Christianization: Women’s Immolation in Europe, India, and Japan (1550-1650)

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During the European Reformation, European states were nations “with the soul of a church.” The Portuguese Jesuit Luís Fróis (1532-1597) of the Society of Jesus arrived in Japan in 1563; six years later, Fróis convinced the most powerful local warlord, Oda Nobunaga, to allow Jesuits to spread Christianity in Japan. Although the Bible does not explicitly deal with the concept of gender equality, Fróis did not discriminate between male and female converts. For example, one of Fróis’ devout converts, Hosokawa Gracia, became a Christian martyr by having her subordinate kill her and then burn her body. The immolation of her remains became a contributing factor to the conclusion of the long-time warring state era from 1467 to 1603. During this transition, Japan reversed from being a warring state to a bakufu state (a previously existing model of governance marked by a patrilineally inherited military dictatorship). In the same period, the practice of sati or suttee (widow-burning) and witch-hunts existed in India and Europe respectively. Since the European states at the time were under the control of the Church, the vast majority of witch-hunt scholars approach the subject from a Christian perspective to explain that those who performed witch-craft had to be punished in order to maintain a godly state. Conversely, Silvia Federici approaches the witch-hunts through a Marxist framework, arguing that witches’ protests had to be suppressed to enable Europe’s transition from feudalism to capitalism – a result of the witch-hunt in Europe and its extension to Central and North America. In this article, I use a postcolonial lens, based on an a posteriori model of

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current global capitalism and feminism in church history. Deriving a theoretical framework from the European witch-hunt movement as an underlying mechanism of Christianization, I examine the ways in which the witch-hunt model either directly or indirectly catalyzed a global transformation to capitalism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

I argue that the historical phenomena of the witch-hunts produced the economic and political systems that are associated with modernity. The clergy demonized heretic women as witches and silenced them by torture and execution to extract capital. Upholding the same ideology, European settlers vilified and massacred the colonized to extract capital for European modernization. Moreover, using a comparative analysis to examine the historical background of women’s immolation, I conclude that the practice reveals a social structure common to the European, Indian, and Japanese contexts between 1550 and 1650: male domination and female subjugation. In her article entitled “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Spivak relates European women’s suffering from the witch-hunt persecution to Hindu women’s suffering from the sati practice (widow-burning, a funeral custom dated back to the third century BC). Similarly, in her article entitled “Contentious Tradition,” Lata Mani analyses the British abolishment of sati in India in the nineteenth century as preparation for Christianization for the purpose of colonization. I include the approaches of Spivak and Mani to expand my own argument.

Christianization and Colonization in Asia in the Sixteenth Century

In Fróis’ History of Japan, he not only condemned the cruelty of women’s immolation, but also detailed the expansion of Christianity in the sixteenth century as a world religion. Fróis and the Jesuits arrived in Japan to carry out their Catholic missions through collaboration between the Society of Jesus and the Portuguese seaborne empire. As a member of the Society, Fróis took a galleon to Goa, India, where he met Francis Xavier, the first missionary to Japan, and his Japanese companion, Yajiro, in 1549. Following that, he went to Malacca and later returned to Goa in 1557. He worked as a priest and a coordinator of theology for the district director of the Society of Jesus in Goa, collecting reports from East Asia and sending them out to the external Society of Jesus in Portugal. From these transmitted texts, Fróis learned about missionary works in East Asia.
**Vernacular Interpretation of Japanese History**

Through his Japanese mission, Fróis engaged in an intercultural study to learn Japanese language and customs for evangelizing the Japanese. Upon his arrival in Japan at Yokoseura in Nagasaki, Fróis immediately experienced local political warfare. The warring state persisted throughout Fróis’ stay in Japan while he learned Japanese over the course of his stay with the help of his Jesuit colleagues. Due to his fluency in Japanese, Fróis was able to travel around Japan to engage in cultural contacts with the indigenous population. In order to accomplish his Christian mission, Fróis sought out Oda Nobunaga in 1569. He described the warlord as behaving similarly to the depiction in *The Chronicle Lord Nobunaga* written by Oda’s vassal, Ōta Gyūichi. In *The Chronicle*, Ōta narrated how his lord besieged the castle of a rebelled subordinate, Araki Murashige, who betrayed Oda and left Araki’s family in Setsu. Differently than what Ōta wrote, Fróis emphasized in his *History of Japan* the bloodshed pursued in the punishment of Araki’s family in lieu of Araki extended to women’s immolation:

Three hundred and eighty women and one hundred and thirty-four men were placed on a stack of weeds and woods and were burned alive. Their howling and crying terrorized everyone. Even though they were heretics [according to the Jesuits], they did not do anything wrong. They were sentenced due to Araki’s malicious stubbornness and evildoings; Araki should have been the only one to be punished. However, these people took his place to be tortured to death. Fróis spoke Japanese as a lingua franca to communicate with the local Japanese and collected oral narratives to give voice to those innocent women by describing the malicious violence of the women’s immolation. Even though the immolation was not gender specific, and Fróis’ condemnation of women’s immolation in Japan was framed by the Jesuit’s Christian perspective, the simultaneous history of church-sponsored women’s immolation in Europe complicates this reading. Rather, the practice of women’s immolation across the European and Japanese contexts provides a framework for analyzing the ideological imperatives and unanticipated effects underlying the practice of women’s immolation in this period.
Christianization in Europe: The Witch-Hunt Movement

The history of witch-hunts in Europe originated in the historical background of the feudal system. Under the system of serfdom during the Middle Ages, serfs lived in poverty and held an inferior social status that often led them to rebel against the Church. The corruption of the clergy could be seen throughout Christian history in medieval Europe: the Church sold indulgences such as purgatory and absolution, preached the sanctity of the tithes, and extorted investitures from churchgoers. Moreover, the Church attacked any social insubordination through the charge of heresy. For example, in 1234, the Bishop of Bremen punished peasants who refused to pay tithes by waging a crusade against them. Subsequently, in the thirteenth century, the Pope created the Holy Inquisition to eradicate heretics and heretical doctrines. According to the 1377 Inquisition in Ypres, garment workers were burned as heretics for having rebelled against their employers.

Heretic Women (900-1322)

To fight against Church corruption, heretic women contested the Church’s control over the reproduction of labor power and participated in proletarian revolutions. Between the end of the Early Middle Ages and the Late Middle Ages, unlike the women of the orthodox Church, the women in the heretic world were equal to men regarding their social status and mobility. In the tenth century, the Bogomils (a sect of Manicheanism) already contained a considerable number of heretic women who formed women’s movements seeking to control their own reproductive system, according to the eleventh-century Inquisition in France and Italy. Some of these women heretics might have been burned for controlling their reproductive function by having abortions or using contraceptives. Even so, heresy remained the main threat to the Church in 1215.

The Popularity of Women’s Heretic Movements: Fighting against Church Corruption

Resisting clerical exploitation, women participated in heretic movements to exhort people not to pay the clergy for any taxes or tithes. While the Christian Church preached that women should be submissive to their husbands, and canon law even sanctified husbands’ right to beat their
wives, many heretic women were often against marriage and procreation. They shared apostolic poverty, sought a return to the primitive church, and were in favor of religious reform. Heretic women often performed medieval birth control in the forms of sodomy, infanticide, and abortion, while the Church wanted to control the marriage and sexuality of everyone, from emperors to peasants. Subsequently, the proletarians from European countries gathered an international assembly to challenge Church corruption and landlords’ greed, denounced the accumulation of wealth, and demanded social justice in order to redefine women’s everyday life and their sexual reproduction.

**The Proletarian Revolution after the Great Famine (1323-82)**

The great famine (1315-22) ushered in an era of proletarian revolution that arose from built-up class conflicts. Since the thirteenth century, land owners and urban patrician merchants had maintained a power structure that solidified urban and rural workers. Urban proletarians of women and men felt alienated from their own productions and fought for an egalitarian society, a struggle referenced in the political discourse of fourteenth-century Florence. Consequently, there were proletarian rebellions throughout the fourteenth century in Europe, including the 1323-8 peasant revolts in Flanders, supported by craftsmen at Liege; however, they were ultimately defeated by the King of France, Charles IV.

**Black Death (1347-52)**

The great famine weakened Europeans’ immunity to morbidity, and the advent of the Black Death undermined the stability of the social hierarchy. The labor crisis reversed peasants’ social order and threatened the ruling class while the peasants acquired more wealth and power. The ruling class struggled to regain their status; peasants resisted through insurrections. The labor crisis prompted the landowners to return to slavery in 1366; in 1378 Ghent weavers established the first known dictatorship of the proletariat. In Germany and Italy, day-laborers seized power in 1379 to establish a workers’ government; the shortage of the labor force inspired the uprising of 1381. The Ghent weavers were eventually crushed by the nobility and bourgeoisie in 1382. In the same year, 26,000 weavers at Ghent died at Roosebecque undoing their previous
success. Attempting a genuine social revolution, however, workers at Liege succeeded in the fight against the nobility in 1384, and their craftsmen became the arbiters of the government.\textsuperscript{33}

**Heretic Women (1300-1500)**

While women attained social and financial independence, a misogynous backlash also emerged. These heretic women worked as schoolteachers, doctors, and obstetricians by the fourteenth century, and, according to the state records, they gained more social autonomy. Even though priests scolded women’s disobedience, these women participated in heretic movements. By the fifteenth century, the women populated the cities heavily and attained traditionally male jobs such as butchers. In Frankfurt, they participated in around 200 occupations from 1300 to 1500; in England, they dominated the silk-making guild: the female employment rate was as high as the male.\textsuperscript{34} However, by the beginning of the fifteenth century, the process of inquisition marked a transition from persecuting heretics to persecuting witches, corresponding to the inquisitors’ finding of the Luciferans (devil-worshippers) sect; consequently, persecuting witches could be seen in the Spanish Inquisition from 1540 to 1700.\textsuperscript{35}

**Sexual Politics (1350-1499)**

Furthermore, Church inquisitions aligned the timeline of social conflicts between the nobility and the proletariat with that of contemporary sexual policies in Europe.\textsuperscript{36} The great famine, Black Death, and the disappearance of serfdom segued into a golden age for the European proletariat. By the end of the fifteenth century, the feudal power of the nobility, Church, and bourgeoisie united together through a sexual politics to divide proletarian protests, to dissolve social conflict, and to centralize state, class, and feudal power as a counter-proletarian-revolution. At this time, the feudal power granted “gang rape” privileges to the male proletariat: permitting them to sexually assault lower class women, usually members of the poor young proletariat. Once these women were raped, they lost their social status and had to be expelled from their hometowns or become prostitutes. Meanwhile, the legalization of group-raping created a climate of misogyny undermining the class solidarity that the proletariat had achieved in the previous feudal struggle.\textsuperscript{37}

At the end of the fourteenth century, the Inquisitional target
became gender specific focusing on female heretics and preparing a stage for witch-hunts. After two inquisitors of the Dominican Order, Heinrich Kraemer and Jacob Sprenger, published *Malleus Maleficarum* on witchcraft in 1486, the first witch trials began taking place in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy in the fifteenth century. Meanwhile, Rossell Hope Robbins wrote the first account of Sabbats. Some contemporaries described the Sabbat as a sexual transgression where the devil instructed the witches to revolt against their employers. The nocturnal gatherings were also suspected to be a peasant conspiracy to encourage uprisings which were deeply feared by the authorities. Subsequently, the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, enacted the imperial legal code to punish witchcraft by death in 1532. After 1550, ordinances made witchcraft a capital crime in Scotland, Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands.

**Witch-Hunts: Women’s Immolation in Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries**

The witch-hunt, accompanied by the transition from serf feudalism to mercantile capitalism in Europe, was a misogynous campaign led by the Church to maintain its power and wealth. The movement took place primarily from the last half of the sixteenth century to the first half of the seventeenth century at the time of a main price hike. For example, in France the Croquants fought against an excessive tax that caused major starvation in Europe between 1593 and 1595. Women always initiated and carried on the insurrection after men were unable or unwilling to continue protecting their children. Even when male proletarians gave up on rebellions, female proletarians persevered in fighting for their rights. These female warriors would eventually become the targets of witch-hunts.

The primary source of written literature and art works in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries supports the history of witch-hunts. Around a hundred thousand women were tried as witches, and the authorities targeted poor and old women specifically. When they were young, they were the by-products of the sexual politics that attempted to silence young male proletarians’ rage against the rich for postponing their marriages. These raped women were needed in the state-managed brothels in Italy and France between 1350 and 1450. Moreover, artworks such as Sebald Beham’s (ca. 1530) show that these prostitutes followed soldiers
or proletarians to the battlefield to provide cooking, washing, or reproductive services to them. When these prostitutes grew old, they relied on public charity to survive. Most likely, the authorities felt hostility towards having to provide communal resources to keep them alive. Furthermore, they lived long enough to acquire the proper knowledge to lead people in revolt, and their collective wisdom threatened authority. Therefore, the authorities claimed to have received an accusation from a neighbour and put them on trial as witches; they were publicly humiliated and tortured to extract their confessions. Some of them were submerged in water or hanged. Although records of these trials are incomplete, and the number of women who were executed “by burning at the stake” is uncertain, the executions successfully deterred spectators from engaging in any kind of uprising. The witch-hunt movement was a kind of state terrorism designed to destabilize feminist movements.

**Witch-Hunts: Christianization and Colonization in the Americas**

Witch-hunts were employed to colonize the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the same approach was applied in the Christianization of Europe: for exterminating the native, the colonizer vilified the colonized as inhuman. For example, a picture of the Sabbat painted by Pierre de Lancre demonizes the witches as devils to support their eradication. Similarly, Tobias Smollett’s painting depicts the Caribbean Indians as devils, suggesting that the West had a right to exterminate them. Federici considers *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare a metaphor for the indigenous resistance to Europeans’ colonization.

In my interpretation of Federici’s title of *Caliban and Witch*, Shakespeare’s witch, the mother of Caliban, represents a pattern of Christianization in Europe. Shakespeare’s Caliban, a slave living on the island of the Americas, represents an example of Christianization and colonization inherited from the methods of Christianization in Europe. Using the same charge of heresy, a Spanish anti-idolatry campaign led by Diego de Landa in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico in 1562 tortured more than 4,500 for practising human sacrifice. In Peru, the first Spanish attack on native devil-worshiping was in the 1560s, coinciding with a native millenarian movement. The Taki Onqoy movement encouraged the indigenous peoples to reject Christianity and refuse paying tributes. The indigenous peoples continued to live the same lives as they did before
under the pretense of maintaining Christianity. Between 1619 and 1660, the Spaniards destroyed idols and brought the same witch-hunt procedure from Europe to the Americas: reading an edict against the sin, obtaining secret denunciations by informants, torturing to extract confessions, and punishing.  

Nevertheless, the European model of the witch-hunt was unable to be successfully transported to the Central and South America because the Christian ideology underlying the witch-hunt was alien to Indigenous peoples in the Americas. Regardless of the colonizer’s attempt to segregate Andean women from their own communities, Andean women were still needed in the functions of local informal village reunions to maintain their ancient traditions and resist colonial power. Indigenous women were supported by their communities; their solidarity fighting against the foreign power became stronger after the hunted witches were persecuted. Similarly, this European witch-hunt model was brought to British America at a crucial turning point in the seventeenth century. The witch-hunt movement emerged in Salem, Massachusetts; when Puritanism was challenged, the Salem witch and the Puritan’s wife supported one another, and the Indigenous spiritual leader suggested that Christian missionaries associated Indigenous cultures with evil in their context of Christianization. Moreover, in India, the model of Christianization was utilized to camouflage the real colonial intention behind the British abolition of sati. After staying in Goa, India, less than a month, Robert De Nobili, another member of the Society of Jesus, witnessed the rite of sati; however, Fröis never verified whether he witnessed sati during his twelve-year stay in Goa.

**Sati in India**

*Sati* was a social and cultural tradition in India: widows were encouraged to show their faithfulness as good wives by ascending the pyre to be burned beside their deceased husbands. By following their dead husbands into the afterlife, they would live eternally in heaven with their husbands. There is speculation that the widows truly wanted to die and would have threatened anyone restraining them from committing *sati* with legendary curses; recommended widowhood or ascetic widowhood might not have been a good option for these widows; they deserved to have an option to enter into a new marriage after their husbands’ death. However, the voices of women who participated in *sati* could not be heard since
there were no independent resources recording their thoughts. Therefore, Hindu widows did not control their own lives after their husbands’ deaths. An Islamic Mughal ruler, Aurangzeb (1618-1707), was said to have abolished the sati practice in 1664, but the ruling had no lasting effect on the indigenous tradition. In the mid-sixteenth century, Fróis eventually went to Japan via Goa to write the History of Japan.

Christianization for Evangelization in Japan

Christianization for the purpose of colonialization in Japan was impossible in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because it was undergoing continual civil wars. For example, religious conflicts and warfare persisted between Christian missionaries and local Buddhists: they both faced death on a daily basis. Other than joining in the ongoing civil wars, Fróis persevered in collecting oral narratives to write the Jesuits’ missionary history. Fróis discovered that Japanese women played an important role in helping Jesuits’ missionary work. However, their contributions to support the spread of Christianity were often overlooked by contemporary scholars. To demonstrate how female powers in the religious arena emerged in the warring era, Fróis provided a report by Almeida, another Jesuit, about a female Christian sympathizer, Monica, as evidence.

Indigenous Agency: A Test Case of Successful Evangelization in Japan

Jesuits’ evangelization inspired Japanese women’s agency in the process of helping to convert local atheists, Shintoists, and Buddhists, to Christianity, representing a transformation from patriarchal agency to matriarchal agency through Christianization. In 1565, Fróis quoted Almeida’s portrayal of Monica, a daughter of a local Christian protector who took care of Almeida when he was ill at Sakai and had a non-Christian fiancé, as a successful Christian model. The following year, Fróis wrote his own account of Monica. She converted her fiancé to Christianity after they were married. Six or seven years after she delivered her second child, she lost consciousness due to an epidemic sickness. Whenever she regained consciousness, she repented of her sins, prayed to God to save her soul, and was reconciled to the possibility of death. During Monica’s twenty days of illness, she continuously recited the names of Jesus and Mary in order to convert her mother successfully, a
devout Buddhist of the Ikkō sect, to Christianity and had her baptized. Monica’s perseverance successfully converted her family regardless of many difficulties.

**The End of the Christian Golden Age: The Death of Oda**

The abrupt death of the Jesuits’ only Japanese warlord supporter, Oda, ended the golden age for Christian missionaries due to the rebellion of Oda’s subordinate, Akechi Mitsuhide. In his *History of Japan*, Fróis depicted the death of Oda:

(Oda) Nobunaga pulled out the arrow in his back and brought a scythe-shaped long-knife coming out from his room. He fought for a short while, and eventually his wrist was hurt. He then entered his room again, closed the door, and slit his own belly. Others said that he burned himself alive . . . There was none of his remains left on the floor.

As the most powerful warlord in his time, Oda demonstrated *bushido* (warrior-ship) to end his life: to avoid his remains being used to his rival’s advantage, Oda burned himself.

**Female Indigenous Agency in Christian Martyrdom in Japan**

Wishing to die as a martyr to Christianity, the daughter of Akechi Mitsuhide, Hosokawa Garacia (Tamako), expressed her desire to achieve martyrdom, no less than the most powerful male warlord, Oda, achieving *bushido*, thirteen years prior to her death. Fróis wrote about her resolution:

Eleven days after Oda died, Akechi died as well. Akechi’s daughter survived her father. She often heard of Ukon from her husband regarding Christianity. Her husband once heard of our preaching and was willing to become a Christian. Since Toyotomi Hedyoshi did not support Christianity, she said “If that tyrant returns to Osaka to harm any Christians, for the sake of being a Christian I might be killed. If so, that would be a great thing: I would never want to miss the chance to be a martyr to Christianity.”

Three years after Fróis’ death in Nagasaki, her dream came true at the advent of the important battle of Sekigahara in 1600. The anecdote of her
death was written by her servant, Shimo, and compiled in the *oboegaki* (memoir) of Shosuga, her grandson’s vassal, in 1648. Yamamoto Hideteru (1857-1943), a Protestant church historian, published his pamphlets about the *Chronicle of the Hosokawa Higo Clan* while Yamamoto was alive:

The night before the battle of Sekigahara, Tadaoki (Akechi Mitsuhide’s daughter’s husband) received Bungo Kitsuki 60,000 *koku* (bushels) stipend. His vassals were divided among Tango, Osaka, Kitsuki. Therefore, Tadaoki was determined to join (Tokugawa) Ieyasu’s army in the name of fighting Uesuki. Ishida Mitsunari (Tadaoki’s rival) at Tenshukaku began taking hostage in Osaka responding to the news that Tadaoki joined Ieyasu. Tamako (Akechi Mitsuhide’s daughter, Hosokawa Gracia) was surrounded with Ishida’s army. She asked Ogasawara Shôsai (a servant of the Hosokawa clan) to impale a knife on her chest. She did not want to kill herself: as a Christian, “committing suicide” was prohibited . . . Later Shôsai burned her dead body . . . After she consulted with her vassals, Tamako, as a lawful wife, considered that would be the best thing for the Hosokawa clan. 

Hosokawa’s death stopped the extortion of her husband’s rival, Ishida Mitsunari. Ishida gave up taking hostages from warlords’ wives, fearing public anger might help further to strengthen the power of Tokugawa, Hosokawa’s warlord. Eventually, Tokugawa won the decisive battle of Sekigahara to end the nearly two-century warring-era in Japan. Hosokawa sacrificed herself not only for the righteousness of the Hosokawa clan, a form of warrior-ship that unified the Hosokawa and the Tokugawa clans, but also as a martyr to resist the oppression of Christianity. Her martyrdom was similar to that of the twenty-six martyrs (Toyotomi crucified twenty-six Jesuits in Nagasaki as part of his religious oppression of the order). Soon the warlord of the Tokugawa clan evicted the Jesuits and isolated Japan to monopolize state capitalism. Hosokawa’s death reversed Japan from a warring state to a *bakufu* state and from privatized capitalism to state capitalism. In addition to Hosokawa, other groups of Japanese women showed their agency in warfare as well.

*Indigenous Women’s Agency in the Evangelization of Japan*

Fróis provided another account of how his evangelization shifted social power in the religious arena in Japan from men to women. In 1590,
Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the second warlord after Oda who unified Japan, ordered Kato Kiyômasa to attack Hondo castle (jô) in Amakusa, Kyûshû. In the castle, the Jesuit sub-district director, priest, and friars were surrounded by the heavy attack of Kato; women chanted in the name of Jesus and persevered in the battle even after their male soldiers quit. These three-hundred women won an honorable reputation: fighters in Amakusa were not men; they were women, the most effective, bravest fighters:

The state of the war became extremely dangerous. The castle was under siege; however, women’s agency was amazing greatly surprising. After having lived in Japan for so many years, I need to tell the great achievements of these Japanese women. Wives, daughters, and daughters-in-law of the lord of the castle, Don Andreidon Giorgi, and other noble women not only rescued injured husbands and relatives and handled dead bodies, but also united together to fight. Three hundred women understood the crisis they were facing and forgot about themselves as women: their physical and mental constraints. They showed unequivocal bravery as female warriors to enter the war in solidarity . . . It did not matter whether they were married, widowed, or single, they cut their hair and clothes short in order to fight freely.69

These fearless Japanese women were not unlike the European heretic women, who, in the same period, were tried as witches and put to death for resisting patriarchal authority. Even though these Japanese women all died in the end, they protected priests and friars and were martyrs to Christianity. Subsequently, the Jesuits successfully evangelized Japan in the sixteenth century. Contrasting this model, the British deployment of Christianization in nineteenth-century India was influenced by the project of colonization in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Focusing specifically on British attempts to abolish the sati practice in India, modern Hindu feminists have questioned the humanitarian claims of British involvement at the time.

The British Abolishment of Sati in the Nineteenth Century

Christianization for colonization was attempted under the pretence of saving widows from the sati practice in India. While Spivak argues that the British abolishment of the sati practice reversed the native social consciousness to feudalism in India, Mani considers that in the debates on
abolishing *sati* widows had no subjecthood and agency. By the time the British abolished *sati* in 1829, 63 percent of 8,134 *sati* were among the upper caste in Calcutta city; based on colonial reports, women were coerced to ascend the pyre. Officials forbade widows under sixteen or those with infants younger than three-years old from participating in the practice. According to the data of 1818, 64 percent of women were above the age of forty, and women could immolate themselves if they had their infants taken care of. The discourse of abolishing *sati* was already prevalent prior to British rule, and the colonial officials had power over India’s population. To analyze how British authorities controlled the debate on abolishing *sati* among the sceptical indigenous, Mani selected three sources of documentation.

**Hindu Feminist Analysis of the British Abolishment of Sati**

Those three sources of documentation represent the position of the colonial, the indigenous progressive, and the indigenous conservative parties, helping us to understand the politics of the debate. A letter from a British official, Walter Ewer, in 1818, to the judicial department represented the colonial position. Ewer, an abolitionist, argued that the performance of *sati* ignored and did not reflect obedience to the Brahmanic scripture and the religious nature of the *sati* practice; he interpreted the practice as the conscious design of the surviving relatives to secure material gains. Therefore, the performance could not be a sacred act. The tract of Rammohun Roy, a member of the indigenous elite known for his Bengal Reform in 1830, represented the progressive indigenous position. The orthodox community’s petition represented a conservative indigenous position. All of these parties – the colonial party represented by Ewer, the indigenous progressive party represented by Roy, and the indigenous conservative party – focused on the scriptures as the premise for determining whether the *sati* practice should be abolished. Through the analysis of these three sources of documentation, Mani argued that the British established a double-standard policy with regards to abolishing the *sati* practice.

**The Double Standard of the British Tolerance of Sati**

The double standard underlying Britain’s selective toleration of *sati* represented an attempt to avoid potential political repercussions from the
indigenous population. The 1813 regulation provided certain criteria to determine whether a sati practice was permissible: Ewer advocated that when a sati performance and an official’s reading of the scripture interlocked, the performance met the criterion of being a good sati; otherwise, it was a bad one. Addressing both religious and material issues, the abolition of sati could be safely executed without provoking indigenous rage. Subsequently, British officials tolerated sati twice in 1827; however, after Ewer determined that the actual sati practice bore no resemblance to a religious ritual, he pointed out that the scriptures only mention Hindu widowhood but not the necessity of the sati performance. Depending on their reading of the scriptures, colonial officials decided whether a sati was permissible by determining through observation whether the widow demonstrated free will.74

**Officials Returned Appropriated Brahmanic Scriptures to Hindus**

Brahmanic scriptures would have to be re-interpreted by colonial officials. In 1830, Roy, with Calcutta residents, petitioned Bentinck, a prominent figure who belonged to both Dutch and British nobility, to prohibit sati by offering the evidence that jealous Hindu princes initiated the burning of their widows, a motivating factor that was not legitimized by the Brahmanic scripture.75 Although evidence of sati practice based on material gains varied from region to region, these variations challenged the textual hegemony of colonial officials’ reading of the Brahmanic scripture about sati. The British authorities stressed the assumption that the sati practice should have been viewed primarily as a total obedience to religious texts in their attempt to abolish the sati tradition. To support this aim, British officials appropriated the Brahmanic scripture then returned them, reinterpreted, to Hindus.76

**Subject of Abolishing the Sati Practice: The Hindu Tradition, not Hindu Widows**

The British authority prepared to bring in Christian order by abolishing Hindu tradition of sati. If widows were to be saved, their agency and subjecthood in the debate on abolishing sati should have been prioritized. However, British officials, Christian missionaries, and the indigenous elite and conservative group shared the same methodology: each privileged Brahmanic scriptures as Hindu tradition. In a patriarchal
discourse to justify the colonial civilizing intervention, officials foreclosed women’s subjecthood and agency in the sati debate: the subject of the debate had nothing to do with widows’ rights. Rather, the subject of the debate was the indigenous tradition that British officials intended to reconstitute and rearticulate by reinterpreting Brahmanic scriptures. Losing their agency and subjecthood to the authority of both Hindu men and colonial officials, widows eventually remained the eternal victims in the act of sati. Thus, the intersection of traditional and patriarchal notions enabled a discourse of salvation, a concept of protecting the weak from the strong. Saving Hindu widows from committing sati was integral to the British notion of outlawing the sati practice; the real intention underlying the colonial power’s attempt to abolish the practice was to impose Christian order on India. The first step was to remove the tradition without incurring any local insurrections.

**Conclusion**

Women’s immolation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries manifested the social structure of male domination and female subjugation in Europe, India, and Japan. In these three areas, women did not possess agency and subjecthood over their own lives. Just as in the West, the Church openly supported political terrorism in persecuting European witches; in India, Hindu widows burned themselves to follow their deceased husbands; in Japan, for the sake of their husbands or their male warlords, Japanese women were immolated.

Both Protestant and Catholic reformations, in fact, gave church women more space to contribute their activism to the church in Europe and abroad in Canada in the witch-hunt period. However, both Protestant and Catholic churches tried thousands of women as witches who were usually killed at the stake. Nevertheless, in the mid-seventeenth century judges ended the witch-hunts, admitting that witches did not exist in the world. Federici’s euphemism clearly demonstrates that the witch-hunt – a misogynous movement and genocide of poor and old women – silenced these women’s revolutions to re-allocate their capital to the Church and the state and thus created a transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe.

For the purpose of colonization, imperial powers utilized the same European model of witch-hunts to spread Christianity throughout the Americas. The colonizers wanted the resources of the colonized but feared
their resistance. In order to quell opposition, the colonizer vilified the colonized to subjugate them for monetary profit. For example, before 1542, the Spaniards desired the resources of the Americas but feared native resistance; thus, they demonized South American peoples as primitive and backward so that they could be seen as righteous in their massacre of the indigenous heathens. Spaniards “burned everyone alive” in Hispaniola and impaled women, young and old, in pits in Guatemala. Nothing could be more barbaric than the destruction of the Indies based on Bartolomé de las Casas’ account. However, they were unsuccessful in part because the indigenous in other areas rejected Europeans’ assimilation and strived to maintain their old traditions and religions.

In contrast, Fróis’ style of Christianization for inter-culturalism has become increasingly popular and has developed into the global evangelism we recognize taking place in the present. For example, through his study of Japanese language and culture, Fróis was able to collect vernacular narratives through his cultural contacts with the native Japanese to write the Jesuits’ missionary history in Portuguese. His First European Description of Japan, 1585 was translated into English from Portuguese in 2014, and he filed important contemporary reports such as the martyrdom of the twenty-six saints in 1597 shortly before his death. Moreover, Fróis’ History of Japan was translated into Japanese in 2000 by Professors Matsuda Kiichi and Kawasaki Momota. These accounts are integral primary sources for the research of sixteenth-century Japanese history.

From Fróis’ books, scholars can detect a model for evangelization based on the recognition of the indigenous culture through inter-culturalism. This approach is different from Christianization for the purpose of colonization: the colonial authority used the witch-hunts as a model through which to eradicate native traditions and to assimilate indigenous cultures into the culture of the colonizer. In contrast to this view, Fróis engaged in inter-cultural learning to equalize his social status with the native population, inspired Japanese women’s subjecthood and agency over their own lives, and successfully converted native Japanese. In return, the indigenous were martyred for protecting Jesuits and Christianity. Fróis’ inter-culturalism for evangelism presents itself as a more successful model than colonial recognition by assimilation because it was based on equality and reciprocity. Christianization in the form of evangelization helped Japan in a positive way and inspired Japanese women’s agency, which was further passed on to the modern female foreign missionaries to
Japan who were members of the Woman’s Missionary Society in Canada in the nineteenth century. This approach clearly depicted the development of global evangelism.

Unlike Hindu scholars’ harsh criticism of the British abolishment of sati in the nineteenth century, the colonial Muslim king received praise for his abolishment of sati in the seventeenth century. Despite the fact that Robert De Nobili (1577-1656) and William Carey (1761-1834) attempted to evangelize India, Christianity remained unpopular in India; Christianization was often overshadowed and stigmatized as a process of colonization. It is hard to believe that the British abolished sati in India out of a humanitarian intention after Europeans burned their own women and brought the same witch-hunts to the Americas. In fact, the British abolishment of sati in the nineteenth century fell into the same pattern of Christianization for colonization. The double standard of abolishing sati demonstrates that the British were afraid of native insurrections. Following the same mentality that the Church used in medieval Europe, the British re-interpreted Brahmanic to undermine Hindu tradition and to introduce the Christian order. This can be attested to by the number of witchburnings in western India in 1840; the number was more than that of sati in the same year.

Thus, a transition from feudalism to capitalism eventually took place in India even though India maintained indigenous feudalism, indicating its opposition to colonial power and protecting its tradition of the sati practice. Through the corruption of feudalism after the Second World War and global decolonization, in theory, capitalism equalized everyone’s social class based on individual income and property. Eventually, capitalism catalyzed democratic movements in these three areas in the twentieth century. Conversely, Fróis’ successful evangelism was neither capitalism nor colonialism; it was based on an a posteriori situation of global evangelism. Fróis’ evangelism closely resonates with Jesus’ teaching in “Life among the Believers” of The Acts of the Apostles: believers share personal possessions and help one another to survive; this mentality also resonates with the socialism of the present day, which supports the sharing of social responsibilities. It is a lasting lesson that comes down to us from the witch-hunt movements.
Endnotes


8. Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, *Canadian Methodist Women, 1766-1925: Marys, Marthas, Mothers in Israel* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 1-15; and Phyllis D. Airhart, 78-9, 74, 129, 141-2. Airhart and Whiteley are prominent authors of Canadian church history. Moreover, female principals have emerged in recent years: Airhart has been principal for several years, and Michelle Voss Roberts is the current principal of Emmanuel College. These female academics not only demonstrate the feminism flourished in the Methodist Church (later United Church of Canada) in the
late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, but also embody the spirit of second-wave and third-wave feminists.


17. Federici, 23.

18. Janz, 53-4. Albert of Mainz instructed staff in 1515 about the sales of indulgence, purgatory, and absolution.


23. I am grateful to Professor Eva C. Karpinski who taught me and inspired me to do research on women’s reproductive health in Asia and Canada.


27. Federici, 33.


29. Federici, 42-3.


31. Federici, 44. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are described in the New Testament predicating the advent of famine and death (Revelation 6:8, NRSV).

32. Federici, 45, 57-8, 43.
33. Federici, 43, 45, 43.


37. Federici, 46, 49, 47-8, 48, 49.

38. Federici, 49.

39. Janz, 14-22, 23-6. Henricus Cornelius Agrippa gave a different account from Kraemer and Sprenger about the status of women in 1509. See Hsia, 406-424. Similar to Denis R. Janz, Wolfgang Behringer explores debates on demonology based on the contemporary literature between 1500 and 1660 such as Johann Weyer (1515-88) and Henricus Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) against the persecution of witches. See Brian P. Levack, ed. *Witchcraft in Scotland* (New York: Garland Pub., 1992), 7:ix-x. Sorcerers or magic practitioners were considered as harmful witchcraft to a godly state. See Brian P. Levack, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 429-46. Although biblical scholarship did not accept the interpretation of the “sorcerer” in Exodus 22:18 as being the same as the definition of “sorcerer” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the church administration continued to use the term to eradicate witches.


41. Janz, 165-7; Federici, 7, 174, 176.

42. Federici, 174.
The drawing of Elizabeth Sawyer in 1621 and Hans Burkmair’s paint/woodcut before 1514 conform to the stereotype of the witch – poverty and sterility.

A witch was submerged in the water, and later imprisoned for life.

Prospero colonized an uninhabited island and enslaved the indigenous Caliban while Miranda, Prospero’s daughter, ungratefully vilified Caliban. See Federici, 137.

Sati, both a ceremonial rite and a name, is a common female name meaning “a good wife” or “faithfulness” also given to the practice of widow sacrifice. Sanneh, 135. Sanneh interprets “sati” as faithfulness. Spivak, 306. Spivak explains “sati” a good wife.


63. Fróis, 2:24-32.

64. Fróis, 3: 48; Ōta, 382-3; Ōta, trans. J.S.A. Elisonas and J.P. Lamers, 472. Fróis’ account of Oda Nobunaga is not completely the same as Ōta’s; however, they are very similar.


66. Fróis, 1:326; *Shirō Sōran*, 13 263.


70. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 297-313; Mani, 88-126.

71. Mani, 88; Datta, 19-70.

72. Mani, 97, 100, 98, 90. Colonial officials reported the barbarity of Hindu males’ coercion of this matter. See also Major, 73-118.
73. Mani, 88-9, 102; Major, 119-51.
74. Mani, 94, 92-3, 94-5, 90, 92, 104; Major, 172-94.
75. Mani, 92-3, 105-6; Datta, 82-118.
76. Mani, 96, 92-3.
77. Datta, 71-81; Major, 227-38; Mani, 97, 118.
78. I am grateful to Professor Radhika Mongia who inspired me to write this paper.
80. Brian P. Levack, The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe (London: Routledge, 2016), 1. This newest edition is essential reading for students embarking on the history of witchcraft. Federici, 208. It is impossible for anyone to find out how many witches were burned because those who conducted witch-hunts were free to arrest witches and handle records. Oldridge, 100-103. H. C. Erik Midelfort probably accepted the number of witch-burning from De Praestigiis Daemonum of Johann Weyer (1515-1588). Federici, 202; and Oldridge, 342. Brian P. Levack used “judicial scepticism” to explain inquisitors’ ground to end witch-hunts.
81. Federici, 8.
86. Sanneh, 1-8, 128-33.
88. Sanneh, 134-42.
90. Federici, 237.

91. Spivak, “Can Subaltern Speak?” 298; Datta, 34; and Thompson, 69. The number of sati from 1815 to 1818 steadily increased to twice. Thompson, 127. The rite still survived at the beginning of the twentieth century.
