

# “I Write What I Like”

## THE POLITICS OF BLACK IDENTITY AND GENDERED RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN MEER’S *THE BLACK WOMAN WORKER*

### **Tiffany Willoughby-Herard**

Concluding research that was launched in 1984, Fatima Meer’s *Black Woman Worker: A Study in Patriarchy and Woman Production Workers in South Africa* (1990) raised critical questions about how the concept of gendered black consciousness articulated with racial colonialism, segregation, and apartheid. While the radical black feminism of that era was becoming coherent as a set of consistent political philosophies across the Americas and on the African continent, it was anticipating, laying ground work for, and helping to establish the publishing audience that constitutes our current interests in comparative black feminist studies, black feminist internationalism, African feminisms, and African gender studies. Our histories of the making of “the working class” and “left” have been shaped forever by the role played by research on black working women as servants, migrant laborers, domestics, and enslaved people. Willoughby-Herard examines and offers an account of how the contested and complex political identity of “blackness” was articulated in this moment, why this set of nested categories was necessary for Meer and her collaborators, and the cultural work that it did to bind together African, Indian, and so-called Coloured women in a context of extraordinary state and vigilante violence.



*Tiffany Willoughby-Herard is an assistant professor of African American studies at UC Irvine. Her research examines the international dimensions of racialization, racial identities, and the racialization of poverty. Her book, Waste of a White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the Racial Logic of White Vulnerability, analyzes the political and historical impact and effects of the Carnegie Commission Study of Poor Whites in South Africa, 1927-1932. Through attention to racial and class formations deployed by philanthropic organizations and social scientists in the United States and South Africa, it considers the politics of scientific racism and civilizing missions in particular with regard to the construction of the social identity “poor whites.”*

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