

#Me Too: A Movement, Not a Moment

By: Nina Denny and Andrea Lawrence

Attention has been brought to the magnitude of sexual violence through the movement #Me Too-- one of the latest stories has come with a bit of a shock. *Babe*'s online site published a story that reviews a woman's ("Grace") experience of a date with comedian Aziz Ansari, during which he aggressively pursued sexual intercourse with her. Although "Grace" notes that she never yelled "NO," during the incident and that it took her awhile to leave his apartment, she did express extreme discomfort (and disinterest in intercourse) which he appeared not to consider at all. In a perfect world, her obvious anxiety would express a lack of consent. What has given many people pause in this recent #Me Too case is Ansari's reputation for being an outspoken feminist—he has written a book on the topic of love, sex and dating, has spoken about feminism in multiple interviews, and most recently, spoke out at the Golden Globes while wearing a "Times Up" pin. The striking contrast of these gestures to this gruesome report of his aggressively clueless "dating" behavior is, no doubt, shocking to most.

Controversial discourses surrounding consent have deepened due to this story's exposure. Is the notion of consent as simple as "no means no," "yes means yes," and nothing is left in the grey area? If this were the case, then the smartest approach for a serial assault perpetrator would be to simply not ask the question at all, thus never receiving a negative response.

This discourse then raises the question; can "good men" commit acts of sexual violence? Back in our April, 2015 newsletter, we praised Aziz Ansari in our "Men We Love" section for "bringing up controversial issues in productive ways" and specifically supporting women's rights. However, it is devastating to think that our role models so casually and brazenly contribute to rape culture with no apparent self-control or awareness. Fellow comedian, Samantha Bee, takes a good look at our society and the acceptance of rape culture and this case in particular on *Full Frontal*:

<https://www.samantha-bee-aziz-ansari-me-too>.



As Anna North noted on Vox, the Aziz Ansari incident is ordinary, and that's exactly why we need to talk about it. By continuing the dialogue around sexual assault and focusing on consent, we can help to change this culture. Tarana Burke, founder of the #Me Too campaign, is helping to do just that. She explains on her website, metoomvmt.org, that the purpose is "to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly young women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing." Using the concept of "empowerment through empathy," the #MeToo campaign helps spread awareness on social media and shed light on the many harassment and assault cases in our society today.

Part of the conversation is about empowering women to feel comfortable with asserting a clear "no" even without a request for "permission." But this notion often translates into victim blaming, a phenomenon all too common in interpersonal violence cases. We know that in our culture, women's voices are often not heard as clearly as men's, but this doesn't mean we should stop making noise. Women cannot and should not be blamed for the misconduct of men; it is crucial for all of us to listen to what women have to say when we do choose to speak up.

Women of Mountains: Cultural Connections

By Melissa Fuller

The Department of Modern Languages works with the Atlas Cultural Foundation to provide a faculty-led study abroad program to a village in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. Situated on the western border of Africa, Morocco has diverse topography. There are three main segments of the Atlas Mountains, the High, Middle, and Low, and each has their own unique expressions of their cultural identities. Last year was the fourth year in a row that I've made the voyage, and there have been new discoveries made every time. The women that have opened their hearts and welcomed us into their community are so generous with their belly laughter and knowing glances that everyone feels right at home as soon as they arrive. I believe it is crucial to share a few of the insights gained over the years from these relationships and to continue the work involved in building bridges between our two communities that call the mountains home



When picturing Morocco, many of us probably think of certain images or defining characteristics that we've seen on television or online. What aren't captured in those mediums are the smells that come from the kitchens, the mint along the paths, or the cacophony of sounds that fill the air. Donkeys, goats, and chickens, the river, people sharing hellos and well wishes to one another's families, and the children walking to and from the five adjoining villages give Zawaya Ahansal its bright and thriving culture. Largely because of the work of the MSU Study Abroad

staff and the Atlas Cultural Foundation, Montana State University students have the opportunity to learn about the wonderful traditions that are still respected today, and make life-long connections with other students and program facilitators, the children and their families, and a very special part of the Earth.

The connections made with the women of the Atlas Mountains have illuminated how important it is for us all to share stories, sit and have tea, and support one another in all of our everyday efforts. From making things in the kitchen, to helping out with one another's families or business ventures, to just being a good listener and someone to laugh with about the little things. All of this brings vitality to any community because it fosters connection and happiness—clearly, we all have many lessons to learn from people who are not defined and driven by social media.

Thank you for reading what I hope will be the first of many short pieces written for The Womanifesto. If you are interested in exploring more information about this program, check out the study abroad website link to Voyage au Maroc ML492! <https://www.montana.edu/cpa/apps/studioabroad/program/51137>

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TPS and the Salvadoran “Problem”

By Michelle Lopez

Temporary Protective Status (TPS) is a program offered by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) allowing immigrants from countries stricken by natural disasters or armed conflicts to temporarily work and live in the United States. In 2002, El Salvador was placed on the list after a massive earthquake damaged the country's infrastructure and access to clean drinking water.

Though the current U.S. administration has used the earthquake damage “recovery” as an excuse to send over 200,000 Salvadorans back across the border in 2019, gang violence and violence against women and children in particular have escalated to extreme levels in the country since the end of their most recent civil war in 1992.

Murder rates in El Salvador have notoriously earned it the “deadliest place in the world” tag. Femicide as well as sexual violence against women and children continues to be a prevailing issue in El Salvador—as a result, more and more women and children have been seeking refuge in our country. According to the Institute of Legal Medicine, 524 women were murdered in 2016 (El Salvador's population is 6.3 million), and according to lawg.org 1,123 cases of sexual violence and 475 cases of femicide were reported in El Salvador in the first 8 months of 2015. These numbers do not adequately represent the slaughter. Only bodies that are recovered and properly buried are counted. Despite major crackdowns on gang activity and occasional truces between the gang leaders and government, children as young as 9 years old continue to be recruited into gangs such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 (which were actually formed in the U.S. by immigrants). A Sept. 2, 2017 article in the *New York Times Review* cites that nearly 7 out of every 10 female rape or violence victims is under the age of 20, and the vast majority (3/4) are abused by family members in their homes. These women and children have very few resources to help keep them safe. Many are forced to live in constant fear of violence or must leave their homes in hopes of finding safety and security.



As the name would suggest, TPS was created as temporary relief for the citizens of those countries in need. Yet, the terms and definitions of what constitutes a “disaster” clearly need to be re-examined. The issue of how to move forward with 200,000 Salvadorans (mostly women and children) currently living in the U.S. seeking asylum here is indeed, complex and challenging. The violence they face in their homeland in the form of rape, torture, murder, interpersonal violence, and the absence of reproductive justice, etc. should surely be enough to earn them asylum in our country. Given the current political climate and government shut downs in the U.S. due to congressional disagreements on this issue, it doesn't look very promising. Ending the protection status of Salvadorans won't stop the flood of citizens into the U.S.; it will likely just make the process more unsafe and difficult. Women and children are the most vulnerable during the excursions north and are often violated during these journeys—they deserve to feel safe and to not live in constant fear of violence. We need to redefine our vision of “disaster” and amnesty if we truly want to help these citizens who are often left with no choice but to migrate from their homeland.

SAVE THE DATE!

The 27th Shannon Weatherly Memorial Lecture featuring author, academic and activist, Sarah Deer

Join us on Monday, April 2nd at 7:00 p.m. in the SUB Ballrooms for this free lecture and following reception.

Deer is a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma. She was named a MacArthur Fellow in 2014. Currently a professor at the University of Kansas, Deer is also the Chief Justice for the Prairie Island Indian Community Court of Appeals. Her latest book, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Violence in Native America* has been taught in various MSU classes.

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