#) and [2](#); we've translated some poems from [English to Arabic](#), and we've translated an article into [Japanese](#). However, I'd like to do more, including—following the model provided by another online, open access feminist journal, *Wagadu*, of publishing abstracts in multiple languages. This will at least allow scholars from around the world to know what's being published in five or six languages. But our capacity to do this is not there at the moment. Also, there are some regions of the world that we could tap into; our bibliographic analysis shows that some areas of South America and Central Africa have low JIWS' readership. We have a new South African co-executive Editor, Catherine Ndinda, whom I hope can help with this. Priyanka Tripathi from India is also serving as a co-executive Editor. I would like to continue to make use of the online platform by publishing vlogs, podcasts, art (we recently published our first online art exhibit, [Art Against Violence](#)) and we've published quite a few images and even linked to YouTube videos, so we've increased these opportunities. I'd like to see more! Finally, while we're increasingly publishing about decolonial feminisms, these are articles mostly by non-Indigenous scholars about the importance of Indigenous thought and praxis. I would like to increase our contributions by First Peoples, offering potentially new genres for organizing, building awareness of social movement activism.

List of selected works by Prof. Diana J. Fox

Articles

2023. *The Spirit of Marronage: Expressions of Indigenous Sovereignty*. Edited by Drs. Ping-Ann Addo, Diana Fox, and Cynthia Ellis-Topsey. Under contract with Vernon Press.

2023. Forthcoming with Shazia Malik. "Representations of Cis- and Transwomen's Agency and Gender Relations in Oral Traditions and Performative Practices in Kashmir: A Study of Digital Folklore and Queer Folkloristics." In *Kashmiri Futures*, a special issue for *English Language Notes*, Duke University Press. Eds, Deepti Misri and Ather Zia.

2023. Forthcoming with Shanahan, Jenny. "Working to Create an Equitable University through Antiracist and Decolonial Theory and Practice." Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

2022. With Suzuki, Naoki and Vivian Clark. "Gender and Sexuality in Physical Education and Health Curricula in Japan: Feminist and Human Rights Perspectives." In *The Handbook of Research on Education as the Driving Force of Equality for the Marginalized*, editors, Jacquelyne Boivin and Heather Pacheco-Guffrey. IGI Global.

2022. *Foreward in History and Myth: Postcolonial Dimensions*. Edited by Arti Nimal and Sayan Dey. Vernon Press.

2021. [Social Movements for Gender and Sexual Diversity: Case Studies from Jamaica, Nepal, and Japan](#). Academia Letters, Article 253.

2021. Book Review: *New West Indian Guide* (NWIG), Volume 95.1-2.

2020. [Scholar-activist Anthropology in Nepal: Radical Women Artists on the Liberation Front](#). *Bridgewater Review*, 39(1), 34.

2019. Ronnie Shepard & Shir Lerman Ginzburg (eds.), *Gender, Health, and Society in Contemporary Latin America and the Caribbean*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2019.

2017. with Jillian Smith. [Stewards of their Island: Rastafari Women's Activism for the Forests and Waters in Trinidad and Tobago—Social Movement Perspectives](#). In *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 3:142-168.

Books

2010. [Cultural DNA: Gender at the Root of Everyday Life in Rural Jamaica](#). A feminist ethnography of fieldwork in rural Jamaica. Mona, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press.

2009. *Women's Activism for Gender Equity in Africa, Vols 1 and 2*. Eds. Diana Fox, Mechtilde Nagel. Philadelphia: Xlibris Press. Hardcopy publication of a special two volume collaboration between the Journal of International Women's Studies (JIWS) and WAGADU: A Journal of Transnational Gender Studies.

1999. *The Challenges of Women's Activism and Human Rights in Africa*. Edited by Diana J. Fox and Naima Hasci. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.

1998. *An Ethnography of Four Non-governmental Development Organizations: Oxfam America, Cultural Survival, Grassroots International, ACCION International*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press (published dissertation).