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## California at the Intersection: Thinking Society, Culture and Identity in a Global Context

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## THEME 1: *Society, Culture & Identity*

The first theme remains rooted in the idea of both California's separateness and commonality; unity in diversity by connecting the stories of ourselves to the world around us.

On May 3, 1535 Hernán Cortés's men landed on California's shores and called the place 'Santa Cruz'. As early as 1539 the voyage of Francisco de Ulloa referred to this place as the "Isola of California" and in 1541 Friar de Meno gave evidence back in Spain of an "isla de California". Later, the first map of California as an island appeared in 1622 and, in rapid succession, a number of maps between 1624 and 1625 all asserted California's island status. Approximately fifty years later in 1681 Jesuit Father Eusebio Kino was sent to Baja and founded the first mission at Loreto in 1697.

Perhaps it is indicative that the present-day Santa Cruz is nowhere near that original landing site as it also marked the beginning of California's 'identity crisis' that the mysteries around not only its name, but its very shape imply. Theories and sources for the name of the state vary, but the idea that California was remote and exotic was not in question and the possibility it might be an island only made it more plausible to call down centuries of voyagers' tales. Thus, almost from the outset, this home to Amazons that was understood to be at "the right hand of the India...very near to the region of the Terrestrial Paradise, which was populated by black women...There ruled on that island of California, a queen great of body, very beautiful...more than any other who had ruled that kingdom before her...Queen Calafia" (*Polk, 125*) was called into being.

Given that we begin with the theme of identity, the persistence and relevance of this particular story is worthy of some note. The origins of the Amazon story are obscure and it is unknown if there is any basis in fact for a race of women living without men (sometimes portrayed as white and at other times as black – sometimes breeding with men only to kill them and often taming wild beasts including griffins) but they are among the oldest mythological characters in the global pantheon. In Greek literature, they "took after their mother Harmonia, in grace and beauty and after their father, Ares, in warlike disposition" while a similar story is also found in oriental mythology where "accounts of marvels such as giant trees, lakes of tar and burning mountains" clearly invite comparisons with California. More interesting still, is Polk's suggestion that they might be "two ends of the same myth, girdling the earth...from the Orient to the Mediterranean, or vice versa...carried in opposite directions to the farthest reaches east and west, to meet again in the place we now call California" (*Polk, 8*).

Such stories of the peoples of the place could also be linked, again according to Polk, through the term Calif which is a Spanish spelling for a sovereign Muslim power and perhaps making Calafia a female Muslim leader. Thus, California's identity connects to the Muslim world, the Middle East and Africa as well as Rome, Greece and medieval Europe more broadly. The state was 'global' even before more and more peoples of the world arrived.

The Associate Editors of this theme bring a breadth and depth to ideas and questions of identity. They demonstrate the possibilities for enquiry in this area by literally starting with the same story (and yet another origin story for the state of California) that links statehood to Athena and the idea that California sprang into being not so much as a frontier, but a fully formed entity and going concern of ranchers, miners and soon thereafter cities and railroads. As Cary McWilliams puts it, for California "the lights went on all at once" (*California: The Great Exception, 1976*). Kerri Malloy from San Jose and Dana Belu from Dominguez Hills ask about the effects that arrival had on our Society, Culture and Identity and invite others to do the same.

Themes could include, but are not limited to:

- Social movements originating in or influencing California society and culture that challenge or support institutions, structure, or power;

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- Particular effects and aspects of California's past on how it engages with the international community;
  - Identities formed and influenced by a multicultural California;
  - California as an economic power and its impact on global societies and cultures in the contextualized in the networks of economy and trade and its impact on the environment;
  - Domestic and international perspectives of California as a place and ideal/multicultural utopia (medical, technological, political);
  - Influence on the formation of individual and group identities of the entertainment, technology, and progressive movements of California;
  - Future challenges that the state will face and proposed solutions.
  - Effects of California as a driver of scientific essentials and sustainable environments on society, culture, and identity regionally, nationally, and internationally.

*Dr. Alison R. Holmes, Managing Editor*

## **California at the Intersection: Thinking *Society, Culture and Identity* in a Global Context**

*Athena, the goddess of wisdom and battle strategy, is the central focal point of the state of California's seal, an embodiment of the self-image of the state and its place in a global society. Born of two men, Zeus and Hephaestos, Athena sprang into the world as a fully formed armor-wearing adult. Zeus surrogated her after eating her mother, Methis, and Hephaestos, the god of fire, used his tools to carve Athena out of Zeus' forehead. Wise beyond her years but lacking in the experiences of infancy, childhood, and adolescence that give rise to empathy and the ability to form relationships, Athena is a male identified goddess, solitary, rational, competitive, innovative, and feared. She is disconnected from her maternal lineage. Like Athena, California was born absent the formative years of territorial governance that helped to shape the mature governments of previously admitted states. Annexed by the United States under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) that ended the war with Mexico, the state had an expedited transition to statehood (1850) and rapidly grew as a global economic force. Today, as the fifth largest economy in the world, California continues to grow. One relatively new area of economic growth and technological innovation is California's international reproductive surrogate market.*

As a scholar working at the intersection of phenomenology, gender and technology studies I theorize the impact of reproductive technology on women's bodies, health and on their maternal identity, especially in the context of surrogacy. Surrogacy is illegal in many first-world countries, but California clinics welcome diverse clients from around the world who want to form their own genetic families by using donated eggs and surrogate services in cutting edge medical facilities. This reaffirms California's identity as a technological, medical and political haven, even as interdisciplinary and intersectional frameworks, such as feminist phenomenology, bioethics, and race studies can be seen to problematize this forward-looking identity. This critique is based on claims related to the exploitation of women's labor and to the technological appropriation of their (reproductive) bodies. For example, in *The Assisted Reproduction of Race*, 2018, Camisha Russell reframes the assisted reproduction technology

(ART) industry as a technology of race that perpetuates racist reproduction under the guise of a value neutral medical scientific enterprise that is supposed to help restore fertility. ART ideology also reproduces racist assumptions about what counts as a family and what kinds of families are desirable. Her account socializes technology and technologizes social values.

Outside of the reproductive domain, recent influential works in philosophy of technology by Don Ihde (*Husserl's Missing Technologies*, 2016, *Medical Technics*, 2019) and Andrew Feenberg (*Technosystem: The Social Life of Reason*, 2017) continue to show how a multitude of technologies and instruments that we use, shape who we are becoming. For Ihde, technologies are multistable, that is, their design can never completely determine their use. In *Technosystem: The Social Life of Reason* (2017) Feenberg claims that all aspects of modern life are organized by technical operations and devices that in turn are (invisibly) mediated by values and norms that produce the “technosystem” - networks of technologically mediated relationships, designs and institutions. (Feenberg 2017, 123). In my own work (*Heidegger, Reproductive Technology & The Motherless Age*, 2017) I show how technical mediation is central to understanding how assisted reproductive technologies produce an ontological shift in the way human beings come to life and how we think about motherhood and family. Popular academic books such as Shelley Park's *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaternalism in Adopted, Lesbian, Blended and Polygamous Families* (2014) and *Intersections of Mothering: Feminist Accounts* (2019 eds. Carole Zufferey and Fiona Buchanan) present multicultural and intersectional critiques of, and alternatives to, hegemonic conceptions of motherhood and family. Unfortunately, they situate the family beyond the technologies that enable them to exist even as non-heteronormative families heavily rely on a host of technologies for carving out their existence and identities.

Theoretical and applied work in the politics of family building and bioethics, for example, is especially urgent in California since the state is the most populous in the nation, the most “surrogacy friendly” state in the U.S. and an international destination for surrogacy services, especially gestational surrogacy. Gestational surrogacy uses in vitro fertilization techniques to

implant a woman's egg into another woman's uterus for the purpose of completing the pregnancy. The woman who completes the pregnancy does not share any of the fetus' genetic information, will not be the newborn's mother and takes the job out of dire financial need.

Gestational surrogacy has opened the door for the LGBTQ+ community to build genetic families with the help of a surrogate. Due to rigorous laws in place to protect the rights and interests of the future parents, the surrogates and the newborns, California can be seen to be at the forefront of re-imagining maternal and gender identity and reconfiguring how we think (and form) families outside of hegemonic, patriarchal and heteronormative structures. In view of its liberal politics and cutting-edge medical technology, California itself can be thought of as the opaque yet enabling background, the conditions of the possibility for what is novel and progressive to appear. Of course, what is novel is not necessarily progressive and requires social and cultural interpretation to determine its value.

For example, access to new reproductive technologies (and other new technologies produced in California) is out of reach for many people, especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In fact, high prices have contributed to the outsourcing of surrogacy to developing nations such as India, Thailand, and Mexico and until the recent war, Ukraine where it is available at a fraction of the cost in California. There is substantial environmental degradation associated with the use of technologies in surrogacy, especially in gestational surrogacy. This degradation results from the intersection of heavy international travel, the use of communication technologies, medical technologies and from increased hospital traffic in the assisted reproduction of first-world children. The footprints of these children are by far the heaviest in the world. All of these factors raise important questions about equity, labor, race, social and economic justice. They raise a host of interdisciplinary questions that lie beyond the scope of reproductive health and reproductive rights and extend into scholarship about sustainable technologies, gender and biopolitics, human trafficking, environmental studies, climate change and sociology studies.

In this section of **csuglobaljournal** we invite interdisciplinary submissions that include, but are not limited to, some of the following issues related to the intersection of society, culture and identity in California and how this explains the interface between the state and the globe. For instance, how might interdisciplinary and intersectional scholarship from within the CSU system illuminate the social, political and cultural identity and commitment of California and Californians to individual rights and liberties, including, but not limited to the reproductive rights of women and girls? Does the recent passing of legislation that protects a woman's right to reproductive choice reaffirm California as a safe space, a liberal haven for women and girls to live free and autonomous lives? Or does it point to a silent majority that did not vote? Whose histories are being left out when California is framed as a progressive, cutting-edge liberal democracy? Is California a social utopia or a secret dystopia? Does its massive size, huge population, prolific technological and economic output put California into environmental debt? Does California have unacknowledged environmental obligations to its neighboring states and countries?

In sum, we want to bring together scholarship that disturbs the similarity between California and Athena as a fully formed being with a rigid identity. Instead, we want scholarship that traces California's becoming, its on-going change and development as it interfaces with the globe. In this sense, we invite submissions that see California as looking forward and backward, a Janus head that bears the social and cultural energies kindred to those of flux gods, such as Mercury and Kokopelli.

**Dana S. Belu**