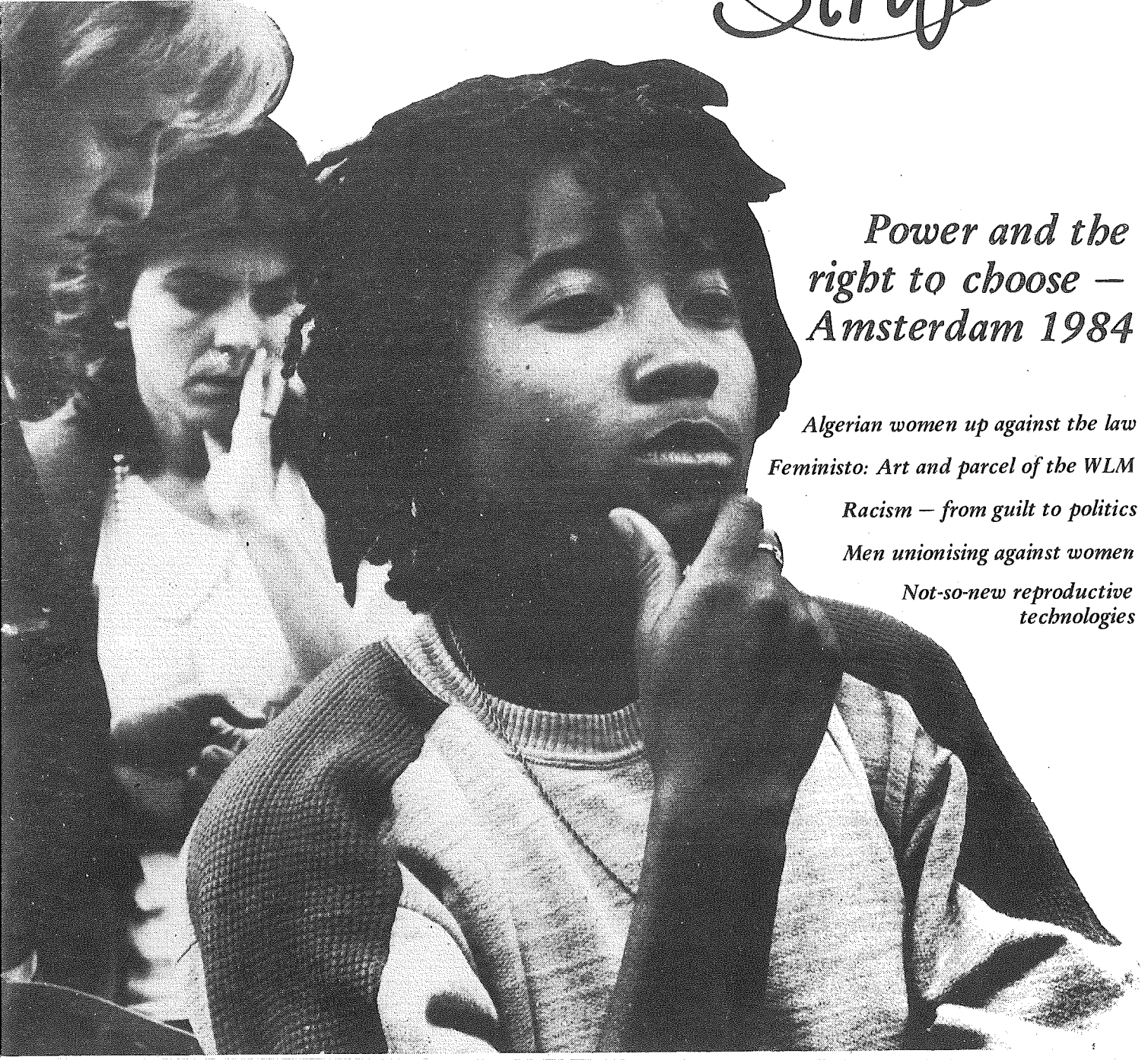


Trouble and Strife

a radical feminist magazine No.5

£1.75



*Power and the
right to choose –
Amsterdam 1984*

*Algerian women up against the law
Feministo: Art and parcel of the WLM*

Racism – from guilt to politics

Men unionising against women

*Not-so-new reproductive
technologies*

Trouble and Strife is cockney rhyming slang for wife. We chose this name because it acknowledges the reality of conflict in relations between women and men. As radical feminists, our politics come directly from this tension between men's power and women's resistance.

Please note our new address:

Trouble and Strife, c/o Women's Centre, 50 Bethel Street, Norwich, Norfolk, Britain.

Trouble and Strife is produced collectively by Lynn Alderson, Dena Attar, Cath Jackson, Liz Kelly, Sophie Laws, Diana Leonard, Judy Stevens and Ruth Wallsgrove, with help from Alice Henry, Carole Reeves (paste-up), Sue Andrews, Pam Muttram and Sara Scott (taping), and Polly Barker and Vari Waterperson (subs).

Thanks to *Spare Rib* for use of their space.

Although we take collective responsibility for the contents, we do not necessarily agree with every article we print — only that we feel it is interesting. Unsolicited articles are welcomed; please enclose a stamped addressed envelope. We do not intend to publish poetry or fiction.

Typeset and printed by Amazon Press, 75 Back Piccadilly, Manchester 1 (061-228 2351).

Distributed by Turnaround (01-609 7836) and Scottish and Northern Books Distribution Co-op (061-228 3903)

Trouble and Strife is also available on tape from *Trouble and Strife* Subscriptions, c/o Women's Centre, 50 Bethel Street, Norwich

Copyright on articles and illustrations held by the author/s or artist



Cover photo from the International Tribunal on Reproductive Rights, Amsterdam, July 1984, by Eva Besnyo

Contents No.5

How men can act innocent; and Advice to white collectives wanting to employ Black women	2
Bound and Gagged by the Family Code: interview with Algerian feminist Nadine Claire	5
Clinical Smears: problems with Well Women Clinics <i>Lisa Saffron</i>	13
Racism: not a moral issue <i>Ruth Frankenberg</i> and <i>Janet Martens</i>	17
Makers of Men: the anti-feminist backlash of the National Association of Schoolmasters in the 1920s and 30s <i>Margaret Littlewood</i>	23
Joanna Russ' <i>The Female Man</i> : a classic reviewed <i>Ruth Wallsgrove</i>	30
A Truly International Conference: a report on the Women's International Tribunal and Meeting on Reproductive Rights in Amsterdam, July 1984 <i>Sophie Laws</i>	34
Review of Two Books on Caring for the Disabled <i>Pat Rock</i>	43
Not So New Technology: Infertility and Feminism <i>Naomi Pfeffer</i>	46
Writing Our Own History: Art and Parcel of the WLM. <i>Phil Goodall</i> talks to Lynn Alderson and Sophie Laws about <i>Feministo</i>	51

Revolutionary & Radical Feminist Newsletter

No. 14 OUT NOW

REVIEWS, ARTICLES, CARTOONS & LOADS MORE

WOMEN ONLY

Subs. info:-
Single copy: 65p. 3 issues: U.K. £1.50 overseas: £3.00, please make cheques and p.o.'s payable to "R.R.F. Newsletter" (initials only, not the full title). Send to:-
R.R.F. Newsletter, 17 Kensington Terrace, Leeds, 6.
Available on tape for blind women

off our backs
celebrate our 15th year of radical feminist news

SUBSCRIBE NOW
11 issues each year
\$15 sea mail, \$25 air mail
send international money
order to: off our backs,
1841 Columbia Rd NW
Washington DC 20009, USA.

Keep up with the news of feminism all over the world. *oob* specialises in conference coverage, interviews, news and reviews. Recent articles: Interview with Brixton Black Women's Group; review of *Women In Russia* edited by Tatyana Mamanova and interview with Mamanova; interview with Judy Clark, jailed revolutionary, on the politics of violent revolution.

Advertisements

How men can act innocent

During this last year, I have been working on a 'Violence Against Women - Women Speak Out' Survey, in Wandsworth South London. It is an attempt at a feminist response to the malestream arguments and research projects which claim that it is women's irrational fears rather than men's violence to women which is the problem. At the moment I am currently writing up the main body of the research, although our pilot report can be obtained from the address below.

During the course of the project, we have often been asked to give talks about the work to mixed as well as women only groups. One thing that has struck us in giving talks about violence against women is the numbers of men who, while accepting that violence against women is a problem generally, are outraged by the suggestion that they themselves may be a problem. It is to those claiming total innocence or that they are totally innocent of the ways in which their own behaviour can be a problem that this is addressed.

In this view innocent men are those who not only do not engage in violent or threatening behaviour, but those who refuse to collude in male violence in any way, even by silence. Innocent men are those who personally, politically and socially act to challenge and confront their own violence and that of their fellow men. They are the ones we see campaigning outside the law courts, demonstrating against malestream judicial statements that women are responsible for men's violence against them. They are the ones acting politically to challenge the police view that 'domestic' violence is 'rubbish' work. They are the ones who are vocal in their condemnation of the police and the courts treatment of raped women. They are the ones campaigning for rape within marriage to be recognised as a criminal offence and for kerb crawling to be outlawed. They are the ones who boycott and picket sex shops selling gear for violence -

whips, chains. They are active in the campaign against pornography and the objectification of women in the selling of commodities from cars to newspapers. They are demanding that incitement to sexual hatred be criminalised. They are those who have recognised their political duty and are acting on it without seeking approval or thanks from women. They are aware of their own personal practice and are acting to minimise the threat they pose to women. They are the ones exempted from criticism. They seem to be few and far between, we've not yet spoken to a woman who's heard of one, even from her sister's sister - a rare breed!

The above description outlines some of the political requirements of an innocent man. Below is outlined just some of his essential personal practices. It is just a beginning. Hopefully women will add to it so it can be developed into a more complete code of practice for the non sexist man!

Draft Code

1. Do not go out unaccompanied by a woman, unless it is absolutely essential, particularly after dark.
2. Avoid grouping into gangs. Three or four men together are more than sufficient to be a threat.
3. Do not colonise the whole pavement, whether out alone or with other men. Ensure that there is space for others to pass by without stepping off the kerb or being squashed against a wall or hedge.
4. Do not greet, accost or approach a woman, even if you're sure you know her. If she wants your attention she can always greet you.
5. Do not stop a woman for directions, the time or a light - pick on your own sex. We can't be sure of your intentions.
6. Do not walk behind a woman, rather cross the street than follow a woman, especially if she is alone.
7. Wear bright clothing so you can be easily seen - do not creep around in silent footwear.
8. Do not hang around by yourself or

with others, particularly in ill lit places.

9. Don't hoot or shout at women from cars - even women you are sure you know - as it's hard for those in the street to recognise men in cars and we can't be sure of your intentions.

10. Don't queue too close behind women in bus queues etc.

11. Don't get too close to women in crowds or on public transport. Space invaders are prime suspects. In these situations keep your hands to yourself.

12. Likewise on public transport keep to your own seat and keep your hands to yourself.

13. Rather change a carriage than let a woman be alone with you in the tube or train. Those who don't will be prime suspects.

14. Don't open conversations with women in public places. If a woman wants your attention she can address you.

15. Don't comment on women, their looks, race, facial expression, figure, unless you want to be considered guilty of racist/

Advice to white collectives wishing to employ Black workers

I write as a Black feminist who has tried, and continues to try to work with white collectives. What I have to say is born of my experience as a woman working with other women, but may also be true for Black women in collectives with white men.

As a political principle I find no advantages to Black people to leave the majority of resources and privileges to white people. It is on this basis that I choose to join mixed (Black and white) collectives when I wish to, but even where all the

sexual harassment.

16. Carry a paper or magazine on public transport so you have somewhere to put your eyes. Staring at women is sexual harassment.

17. If you offer assistance to the disabled, mothers with prams etc, let her determine how you may help - don't just grab hold of a woman or a child.

If women want to add to this code, we'd be more than pleased to hear from them. Also our code is specifically concerned with violence against women in public places from men they don't know. We are aware that it is possible to think of codes for other situations, say like at work and we would be happy to pass on our thoughts to any other group of women who want to put one together or if women want to pass on ideas to us, to draw them together.

Jill Radford
c/o Women Speak Out - Violence to Women Survey
Wandsworth Policing Campaign
248-250 Lavender Hill, London SW11.

women concerned, including me, are committed to having a mixed race collective, the process of dealing with racism hasn't ended: in a sense it has only just begun.

In the first place I would advise any group of white women considering prioritising Black women for future posts to be clear on why they want Black women and also what they mean by Black. If these questions are not asked, and not satisfactorily answered then the road to chaos and pain for all, lies ahead.

In asking the question: Why Black women? I propose no answers. It is entirely up to the white women to sort themselves out as to their motivation, but whatever their answers are they should make them clear at interviews with Black women so that the Black women know why they are being employed, and can get some kind of measure of who they are dealing with. I have heard all kinds of reasons given by white women for employing Black women, some frankly patronising and racist, some



naive but well meaning and others motivated by strong feminist ideals. Whatever the reasons, individual Black women can at least choose what kind of women they may be working with. The process of asking the questions of each other is surely a useful way for white women to discuss racism, their own and institutional, in a realistic way. The second part of my advice, 'What do you mean by Black?', actually flows from the first question, 'Why do you want to employ Black workers?' Black as a political position has meant many things in Britain, in the rise of fascism and racist legislation it has caused people of African and Asian descent to work together identifying themselves as Black. Recently, however, many Black people have objected to this lumping together of all 'Non-Whites' as politically unhelpful. There has grown a concept of 'Third World' as a political identity, and 'Women of Colour', which in my view has been useful for all Black and Third World women, so that we can work around those issues where we have a common experience and at the same time not gloss over our differences.

If white women are clear on why they want Black women, perhaps they are also saying that they wish to employ Third World women and Women of Colour, because we are all disadvantaged when it comes to getting well paid jobs, if that is the case then make it clear in adverts and interviews. I am definitely not saying that only Black women (that is Asian or African Descent women) should be employed but if you only want or wish to give preference to Black women make that clear, rather than confusing Third World women or Women of Colour with 'Black'.

One key issue has to be established in my view, that is that in employing a Black woman or a Woman of Colour, she or they are not going to deal with your racism for you. That is why I said earlier that the problems have only just begun. Feminism is supposed to be about the liberation of *all* women, that white women have had a

monopoly on it does not alter, for me at least, the fact that all women need liberation from male dominance. If therefore we are to have a feminism for all women, then it also ought to be by all women. Collectives dealing with issues that relate to all women, should not in my view be composed of only white middle class English women, which is often the case. In principle therefore we must have racially mixed feminist collectives, but in practice we have the employment of one token Black woman who the white women feel now deals with their racism, *not so!*

One Black woman joining an otherwise white collective means change, for every white woman. It means that you deal with your own racism towards that woman on a day to day basis, that everything or almost everything that the collective does is considered for its race dynamic, because there is bound to be one in Britain. I'm not talking about paralysing oneself with guilt, an extremely useless response, but instead asking questions of oneself about ways in which ideas are being proposed may affect Black people — particularly women. Don't expect all the answers — or indeed any — from the Black woman/women on the collective, they are not employed to solve your problems, but if all members of the collective are committed to working together on an equal basis, and are really trying to be sensitive to each other the problems which arise around racism, or any other issues for that matter, can be dealt with.

Working on a racially mixed collective has for me been exciting, challenging and positive, as well as painful and negative, but in the main my feeling is that we must work out ways of dealing with each other which neither patronise or powertrip, but set a standard for what a non-racist feminist future might be.

Linda Bellos

This paper was written for 'We're Here', the Black Feminist Conference held in London in May 1984.

BOUND and GAGGED by the FAMILY CODE

In this extraordinary interview, Nadine Claire talks to Sophie Laws about an alarming recent change in the situation of women in Algeria. A 'Family Code' law has been introduced which removes many of women's basic human rights. She also speaks about contraception, the problem of abandoned children and the consequences for women of the insistence on virginity at marriage.

Nadine: I would like to start with this new law, which is known in Algeria under the name "Family Code", (not the legal name of it, that is "Law on Personal Status") a title which is also used in Tunisia and Morocco. After Independence, in 1962, we were still under extended French law on personal status, because we could not change all the laws at the same time. Under Ben Bella, who was the first president (1963-5), we already had a proposal of a family code, introducing some amendments to the Constitution about equal rights of all citizens, which we felt even at that time to be quite backward as far as women were concerned. Women were already discriminated against, under the pretext of the Koranic influence in the country. We had two other proposals, under Boumedienne, who was the second president of Algeria: the three proposals were stopped by Left individuals (both women and men) who were close to the presidents. What happened in 1982 was that a fourth proposal was issued, under Chadli, and we couldn't find out what it contained. This

was also the case with the three previous ones, but they were circulated among a few people so that at least privileged people could have a look at them; this was also why Leftists could use their personal influence to stop them.

But this fourth proposal was entirely kept secret — I'll give you two examples to show you to what extent it was kept secret. We had friends who were ministers — they had only two sessions to discuss this proposal. They told us that a copy of it was given to them when they entered the room, and taken back when they went out of the room. And they accepted this! This gives you an idea of the climate of fear in Algeria. We also have six women Deputies (MPs), so we went to them as well and asked them if we could look at what the proposal was, before it was passed without our knowledge. They also refused — the same things were happening to them. All the Deputies were given copies when they entered the room, and the copy was taken back. And they also

Ministers were given copies of the proposed law as they entered the room, and had them taken away as they left — this gives you an idea of the climate of fear in Algeria.

accepted it. This is really anti-constitutional, because they are supposed to refer to us, they are supposed to represent us.

Anyway we couldn't get hold of this proposal so two weeks before we knew that it was going to be passed, we had to steal this proposal. Then we duplicated 25 copies on an old alcohol machine, because that's the only way for it not to be traced by the police. They can find a modern machine. We tried to put these 25 copies in various strategic places where people would react. Only one of those copies reached the target — it was veteran women, women who fought in the Liberation struggle and who are legally organised. We have no free association at all, so it's very difficult to organise, it's always illegal, but those women are allowed to have their own meetings. So it was very important to reach this group.

They understood the situation, and they called a demonstration, the first women's demonstration for 20 years, since Independence. Exactly 20 years. Usually any kind of demonstration is just crushed, but this time we had in the front line six women who had been condemned to death under the French, so the police didn't beat them. It was a good tactic. The women veterans also wrote to their Minister, the Minister of veterans, saying that they hadn't fought for such a result. They also wrote to the Minister of Justice and to the President. The State was frightened — the President stopped this proposal. We thought it was a big victory, and anyway the first one since Independence. Then what happened was that everything was very quiet, after 1982, and then we heard that this proposal (or another like it) was still there, and could be passed at any time.

Three feminists had been arrested in October, last October, along with many other political prisoners. But these three had been arrested because they were feminists, and their only action had been to distribute copies of this proposal, and call for people to read it carefully and not let it be passed. They had been arrested then, and we heard about it in March, which means that it was kept secret — there were no trials, no nothing. So we started an international campaign. The President of Algeria

We have no right to marry — we have to be given in marriage by a man of our family.

We have no right to work, we have got to get permission from our father or husband to work.

received thousands of letters and telegrams from all over the world, because we could reach feminist groups in all continents. They were released after one and a half months' campaign. It was a big success.

And then immediately after their release, when everybody was relaxed and happy, the Family Code was passed. So now we are under this law, and I want to tell you what it is. These details are from the fourth proposal — the actual law that was passed may be slightly different, but the spirit won't have changed. It is said that it is inspired by Koranic law, but as we all know, religion is always used by the ruling class.

Family code against women's rights

We have no right to marry, for instance: we have to *be given* in marriage, according to the tradition, by a man of our family to the other family. It was stated that the aim of marriage is *reproduction*, which also means that somebody can be divorced or repudiated (I will explain what that is) on the grounds of infertility. Repudiation is when the husband just sends his wife away — she is no more married to him, but she is not divorced, and stays like this. If her family takes her back, then at least she is fed, but if not, she is on the street. And with the cultural change in Algeria, it's more and more likely that more and more women will be on the street, and not back in their families. So it's certainly a big problem.

Sophie: Before this family code was passed, could men repudiate their wives in the same way?

N: Yes, of course, they could, but it was not *legal*. It was done for years, but the Constitution of Algeria guarantees equal rights, so it was anti-constitutional. But now this law is in contradiction with the Constitution. And we are going to fight it on legal grounds too.

We have no right to divorce at all. Only the husband can divorce. We have no right to work, we have got to have permission from our father or our husband to work. And this is a very good example of the fact that it is not Koranic law, because in the time of the Prophet, I doubt very much that anything was said about wage-earning, since it didn't exist at that time! So this is not

only anti-socialist (and we pretend to be socialists), but it is also very much against women. Now when a couple divorce, or rather when a husband divorces his wife, the children are given to the woman, to the mother. But you cannot really say that she has responsibility for the children. A boy is given to her up to the age of nine or ten, and the girl until marriage. But she is only working as a maid in keeping the children — the husband can take them back whenever he feels that she is not raising the children properly. She has got to stay close to him geographically, so that he could check on her every day. Which means that she cannot go to another city, she cannot build a new life, she has to be under his eye all the time. This is not having responsibility for the children. I could go on with this type of example, but it is useless.

There are laws of inheritance, too, which are Koranic laws — two women equal one man in many respects. This is also true in giving legal evidence.

The situation of women from 1962 to now has been increasingly bad, getting worse every year, and now it is even legal. So a lot of action will probably be taken in Algeria. It has started in 1981, with the first feminist gathering that we have ever had. It was just plain information on the situation of women, on health, education — on three items. And this was already threatened by the Rightist forces that are now called Fundamentalist, that we call the Muslim Brothers. They threatened us that they would come and throw acid in our faces during this meeting, which fortunately they didn't do, but they were in the room, interrupting all the time. We couldn't rent a public place to hold this meeting, we had to be very tricky. Some of us had to register with a union, and then rent a room through the union. It was very complicated, and we have never been able to do it again. The second gathering of feminists was held in Oran, a different town, and it was held within the University, which means it wasn't really public. We have all these difficulties.

What we are planning to do now — it actually started off from sharing some information with Indian women. There are huge minorities of Muslims in India, and

they are living under Muslim law, not the constitution of India. A young woman of 24 years old is now, presently, taking the Indian government to court saying that the law which is applied to her in her area is in contradiction with the constitution, which is the case in most of the Arab countries. I don't know if she will win or not, but the action is very important. So we are planning to meet with other women living under Muslim law wherever they are, and have common action, or at least information about what's going on in our countries.

Thirty thousand abandoned children

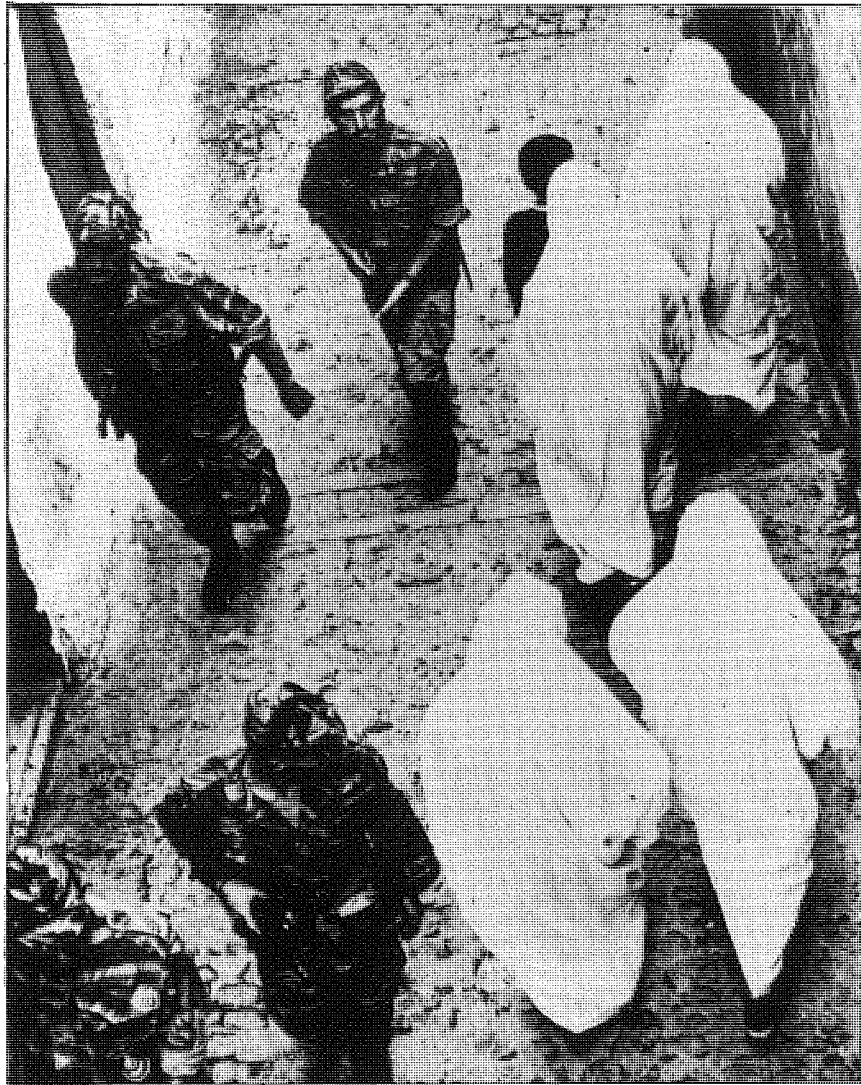
Another thing which is very important and which is not talked about up till now is that we have lots and lots of abandoned children. Twenty years ago this didn't exist at all — it's a new phenomenon, which is appearing in all African capitals. I don't know about elsewhere, but I know about Africa — it began about ten or fifteen years ago. Usually, at least in my country, there were very few illegitimate pregnancies. What

The first feminist gathering, held in 1981 — we couldn't rent a public place.



Algeria has a particular place in Western feminist mythology: of how, during a struggle to throw off a colonial oppressor, men will promise women equality, but then take it back when the struggle is won. This shot from the film Battle of Algiers shows a 'revolutionary' marriage during that battle without religious ceremony or family pressure.

would happen was that either the mother was killed when she was pregnant, or she was killed after the delivery, and the child too. But on the other hand there was a traditional way of dealing with this: she would be hidden in her family, the males of the family would pretend that they don't notice anything, she would more or less hide, but it was with their tacit consent, somehow. Then she would deliver, and anybody in the family or in the vicinity,



from 'Battle of Algiers'

Using tradition against the French colonists: or how to become invisible in women's clothing. The film illustrates how women were used to get weapons past the French checkpoints, since the guards were nervous of touching the Arab women for fear of 'insulting' the Arab men. Here the Algerian nationalist leaders — all men — try to escape past the soldiers (but their boots give them away!)

or a friend, would take the child and say "well I am the mother", and that was it. Well, this could work for, let us say, 100 cases a year, throughout Algeria.

It doesn't work now: we have 30,000 abandoned children in Algeria today. And this does not include the babies who die in the first three months. And I have to tell you that in the city of Algiers, (which has the best health services of the whole country), there is official data from the Minister of Health, that 35% to 85% of abandoned children die in the first three months. And this is in Algiers, in the capital. It is a huge percentage. They die of what is called in French 'hospitalisme du nouveau-ne', hospitalisation of the new-born, which is lack of maternal care. Not that they are not fed, not that they don't have blankets or clothes, but they just let themselves die because nobody wants them. So you have to add this number, I don't know what the total for Algeria would be, to the 30,000 abandoned children. And if we want to have an idea of the number of unwed mothers, then we have to add again: those who commit suicide, and it's a huge number of women between 14 and 25 who commit suicide; those who commit infanticide, and they are also numerous; those who have illegal abortions; those who manage to find a family, deliver in secret and give the child away — and all sorts of other cases. So we have to face the fact that we have a lot of unwed mothers.

The position of our government is that it doesn't exist. Which means that these children are now put in a creche until the age of three or four, then in an orphanage. And if you look at these children, I have been into all these places, they are mentally disabled. It is not that they were born like this — it's an acquired mental disability. So it means that they cannot be adopted by anyone later — at the age of four or five, they don't sit, they don't walk, they don't speak.

S: *Because they get so little care?*

N: Yes. And before 1972, they didn't even have these creches, they were in hospitals, in huge rooms. Nobody was appointed to feed them, so anybody who passed by, either the woman who sweeps the floor, the doctor, the midwife, some

patients would try and give some bottles, just at random. And they were put in beds with walls made out of material, so that they couldn't even see anything. They were put in their beds, facing the ceiling. And how could they survive? That is how they got mental disabilities. You could see huge rooms with 200 babies. This is a bit better now in the creches, but still . . .

No right to adopt

So one of the struggles of Algerian women is to get something like adoption. This Family Code forbids adoption — it is said that it is anti-Koranic. It *isn't*. What is said in the Koran is that if you adopt a child, don't give it your name, for fear of incest, later incest. And don't let the child inherit, because you will hurt your natural children. But apart from these two recommendations nowhere is it said that adoption shouldn't be done. And in actual fact the Prophet himself had adopted children. And in the tradition it was very easy — you would just state in front of two witnesses that "This is my child" and he or she was your child. Not having your name, but who cares? There is a huge difference between this situation and what the State is doing now, a system of fostering under the name of Kafala, which is to give some of these children to families to look after them. But now we have to go through the State to have the charge of those children and this means that the State, the Minister of Justice, is the legal tutor of these children. And this would never be transferred to the so-called adoptive parents.

S: *They would never have any rights over the children?*

N: No. Which means that at any point, the State can take the children back. So if you don't 'behave properly', if you are not a 'good citizen', if you have any kind of political activity, this is a continual threat. This is not adoption, not at all, and women are fighting for the rights of these children.

It has been known for some years, since around 1980, that we had all these children, really thrown into the garbage, somehow. Sweden proposed to take all of them, regardless of their disabilities, and just take care of them. Of course Sweden got a very nationalist answer — these children are our

property. Well fair enough, I am not so much for adoption of Third World children in the First World — but on the condition that *we* take responsibility for our children. If we don't, then we have no rights over them.

It was mentioned in the first feminist gathering, of 1981, that Sweden had offered to take these children, and our women reacted the same way: "These children belong to us, and even if they die here, that's where they should die, instead of living elsewhere". And I heard from an official of the Ministry of Health: "Better be a dead Algerian than a living Swedish citizen". This nationalist reaction has to be denounced now, for it is really too much, what is happening to those children. Especially that now with this new law, we have no more hope for legal adoption. Of course some families will take some children, but there is no security, not for them or for the children.

This is also something which is in the new Family Code, that it is only this type of Kafala which is allowed, and no adoption. And this is linked, this number of unwed mothers and abandoned children is linked to the policy of the Algerian State about contraception.

Contraception rights and population control in Algeria

We can examine the two decades since Independence separately. In the first decade, because of our so-called socialist and anti-imperialist stand, we were strongly against population control, and it was clearly stated by the second President of Algeria, Boumedienne, when he first opened the national Steel Company, in 1968, that the way to development is not population control, it is industrialisation. Fine, so we had to agree with this, as militants, but at the same time, we were signing our death warrants, as we were not allowed not only practice but even *knowledge* on contraception. We were under the extended French law of the end of the First World War in France, which was a pro-natalist law, from 1920 or something like that. And it was really strongly forbidden to have any access to contraception. So in those ten years, what happened was that women had an enormous amount of children. It was at the

Abandoned babies often die: not that they are not fed, but they just let themselves die because nobody wants them.

"Better be a dead Algerian than a living Swedish citizen"?

In the sixties, women normally had 13 or 14 pregnancies.

end of the war, so couples were coming back together, or new couples were formed. It was obviously in the interest of the state to replace all those men who had been killed. After ten years the population growth rate of Algeria was the highest in the world — 3.5. Because we don't have a high infant mortality rate. It was the highest, with Pakistan and a few other countries. The average number of living children per woman was 7.9. I went through the files of hospitals and clinics, and the number of pregnancies was normally about 13, 14. And I quite frequently came across cases of a number of pregnancies close to natural fecundity: nineteen pregnancies.

So this is the situation, with a high instability in marriage, a lot of divorces and repudiations.

S: So women being left with many children?

N: Yes, or not necessarily left, but the children scattered, and it creates a lot of social problems, and psychological problems. These unwed mothers and abandoned children are a consequence of this policy.

Meanwhile in this first decade, the new class was building itself, under the cover of socialist bureaucracy. And now in the second decade they appear as a class, wanting to reproduce themselves as a class, and taking the means to do it. Which implies in the population policy, that they changed completely from this anti-imperialist stand of encouraging population growth to a class approach to the problem. They are threatened as a class, which means they don't want all this lumpen-proletariat to grow around the cities. Half of the population of Algeria is now under 14 — a huge number of young people who cannot be provided with education. And they will be on the labour market, and have no jobs, of course. And all this is a threat to this new class which I think now could be described as becoming a 'normal bourgeoisie', ie owning some means of production, which they didn't do previously, because everything was state-owned. But there are more and more private investments in Algeria, and the self-managed sector is narrowing. Even the land, I think, will be given back to private property at some point.

But now we are going to be given contraception, but in a way which does not respect women any more than they were respected in the previous stage.

S: Do they let in foreign capital?

N: Not yet. That will be a further step. But the change is very evident, and in population policy which is where women are very much concerned now, the first step was January 1981, the new law of finance. Up to '81, we were under a type of French law, which meant that as far as taxes are concerned, if you are single you pay more tax than if you are married, and the more children you have, the less tax you pay. From one day to another, this was reversed. Which means that large families are penalised. So now, if you are single you pay less tax, and the more children you have, the more tax you pay.

Before 1972 we had only one clinic providing contraception, and it was an experimental university clinic, so it was not under the law because it was meant for research, at least we said so. We put a lot of energy into having this clinic as a first step, because we felt it was our right to have contraception. But now we are going to be given contraception, and in a way which is not at all satisfactory and does not respect women more than they were respected in the previous stage. From '72, the beginning of the second decade, some more clinics were opened, inside the Maternal and Childcare clinics. Now we have about 500, which is nothing for Algeria, with a population of getting on for 20 million people, with a lot of young people, so it will create a lot of problems. But there are more and more signs that contraception and even abortion is going to be enforced on women, because of this fear of the growing lumpen proletariat. Contraception is already legal, passed in 1978. And we agreed with this, we had to fight to get it, but at the same time we can see that this is done against us. We now have a law allowing 'therapeutic' abortion, which is good too, but again this is a first step, because they are going to have free abortion, which in itself is perfect, except that it is going to be enforced upon poor women. That is extremely clear. I have heard officials speaking openly of their fear of the people, and openly stating that abortion is the best thing — and sterilisation.

S: Does Islam say anything against contraception?

N: Not at all. We even have statements of high authorities, of colleges of doctors of the faith to state that abortion is forbidden, but that contraception is not forbidden. We had this, from the very beginning, during this decade when we couldn't obtain contraception. So you see Islam is used whenever it is suitable, but . . . when it suits us, it is not used.

Where would they get pregnant?

About unwed mothers. They are the product of all this. When I first started to study this I thought that they would probably be young women coming on the labour market, entering the so-called modern sector, but it was not the case. These women are from poor, but very traditional families: they are kept inside the families, and they hardly go out, maybe ten minutes to get bread somewhere, or go to visit the family, and they are closely watched. Of course, they are from the outskirts of the city, because we have a strong immigration from the countryside to the city, everywhere, and no work, so the whole patriarchal family collapses. Fair enough, we are very happy about it. But what happens is that some of the traditions are still maintained, but some of the rigid moral behaviour collapses. And this is not necessarily to the advantage of women. We have to face the fact that it must be to a great extent rape and incest, within the family. They can't go out, so where would they get pregnant?

They are mainly two groups: a group between 30 and 40, of divorced women, or widows — I won't talk about them now. But the younger group, from the age of sixteen to 24 — when I talked to the medical doctors in the hospitals of Algiers, something very interesting was said to me. Of course it's not statistical data, but it's interesting anyway — they would say "half of them are virgins, in this group", the young group. And another would say "oh, at least half of them were virgins", and then another still, which means that there is some truth in this. They probably get pregnant after one very incomplete intercourse. This is also confirmed in the fact that some cases were known in the bourgeoisie, of young girls being pregnant and the parents knowing it, and begging the doctors to perform a

caesarian on the girl, so that the hymen would still be intact. Which means that they were virgins. It's important, because doctors agreed to do it, and this was only 'for the sake of the girl', so that she can be married afterwards, hiding that she had ever been pregnant. Then she would undertake her so-called first pregnancy, without telling anybody, not even the doctor, that this was happening in a uterus that had been cut. Facing death — instead of social death, physical death. Because being pregnant is social death.

I have heard of many cases in hospitals, of lower class girls who beg until the last minute for a caesarian for this reason. So all this is very complex, but there is a lot to think about, especially about the destruction of the extended family, and what is happening in such cases. The destruction of the authoritarian patriarchal family is not necessarily something which benefits women. In that case, it doesn't.

S: If there is nothing better? And the women have no power to create anything better?

N: Not for the time being. A young girl

Some of the traditions are still maintained, but some of the rigid moral behaviour collapsed — and this is not necessarily to the advantage of women.



Women at the front of a dangerous demonstration. Women played a huge part in the Algerian liberation struggle, but did not control it or the period after liberation.

like this could not work. We don't exist outside the family. Even renting a room, for somebody like me, would be quite impossible. Nobody would rent me a room, unless somebody from my family, a male, came and said, "oh yes, we all agree that she should have a flat". And women who are living alone, there are some, are usually from a wealthy family that can afford to back them, in all respects. Especially on the moral side, and the social side.

So these girls usually hide their pregnancies until the last minute, in the family, bandaging themselves. And we usually have long, wide dresses, which are quite comfortable to hide pregnancies under. They would then get help from a woman friend or relative, who would say, "oh, I'll take her to help me at home for three weeks if you don't mind". And then in those three weeks she would be put in hospital, deliver, abandon the child and then come back, and it will be unknown. And that's the only way.

One last point I want to tell you about, about this virginity. It is really social death — you can't get married, you can't tell anyone, if you are no more a virgin. This business of caesarians shows what it means, and I quite understand, as their whole life is affected. We always had special women of the villages, who would sew back a hymen, but the number is increasing, so now we have huge numbers of Algerian women going to France, and maybe to other countries, and they have managed over years to convince Left groups to help them. And I'm sure it's very complicated for a Left, Western doctor to accept the idea of sewing back the hymen, because it's outside of what they can understand. And it's something nobody would like to do, but anyway they are doing it, and thanks to them those women can go back and pretend nothing ever happened. It also means the destruction of the personality of Algerian women, as we really have split personalities, having to do such things. But at least some people in the Left in Europe manage to understand that there is no other way, at present.

S: *How do you feel about working with women outside Algeria?*

N: I personally believe in internationalism,

also among women's groups, but I am not representative of the opinion of Algerian women and Third World women in general, because you will usually find a lot of racism amongst us, towards you people. You see, accusing the West, and imperialism, is fine, but I don't see how we can get any solution except by identifying the Left forces, however limited their awareness is of our situation, of the evils of international capitalism.

I think we should work with Left people and with women, wherever they are. And if we are not satisfied with what they think, we can explain, instead of attacking them, because we don't identify the principal enemy by doing so. We destroy our own possibilities and forces, in the long run. That's why I wanted to talk to you — it took me ten years to decide that I would do it, because I also was nationalist enough to think that I should not speak outside. But I cannot speak *inside*, so what is the effect of my good will on what happens to Algerian women? When we started that campaign outside Algeria to free those three feminists, we did succeed, because I know where the weaknesses of the Algerian regime are: they don't want this to be exposed outside. And when they feel that their nice socialist image is tarnished, they would just find a way to I think on very limited points we can have common actions, for sure. We need a lot of information that you get very easily, and we can't, so we need a lot of co-operation from the West. And I'm sure we can also give a lot of information, not only for our own sake, which is what I'm doing now, so that the regime would be frightened, and wouldn't dare apply this law that they've just passed. And I hope that this type of attempt can help the forces inside Algeria, women's forces, to fight this law.

But on the other hand I'm sure that we can also give information that would be useful to you — I don't think it's a one-way process at all. But believing in this kind of internationalism, acknowledging all the differences of interest and in wealth and class and whatever . . . this I don't deny, and I think we have to work on it . . . this is absolutely not typical. I haven't always been like this, either — I have been very blindly nationalist in the past. □

Clinical Smears: problems with Well Woman Clinics

Do Well Woman Clinics fulfill our ideals for a good health service for women? Lisa Saffron describes a traumatic visit to one, and analyses the problems it presented.

This is a true story about my visit to a Well Woman Clinic. I live in Islington, in London, where there are quite a few of these clinics and I had no trouble finding one. At least, I managed to get an address for something that called itself a Well Woman Clinic. Now, I was a well woman when I went in and I was just as well when I stormed out. But I wouldn't have been at all well if I had listened to the clinic doctor. Personally I don't think that that kind of place deserves the name. A Well Woman Clinic should be a place where women learn to trust ourselves and each other — to come to have respect for our bodies and for our views of reality. But as long as Well Woman Clinics are under the control of doctors and medical thinking, I can't see that happening.

It all started when I tried to make an appointment for a cervical smear and a breast exam. Pretty straightforward, I thought, but I was thrown by the receptionist's first question.

"Are you on the family planning?" she barked.

"No," I said, surprised. "I want a Well Woman Clinic, not a family planning clinic."

"I know, I know," she came back. "But aren't you registered at a family planning clinic? How old are you?"

"I'm 31 and I want a Well Woman Clinic", I said patiently, using my best assertiveness training techniques.

"31 is very young. Do you mean you're not using any contraception?"

"I'm calling to make an appointment with the Well Woman Clinic for a smear. I do not use contraception." I spoke calmly, determined not to get into an argument about why I don't use contraception. If she couldn't cope with my 'non-contracepting', then I doubted whether she could deal with my lesbianism.

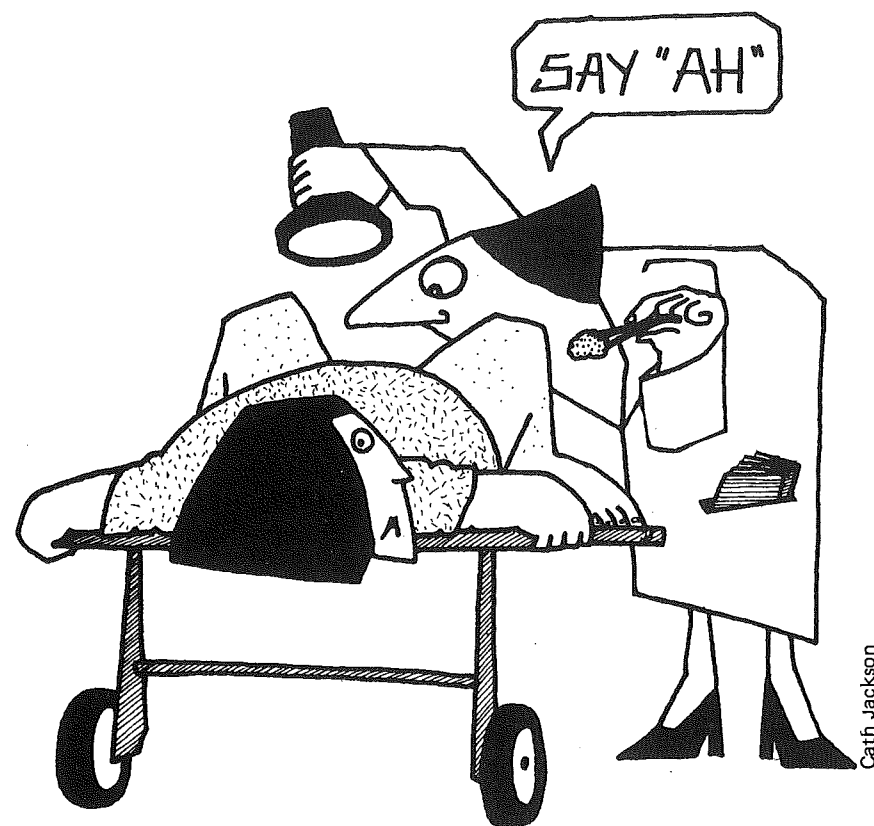
"Well, I don't know. You're supposed to get your smear at the Family Planning Clinic if you're that young. Our doctor doesn't like to see women at the Well Woman Clinic who should be going to their Family Planning Clinic. But," she gave in grudgingly, "I'll give you an appointment for 2 weeks' time."

I don't think that that kind of place deserves the name.

If I cannot speak inside, what is the effect of my goodwill on what happens to Algerian women?

Ms Amel Yaker has written a thesis at the University of Algiers on abandoned children, in the hope that the authorities will react — it has not been published. There is also a book on the subject by Boucebi Mahjoud, *Psychiatrie et Societe* (SNED; Algiers).

An Algerian writer, Rachid Boudjedra, published a book where he described the situation of the child of a repudiated mother. It came out in French a few years ago, called *Repudiation*, (Paris).



Cath Jackson

Not feeling very welcome, I arrived at the clinic at the given time. However, the clerk and health visitor were so nice that I began to relax. That is, until they tried to get me to undress and sit around in a narrow public hallway in a terrycloth bathrobe before going in to see the doctor. Now, I don't have anything against terrycloth bathrobes and I'm not shy in front of other women but it does put you at a disadvantage. I mean, I've never laid eyes on this doctor before and our first meeting is to be with her fully clothed and me in a terrycloth bathrobe. I politely declined to undress. (I know I can be surly when ordered to do something I don't like but I think I handled it quite well. "You're not getting me into one of those," I shrieked. No, really I was polite.)

I was soon ushered in to see the doctor. She was reading the medical history the health visitor had taken and without introducing herself or even saying hello, she demanded my general practitioner's (GP's) name. Now, one thing I like about the idea of a Well Woman Clinic is that you can

come and talk about anything that's worrying you and it doesn't go down on your medical records to follow you all through your life and get labelled as this, that or the other. Women have been labelled as neurotic and complainers by doctors for too long. However, I could see right away that I wasn't going to feel like confiding anything in this lady. She was visibly cross that I wouldn't reveal my GP's identity and spent several minutes going on at me in what any objective observer would describe as an aggressive and hostile manner.

"What is all this secretiveness? What if we get a positive result on your smear?" she shouted.

"I assume you'll send me the result so I can go to my GP and get it treated."

"Oh no we wouldn't," she crowed triumphantly. "We'd only send the results to your GP, not to you."

Talk about secretiveness, I thought but kept my cool. Round One was over and she went on to ask when my last period was. Under any other circumstances that question would have been completely neutral. But, in between making the appointment and coming to the clinic, I had miscarried a pregnancy that I'd been excited and thrilled about. Naturally, when I miscarried six weeks after I conceived, I was sad and weepy. Anyone who knows anything about pregnancies knows how common miscarriages are (one in six of all pregnancies) and should know how upsetting they can be. All my friends were sympathetic and supportive and those that had had miscarriages told me all about it. Most likely, the pregnancy wasn't growing properly or no foetus had developed, so it wouldn't have grown into a baby anyway. I wasn't worried about why it had happened, not when it's so common and when it was only my first. But still, four days after the miscarriage, it was a delicate subject.

You can't know you're well

Does this doctor make sympathetic noises, ask how I'm feeling, reassure me that it's very common and that it doesn't mean I won't be able to carry a baby to term?

"Have you been to a doctor about this?" she snapped. I hadn't thought of it as a medical matter, anymore than a period is.

My body takes care of itself all right and I have confidence that I'll heal myself.

"You'll *have* to have a scrape. You don't *know* that everything came out. It's a very minor operation, just one overnight stay." Her voice quivered with contempt at my cowardice and distrust. Glancing down at my medical history, her eyes lit up when she read that my uterus had been perforated by a coil 11 years ago.

"That can't be possible," she cried. "It's very, very rare — only one chance in a million of that happening. You must be mistaken. Explain to me exactly what happened."

Indignant at not being believed, I glared at her. "Actually the incidence of perforation is about two per 1000 insertions of the coil and some studies have found a rate of 8.7 per 1000," I said between clenched teeth and told her my Perforation of the Uterus by a Coil story in medical language so she'd believe me.

"Yes, very rare," she said. "About one in 100,000." I was just about to bargain her down to 1 in 10,000 when she leaned towards me and said, "You'll have great difficulty getting pregnant again. You probably miscarried because of that perforation. You need a D and C and a full check-up. Otherwise you just won't be able to have a baby. You should start antenatal care much earlier and you should have hormone injections to prevent another miscarriage." (How dare you resist our control! If you don't submit to our authority, you will be cursed and cursed be the fruit of your womb!)

"I didn't come here to ask your advice about the miscarriage or even to share my knowledge about coils. I came for a cervical smear."

"I can't do one today because you're still bleeding. You'll have to come back in 2 weeks."

That was my first and last encounter with a Well Woman Clinic. I thought of trying out another Well Woman Clinic to see if the same thing happens. After all, that doctor might just be one bad apple in a huge barrel of good women doctors. Or she might have got out of bed the wrong way that morning. It's possible but I don't really think that's the point. I'm prepared to bet that her

reaction would have been exactly the opposite if I'd gone to the clinic and put myself in her hands.

"I just miscarried a few days ago. Please tell me why. Can you do any tests to find out what caused it? Do you think I'll be all right? How long will I bleed for? Can you examine me to see if it's all over? I'm so worried that I'll never be able to have a baby." And she would have been very reassuring: "Now, now dear, there's nothing to worry about, you were only six weeks pregnant. Miscarriages are very common at this stage and there's no need to get upset. Most women who have early miscarriages go on to have normal, healthy babies. You just take it easy and you'll be perfectly all right."

But I wasn't playing Patient and she just couldn't handle that. I already had some knowledge — gained by listening to other women's experiences, by reading and by respecting my body. It was too threatening to her. It got her so worried about losing her power that she tried to panic me into not trusting my body and into turning over all control to her. And she didn't even feel the need to be responsible about the accuracy of the information she gave to me.

What are Well Woman Clinics really like?

When I've talked to friends about my visit to the Well Woman Clinic, I've discovered something very interesting — everyone had heard of WWCs but nearly all thought they were clinics where you could see a gynaecologist or be referred directly to a specialist without having to go through your GP. They thought you could be treated at the clinic for any kind of woman's complaint and be seen by sympathetic female staff who would allow you plenty of time to talk. A few were under the impression that WWCs have some form of feminist philosophy — emphasising self help, prevention of ill health and control over your body.

In fact, the majority of Well Woman Clinics are funded by the NHS, and these provide preventative services only. They do such screening tests as cervical smears,

"You need a full check-up . . . otherwise you just won't be able to have a baby."

I wasn't playing Patient and she just couldn't handle that.

I could see that I wasn't going to feel like confiding anything in this lady.

The need arises out of women's dissatisfaction with GP services.

breast exams and blood pressure measurements. They claim to offer counselling and time to talk, though for some reason that was omitted from my visit.

Where did these myths come from? In all the literature I've read from WWCs and from campaigns for WWCs, it has been clear that the need for such a service arises out of women's dissatisfaction with GP services. GPs are generally male. They often dismiss, trivialise, or over-react to women's complaints. They tend to be too busy to listen. They ignore or can't relate to the emotional side of any problem. They are predominantly white and middle class and generally intimidating to working class women and Black women. They may block necessary referrals to specialists. They often attribute older women's problems to their age, and younger women's problems to their menstrual cycles. Many are reluctant to do cervical smears. They don't have the time or perhaps the desire to give basic information on health to their patients . . .

All these complaints and more have been revealed in countless surveys throughout the country which demonstrate the need for the Area Health Authorities to fund Well Women Clinics.

Doctor-power and medical ideology

But no AHA can afford to alienate GPs by admitting that women may have a legitimate grievance against them. When they do agree to fund a WWC, they are very careful to create a service that does not tread on the toes of GPs. Doctors at WWCs do not make referrals to specialists. They will write a letter to the woman's GP recommending that the GP refer her if that seems necessary. All screening results are sent straight to the GP, whose responsibility it is to take the next appropriate action. In practice, there is nothing done at a WWC that couldn't be done by a GP. GPs are certainly capable of performing preventative health checks, and many do them willingly. Perhaps the rest need more general training to encourage them to do so. But what about the more serious allegations against doctors — the way they view women and thus any women's health problems that arise? I think this is rooted

in medical ideology and in the power position between men and women in this society. Medical ideology sees women as sick and abnormal. A doctor, health visitor or nurse working in a WWC has been trained by the same system. Being a woman doesn't automatically give her the politics to challenge it.

What happened during my visit was a good example of how difficult it is for a WWC, dominated as it is by medical ideology, to relate to women as well, and as whole people. At no time during the visit did anyone acknowledge that a miscarriage might be emotionally traumatic. So much for being seen as a whole person! An early miscarriage, like menstruation, menopause, pregnancy and childbirth, is not an illness. Physically, mine was no worse than a bad period. Yet this unfortunate but common event had to be built up into a medical *problem* by the WWC doctor. So much for being seen as a well woman!

There are well woman centres, women's health groups and WWC campaigns which have steered clear of health professionals and are working to provide advice and counselling by lay women and self-help groups around particular well- and ill-woman issues. Needless to say, these kinds of groups don't get funding from the AHA and usually have difficulty getting money from anywhere. In terms of providing much needed information and support to women, they are great. Examples are Rochdale Well Woman Centre and Bristol Women's Health Group. Again, these groups cannot offer medical treatment, though they can suggest self-help measures and ways to get round the system.

After my visit to the Well Woman Clinic, I am less than enthusiastic about NHS clinics. What I'd like to see is a strengthening of the women's health movement in terms of support and information for women on what things don't need medical treatment and what things do. At the same time I'd like to see improved training for GPs and encouragement and support for the few GPs, women and men, who do try to challenge their training and to radically change their practice. □

WHITE RACISM: *more than a moral issue*

*How can white women do more than just feel guilty about racism?
Janet Martens and Ruth Frankenberg, using extracts from a conversation, develop ideas they gained from their discussions.*

Ruth: I see a lot of black women and women of colour being very open these days about describing their experiences and trying to articulate what the problems are about the women's movement.

Although there have been occasional contributions by white women, we feel that the pre-dominant response, whether at meetings, or conferences, or in journals, has been one of uncomfortable silence. It seems necessary to understand this silence in order to break it. We hope to open up dialogue about how white feminists can understand and deal with our racism.

We do not want to construct an apology for white feminist racism. We want to begin to explore its dimensions in order to understand where and how as white women we can start to contribute to an active anti-racist feminism. We recognise that in addressing the issue of white feminist racism, we may appear to be taking a 'holier than thou' stance in relation to other white feminists. It is precisely this ideological construction of racism as primarily a moral issue that we want to break from. Racism is far more than a moral issue, it is a systematic form of oppression involving, to name but a few areas: racist state and legal practices, racist media stereotypes and representations, and a racist education system.

Although the discussions we had were largely influenced by the writings of black women and women of colour, some of the themes will in certain aspects be appropriate to the exploration of white feminist racism

in relation to other minority women such as migrant women, Jewish women and Irish women.

The Challenge to Feminism

The writings of black women and women of colour call for a major transformation in feminism. For one thing there is a challenge to look at ourselves, white women, as 'oppressors', structurally; in white feminism we have seen ourselves mainly as oppressed. There's a challenge to re-evaluate ideas and practices in terms of how they have closed the door to women of colour and black women. We are urged to recognise both the notion that there is something specific to our politics because of our histories and present situations, and that there are socially constructed and important limits to our knowledge about other women. Janet: In recognising difference we have to realise that at this moment in history there are things we don't have in common with black women and with women of colour. A lot of us don't want to give up the notion that we can connect with *any* woman.

There's also a challenge to understand racism more fully — since many white women's first and honest response to criticism is 'what, me racist???'. Often as white women our response to criticism over racism is 'well, I didn't *mean* it'. That really is only something that comforts us as white women. We must also recognise how, whatever our intentions, all of our actions occur within a white dominant society and white

When they agree to fund a clinic, they are very careful to create a service that does not tread on the toes of GPs

The women working in Well Woman Clinics have also been trained in a medical ideology which sees women as sick.



Sue Beasley

women must deal with this.

R: Ultimately, however, the challenge is not only to deal with racism and cultural differences as 'topics left out of feminism'. In my personal politics I owe a massive debt to women of colour and black women for not only making me think about race and cultural difference, but also pushing me back to think about differences between white women and to recognise that we need a feminism which acknowledges all kinds of differences between women at the same time as enabling us to support each other and work together. For example, I was working in a collective of women looking at the relationship between welfare systems and women's work — it's women's work which cements welfare state systems to people, because it's women who do all the 'backing and forthing', the mediation. The women of colour on the collective pointed out how much the feminist literature on this kind of issue didn't fit their lives and how much even what we were talking about as a collective didn't adequately discuss the kinds of labour involved in, for example, negotiating two cultures, or teaching their children a strong and good sense of self in a racist environment. The idea of women doing a 'double shift' is inadequate to women who feel they are doing multiple shifts.

Explicitly or implicitly then in responding to what black women and women of colour say, in order to develop our understanding of racism we also see more clearly the various forms of patriarchal power which are exercised differently in relation to different women.

Recognising Our Own Racism

R: The first time I heard anyone say that feminist theory was racist, I really didn't understand what that meant. And I kept thinking: doesn't she realise that I'm a serious feminist — we're different.

J: The issue of racism started coming up in our *Newsletter*. I came away with the impression that I was privileged because I was white — we all were — and that it was almost impossible for white women to have a dialogue with black women and women of colour. I remember thinking, 'that's all true, but what do I do about it?' At the time I

assumed that dealing with that problem meant learning how to 'handle' any relationship I might have with black women and that that was the totality of it.

Since then, I've come to realise it is important to examine institutional racism and my own racism, in terms of privilege — that is, not just to recognise my privilege but to understand how and why it exists and operates . . . I am beginning to recognise how long I have been embedded in racism — how long I have been unconscious of the way in which my understanding of my life as a woman, or of women's issues, has been a white woman's understanding.

I found myself trying to make excuses in my head about it sometimes . . . the city I came from had hardly any black people . . . thinking the issues weren't around me; . . . and then suddenly thinking, what about native Cree women or Ojibway women? I'd totally forgotten about this whole massive population in Canada which just didn't exist, was invisible to me. This only came to me after a meeting where women of colour talked about invisibility — it suddenly struck me like a bang on the head.

R: I had a very segregated upbringing. But at the same time, just because I as an individual did not meet individual black women or women of colour doesn't mean that what happens to me as a white woman doesn't affect what happens to the other women — in the sense that for example, I can buy cheap Indian clothes because of cheap Indian female labour. Or supposing I am on a council housing list, if there's some race discrimination going on in the housing office, then there's a woman of colour or black woman who's below me on that list because she is a woman of colour or a black woman; by the same token I'm higher than her on the list because I'm white. Even if we don't meet each other our situations are inter-woven.

J: What's gone before is based on an assumption of racism being defined as a notion that black people are inferior, so we assume if we don't believe that, we're not racist. But racism is a practice, and racism is also institutionalised structures which force practices, so that sometimes whites are probably engaging in racist practices without recognising them. For example because of

the dictates of a state bureaucracy, welfare officers, medical workers and teachers all function within racist structures which systematically ignore the specific needs of non-white people — and to some extent these workers are supports in perpetuating racism. There are others who anyway are explicitly racist.

In many cases the ways in which we organise our lives, as white women, are very different from the ways in which black women and women of colour organise theirs — hence our political demands as white feminists may not always be appropriate in relation to black women and women of colour's struggles against sexism. Barbara and Beverly Smith illustrate this clearly in their discussion of lesbian separatism in *This Bridge Called My Back*. They see separatism as a political strategy which may be viable for white middle class women but not so viable for black lesbians who must also engage in political struggles against racism — who are also concerned about the way in which black men are victimised by racism, and are then accused of being 'male-identified'.

White feminism constitutes an area of support for white women, in their struggles, but by default it does not provide the same support for black women and women of colour. All this suggests that if the women's liberation movement is about women's struggles against their oppression, then racism must become a movement issue.

In pointing out the inadequacies of white feminism, black women and women of colour are giving us a means to re-define racism — to get beyond a moral definition which engenders guilt and to move towards a political definition which can enable us to develop an active anti-racist politics.

Silence as a Privilege

J: I think to stay silent is to cop out, politically. There's the temptation to back out and leave the struggle around racism to women I feel are stronger, less confused about it.

R: But if you keep silent and wait for somebody else more capable — who is it, where are they? I'm not saying that there are no white women dealing with racism — but few enough that there is no harm in

another two of us doing so.

J: I went to this planning group for a conference on feminism and racism. I just didn't want to appear at those meetings. Because when women of colour turned around and asked 'What do you white women have to contribute?' only one of us — not me — could come up with a reply.

R: We need to ask why we 'get silenced', and that doesn't necessarily mean, 'why are we silenced by black women or women of colour?' I think it often means 'why do we silence ourselves?'

J: I don't think we can ever claim that we're being silenced by black women or women of colour. I think that their challenge raises fear in us and we then silence ourselves.

R: There's such a power imbalance in the larger society. On the whole it's white people and institutionalised racism who silence and make invisible women of colour and black women. When we respond to them with silence, it is not the result of conditions they have created, but results from the context of white racism and institutionalised racism, within which we meet.

We can make a distinction between why we stay silent in racially mixed groups and why we don't speak to each other as white



women. In mixed groups white women may keep silent out of fear of saying the wrong thing, because of feelings of guilt, because of not wanting to admit to our own racism, ie, of having a shaming experience. Or it may be the result of not knowing how to respond to other women's anger, or feeling we have nothing to contribute, or because we still see it as a problem 'out there' — because we have not yet faced up to our own involvement in racism as a system.

Some of the same factors might explain why white women do not often talk to each other about white feminist racism. Other issues may be a lack of trust or fear of challenging friendships, which discourages us both from exploring our own racism with help from other white women and from challenging white women over racist attitudes and practices. We may fear what women will do with what we say if we admit to racism, or that no-one else shares our experience, even of plain old racial segregation ie, like growing up in a largely white area, having few if any friends who were black. Of course, when we do talk, we find enormous areas in common.

By operating on a moral definition of the status quo, we can actually make anti-racist struggle impossible for white feminism. One thing that makes it possible to be less silent is having support from other women. Differences between white women — especially class differences — also affect our ability to speak to each other about racism.



J: For me, silencing is a very comprehensive thing and I'm just beginning to break that. I can't divorce it from my own experiences as a foreigner and as a working class woman . . . But my silences as working class and as a foreigner had to do with oppression, whereas silence about racism has to do with a privilege. How does it feel different? I go silent because I feel as though there's nothing I can think, say or do that has any meaning in that context . . . because I'm white, privileged . . . The silencing mechanism may be different for women of different classes. For some middle class women it could be a sort of liberalism and for working class women it might be simply not feeling like you have a justification to speak anyway. We start with a whole history of being silenced, or feeling inadequate, stupid, or inarticulate in relation to middle class women. Middle class women don't start with that history, at least in the feminist movement. Any means of tackling silence has to consider differences of class.

R: Keeping silent is a privilege — in the sense that if a white woman doesn't say anything about racism, she can still have her race privilege. Obviously, it's also a delicate issue for black women and women of colour when they start talking about racism, especially in a predominantly white context. There is no guarantee they will be heard or understood by white women. But it's a risk that a lot of black women and women of colour feel now that they have to take. It shows some sense of hope from a feminist point of view that they do so. And it's really important that white women reply.

J: In terms of inter-personal relationships, if I express what I feel in a relationship with somebody, I give them the power to do what they want with it — to accept it, reject it, let it shape how they respond to me, rely on me, whatever . . . And if they respond to me in silence, they take away power from me. There's no equal negotiation going on. In a political situation, if you feel you put yourself on the line by expressing a position on something, into what feels like a political vacuum, it must feel as though you are giving up power, or that, even if you are saying something that might have been important — if you are not

responded to, it's 'disempowered' anyway . . . silence is a very powerful weapon, to keep people in their place, vulnerable because their needs and problems are visible to you and you don't express similar personal statements about yourself.

R: Silence on either side would maintain the status quo, and it's a status quo that works in favour of white women.

Moving On

We consider that there is both a division of labour and a time dimension to confronting racism. Some struggles are best taken on by white women, some by women of colour and/or black women and some in broader coalitions of women of colour, black women and white women. Who does what depends also on whether coalitions can or do exist, and we feel that partly depends on how far white women have begun to work against racism within our political communities. It is important for us to think about where and how we can take initiatives. Crucially, issues do not just concern 'the black community' or relationships between the state and people of colour, but involve also asking questions about ourselves as white people.

R: Part of what white women have to contribute is to look back at our lives and look at the anatomy of segregation, race privilege, the ways that we have been able to avoid noticing things, to begin asking why. Women of colour and black women can and do alert us to the things that happened to them in the same city that we grew up in and that we never noticed, or in the same movement, and give us a sense of what it is that we failed to see. But we can't expect women of colour or black women to go back over our own lives for us and work these things out. It's just not possible.

J: There's enough material around already published by black women and women of colour to make us recognise how unseeing we can be — to construct a context within which we have to examine our racism. The publications I've read have raised challenges which opened doors in my head. In particular *This Bridge Called My Back* and *Ain't I A Woman* made me think not only of the limitations of white feminism but also of the way in which we

white women have expected black women and women of colour to teach us about our racism and to lead us out of it.

I think it is hard to set agendas before we have explored the terrain of racism. And I also think it is not up to us to set agendas, but it's not up to us not to.

It is still possible for us to imagine different kinds of work. We can envisage offering solidarity on specific issues where the initiative comes from black women or women of colour — for example over violence against women *within* their communities. In that context, white women would need to get into discussion with the women who initiated the action, to find out what is the most appropriate way to give support.

R: We need to be sure that if white women support these struggles, it is not done in a spirit of feeling that non-white cultures are much more oppressive to women than white cultures. This has been a common attitude among white feminists, and we fear that many still hold to it. Because there's a whole colonial history which has left a powerful legacy in the way we think.

J: Over other issues though, such as reproductive rights, state racism and sexism, we can envisage white women being involved in developing coalition: with an awareness that there are limits to the applicability of whatever we might think of as a strategy, and being open to being told what the limits are; with a commitment to work through



**WELL, SHALL WE GO WITH
THOSE THAT SPEAK AND
WON'T LISTEN, OR TO THOSE
THAT WILL LISTEN BUT
WON'T SPEAK?**



the issues of why there are differences, why there's something left out of white feminist strategies and what it is.

On a more local, small scale, there are opportunities to make racism a white woman's problem, in workplaces, law centres, refuges, and local campaigns, and so on. As white women we need to think ahead and learn from what has happened in other women's centres, groups, etc, and look and see what could have been done differently. We need to learn how to broaden the basis of any organisation we're in. And to recognise that doing so will transform the organisation rather than just adding to it. One means of doing this is to encourage women to share their experiences of mistakes and successes in mixed feminist groups that they've been involved in.

The whole organisation of the women's movement can be challenged if we start from the premise that we have to overhaul every aspect of it. Because we know enough at this point to suspect that most of it is culturally and racially specific. For example, Hazel Carby has looked at feminist analysis of 'the family', Angela Davis at 'abortion' versus 'reproductive rights', to name only two pieces of written work that white women might turn to as starting points.

If our fight against sexism is constructed simply on the demands and issues raised by white middle class women, then we'll be engaging in a very partial challenge to patri-

archy. White dominated patriarchy effects different forms of violence and oppression for different categories of women. To illustrate this we can imagine a sexist advertisement, showing a white woman in a posh kitchen with all the mod-cons. This advertisement will have different meanings and effects on different women. For a white middle class woman, to whom such mod-cons are accessible, the terms of access implied in the advertisement will be oppressive, i.e. housewife, housebound, women's labour. To a white working class feminist this advertisement would be oppressive both because such mod-cons are inaccessible to her in the first place, and because the advert implies that women's place is in the kitchen/home. To a black feminist or woman of colour feminist, this advert is oppressive because it doesn't even acknowledge the existence of black women or women of colour, it is oppressive because these mod-cons are inaccessible to most black women and women of colour, and it is oppressive because it constructs the white middle class woman housebound/housewife as the ideal female image in British society.

An anti-racist feminist analysis would have to extend beyond this minimal recognition of the different oppressive effects of an advertisement constructed out of white male patriarchal ideology. It would have to examine the imperialist setting for such an advertisement (i.e. what makes the position of a middle class housewife an economic possibility?), and the terms of inclusion and exclusion of this advertisement. If a black woman were, through an anti-racist tokenism, placed in this advert, what would her 'position' be, how might she be westernised and her specific identity as a black woman be undermined, and would she be placed within the same sexist terms of reference as the white woman?

The development of an anti-racist feminism will make it necessary for us to raise a vast number of questions and challenges to patriarchal power which might not have been relevant to the struggles of white middle class women, but which are nonetheless absolutely necessary to a comprehensive struggle against patriarchal oppression and in the interest of women's liberation. □

MAKERS OF MEN

Men's banding together in trade unions is often explained (if not forgiven) by a need to prevent their employers using cheap unskilled female labour to undercut their wages. Margaret Littlewood has been studying the National Association of Schoolmasters in the 1920s and '30s and found instead a situation where men, in a minority, struggled against militant, unionised women, many of whom were better educated than the men themselves. Why and how were the men so successful in asserting themselves that the NAS has come to be the second largest union in the profession?

"Let me wish everyone of you the happiest of times, wherever you spend them, so that you will return with renewed vigour and enthusiasm for the greatest job in the world — the making of men." With these words the President of the National Association of Schoolmasters (NAS) wished his members a good summer holiday in 1935.

The President had some cause for satisfaction. In the twelve years of the men's union's separate existence, he had seen its membership double, from 5,000 in 1923 to a claimed 10,000 in the mid-thirties. This was a small proportion of the total number of elementary teachers, three-quarters of whom were women and thus ineligible to join, but it did represent a quarter of the men in elementary teaching.

The reason why the NAS felt that men teachers needed a separate union to represent their interests was simple: they felt their position in teaching was being threatened by an upsurge of 'militant feminism' within the occupation.

The largest teaching union, the National Union of Teachers (NUT), whose membership was open to teachers of both sexes, had come out in favour of equal pay for

men and women in 1919, as the result of a prolonged campaign by women teachers within the union. Women teachers saw their struggle within the NUT as an intrinsic part of the wider women's movement's concern for full political, social and economic parity with men, symbolised at the time by gaining the vote. But some of its feminist members, faced with consistent male hostility to their demands (most of the union's conference delegates and executive committee were men), decided to form their own separate union, the National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT), whose members were to be exclusively women. The NUWT published its own journal (*The Woman Teacher*), organised petitions and mass meetings, communicated its ideas through a column in a general educational journal *The Schoolmistress*, which claimed to have the largest circulation of all educational magazines among women teachers, and even managed to persuade some local authorities to pay men and women the same on the lower end of the salary scale.

Faced with feminist pressure from outside and inside teaching, men teachers started to meet in small groups in the cities

Men's position in teaching was said to be threatened by an upsurge of 'militant feminism'

Bell Hooks: *Ain't I a Woman?*, Pluto Press, 1982.

Hazel Carby, 'White Women Listen', 'Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood', in Centre for Contemporary Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back* (Hutchison, 1982).

Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (The Women's Press, 1982).

Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds), *This Bridge Called my Back* (Persephone Press, 1981).

The possibilities before the ambitious man are endless.



Men teachers used arguments based on their own inferiority to justify higher salaries than women.

as early as 1913 to see how they could counteract this threat to their privileged status. By 1919, alarmed by the success of those they called "the worst group of profiteers that took advantage of the war to extort money", they had formed their own separate organisation within the NUT, and in 1922 they voted to leave to form their own separate union to defend their gender-based interests.

On the surface it seemed they could not have picked a worse time to leave the shelter of the main union, the NUT. The optimism which led to hopes of an expansion of education at the end of the First World War, had given way to recession. Teachers of both sexes were faced with a proposed contraction of educational provision, especially in elementary education, and a threatened cut of their salaries. As local authorities desperately tried to cut their educational budgets, there was a danger that the increased employment of women teachers at their lower salary levels might prove more attractive than the employment of more expensive men.

In these circumstances it would seem logical that men and women teachers should stand together to argue for a common salary scale and to oppose cuts in expenditure. Women teachers, after all, had proved themselves active unionists, militant in support of their claims. But instead of uniting with their women colleagues, the NAS chose this time to split the ranks of elementary teachers even further, and to argue their case for keeping and extending the privileged position of the male.

The Need to Attract Ambitious Men

The NAS argued that men needed higher wages to ensure an adequate supply of men into elementary teaching. They argued that "with the rapid development of all kinds of new industries demanding intellectual attainment of no mean order and offering substantial financial rewards, the possibilities before the ambitious man are endless" (*Equal Pay and the Teaching Profession*, 1921). Many of these 'highly paid callings' deliberately excluded women, leaving educated women of the working and lower middle classes with far fewer employment opportunities. Men in these occupations supported equal pay for men and women

workers; but this, according to the NAS, was not through any support of feminist principles, but was rather an attempt to exclude women further from well-paid craft and industrial jobs. Because women were substantially in the minority in such work, equal pay meant that the female rate of pay was increased to that of the male. Employers, themselves men, were reluctant to employ women workers at these increased wages. Thus women were forced out of industry and into the major occupation open to talented girls of the working class — elementary teaching. Since women teachers were essential for the education of girls, men teachers could not use the same exclusionary tactics as their industrial brothers. Instead they sought the integration of women into teaching on radically different terms from men.

Teaching thus attracted adequate numbers of women, many of whom were better educated and came from a slightly higher class background than the available men, who were mainly recruited from the artisan working class. According to Sir Robert Blair, Education Officer for the London County Council, "the character and ability of the women obtained for the women's salaries is in advance of those of the men attained on the men's scale". The NAS argued that relatively low rates of pay in teaching would attract only "the unambitious man of low mental power and low attainment . . . content with the narrow limits of his chosen trade" (*Equal Pay*, 1921). This meant that the education of boys would be of a lesser quality than that of girls, as they "have not only an inferior type of teacher but (these) teachers (have) to work under greater mental stress and consequently lessened resiliency of mind" (*New Schoolmaster*, 1922). This argument reverses the normal economic reasoning, where workers argue their superiority over others to justify higher differentials in pay. Instead the schoolmasters were using arguments about their own *inferiority* to justify larger salaries for themselves, and to widen the gap even further between male and female rates of pay.

A Married Wage for Married Men

Men centred their arguments not on their competence as teachers, but on the

distinct roles men and women had within the family. Men needed more money in order to keep a wife and children at home. All men were potential husbands and fathers, so even a bachelor needed more money than his single sister. "Upon him still rests the initiative in marriage and . . . the responsibility for preparing the home and subsequently maintaining it" (*NS*, Nov. 1922).

But marriage, actual or presumptive, did not only justify a higher male wage, it also defined married men as better teachers. "There are few men and few women so gifted as teachers that they would not be improved through marriage and parenthood" (*NS*, Nov. 1922). As well as throwing doubt on the competence of women teachers, as marriage was increasingly becoming a bar on their employment as teachers, this claim also placed all men firmly in a particular relation of heterosexuality. There was no place for the homosexual man who wished not to marry, and more importantly there was no room for the homosexual. The recognised existence of such men would have badly undermined the schoolmasters' case for a family wage payable to all men, irrespective of their actual marital status.

What this presumption of heterosexuality did was enable men teachers to present themselves as the champion of true womanhood against the desexed, celibate advocates of female equality. For the NAS, "a woman's vital force can, and generally does, pour itself into motherhood . . . the *best women* find motherhood and prefer to find in it their chief work and their most absorbing interest" (*Equal Pay*, 1921, emphasis in the original).

Women's True Sphere is as Wives

Equally women needed to give unstinting support to their husbands. Women were not excluded from the pages of the union journal; instead they were ever present, praised for their supporting role. Men's lives, they were told, revolved around three categories: "earning a living, home life, and associate life, by which we mean that co-operative activity, which makes for evolutionary progress in society" (*NS*, Jan. 1922). The latter meant the schoolmaster's union activity, which often necessitated long absences from home. In case wives became dissatisfied with this

state of affairs, they were assured that home and family came first and "the very existence of the Association was largely bound up with the recognition of this hallowed claim" (*NS*, Jan. 1922).

The schoolmasters vehemently defended themselves against charges of sex-hatred. No-one, they claimed, was second to them in their respect for the female sex.

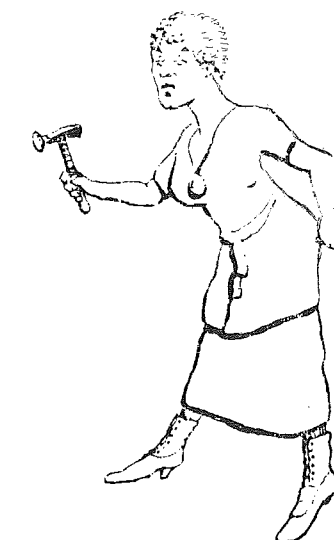
For women men have fought and died, in women poets and writers have found inspiration, without women there can be neither home nor family, in and through women lies the Nation's hope and future moral and spiritual ascendancy . . . Men cannot withhold from her anything that is good for her or give her anything that is bad for her without injuring themselves and their children (*Equal Pay*, 1921).

But, as the second part of this quote assumes, the relationship between men and women was essentially hierarchical. A man's job was "to train a wife and children in the way they are to go".

Woman's true sphere was therefore a man's home. Her interests were best represented by a wage paid to her husband so she could devote herself to her family's welfare. But it was important to the men that their wives had a standard of living equal, if not superior, to that of single woman teachers. If single blessedness was as lucrative as married bliss, then women might refuse to enter these relations of subordination and either refuse marriage, or, if married, refuse to give up their occupation. For despite their assertion of the biological necessity of a maternal instinct, the NAS was uncertain whether women would actually choose motherhood, and marriage unconsecrated by children was hardly a marriage at all: "Nearly all men want children . . . and in every childless marriage the difficulty lies with the woman . . . We all know women who openly say they do not want to give up a lucrative profession or to be hampered in it" (*NS*, June 1922).

Fit Education for Boys and Girls

The presence in teaching of large numbers of women actively pursuing their careers and fighting for equality with men therefore undermined the relation of patriarchal domination on which the men's economic arguments were based. These women, the schoolmasters argued, were a product of the education system. It was not so much



No self respecting boy will willingly submit to spinster authority.

that the men felt girls should not be educated, but that the process was fraught with danger. For men, education was "a mere extension of character . . . Education will not change him as a man"; but educational systems "changed the natures of many of the women subjected to them. They produce a type, a physical and mental type which is distinct from womanhood as a whole. The modern educated woman is . . . an artificial product" (NS, Jan. 1922). In other words, education produced women who claimed equality with men.

But if girls were threatened by the very processes of education, boys were equally at risk if they came under the influence of women teachers after the age of seven. The union maintained that although

in the matter of managing and instructing young children the sex of a person may matter but little . . . in the great task of educating children the sex of the teacher is of paramount importance. The character of children is the essential consideration, and the essentials of character lie in the sex of the person (NS, Nov. 1936).

This assertion was linked to theories of natural development.

All through winter nature is quietly, secretly preparing the blossom that bursts forth with almost startling suddenness in the spring. So in the immature human being we can discern a rhythmic development years before adolescence comes upon them. During these years preceding adolescence, so vitally important in character forming, so impressionable, so open to suggestion, irreparable harm may be done by the wrong influence, the wrong environment, the wrong viewpoint. In the case of young boys, well meaning and conscientious women teachers may do endless harm (NS, May 1935).

To understand the nature of the harm that women teachers did to young boys we must understand the nature of the masculinity put forward by men teachers.

Protecting Boys' Masculinity

The first, but subsidiary point was that masculinity was essentially physical and located in the body. There was a great emphasis on sport and physical exercise in the development of healthy boyhood, but this physical exercise had to take place in an exclusively male environment. The presence of women and girls hindered the development of boy's masculine pride in

his superior strength and agility. Women teachers could and did coach successful football teams, but the good that they did was overshadowed by the embarrassment caused by the supervision of women in this, "one of the most vital and intimate parts of school life" (NS, Nov. 1936). Instead of developing a healthy pride in his body, the presence of women and girls made the young boy feel awkward and ashamed.

What underlay this argument, despite a proclaiming of the joys of heterosexuality, was an intense fear of sexual relations and a neurotic avoidance of the opposite sex. Mixed education in any subject was to be avoided.

From the age of six or seven until the later teens boys tend to avoid girls. They have little in common and no amount of experimenting will alter facts. Most of us have seen the sturdy youngster standing red faced and awkward with his unwilling partner at a school carnival. Those who have taught in a school know that when there is an association of the sexes, it is frequently of a sly and furtive nature of which the youth and girls are later heartily ashamed. Those of us who have had much experience of Evening Institute are aware of the difficulties arising when there are mixed classes of fourteen and fifteen year olds (NS, May 1936).

But if the mere presence of women and girls so crucially affected male sexual development, the most devastating effect on the emergence of a healthy male sexuality was created by having a woman in authority, i.e. by a woman teaching in a class where boys were present. In these circumstances, the schoolmasters argued, "Boy nature will out. If it does not, the man will never grow to full stature." The picture that emerges of 'boy nature' is an attractive one: a generous and warm child motivated by a sense of adventure and fun, in marked contrast to girls, 'the sensible sex' (NS, 1937). Boys were essentially anarchic and anti-authoritarian. They pitted themselves against the petty restrictions and rules of society, not because of innate viciousness but because of high spirits and a lively sense of mischief. They were true innocents, to be understood and guided rather than restricted and controlled.

The young boy's first rebellion was essentially against the authority of his

mother, at about seven years old. But at this age he was also placed under the control of celibate women in the elementary school, where he naturally rebelled. No self-respecting boy, the schoolmasters argued, would willingly submit to this 'spinster authority', and the scene was set for a bitter classroom battle leading to the breakdown of good classroom relations and law and order in the school.

Too Strict and Too Lax

Celibate women, the men argued, were by nature unable to understand the masculine need for constructive freedom. This lack of understanding and acceptance of the boy's anarchic lawlessness created the super-masculine figures of juvenile delinquency, the 'gangster and the hooligan', whose existence was a 'message'. "They give evidence of a lack of understanding in the past; they show us traits that have been neglected and so have found morbid expression" (NS, May 1936).

The 'gangster and the hooligan' however, were, at least recognisably masculine, even though their maleness was expressed in violent and anti-social ways. What to the schoolmasters was worse, was the castrating effects of 'spinster authority'. As one delegate to the 1936 NAS conference put it, "I have witnessed the process of nipping out by Miss Teacher of the budding shoots of young manhood" (NS, May 1936). Interpreting high spirits as an evil nature, the woman teacher tended to exercise her authority in an inflexible manner. Rigid, petty and restrictive, she effectively dammed the course of healthy male development. A boy taught by a woman, it was argued, had the manliness knocked out of him because of the harshness of female treatment. This led to his becoming 'unnaturally subdued':

He is intimidated, humiliated, has every emotion under intense control - hence the outburst of nervous excitement in the playground. He is easily distinguished from the seemingly rougher but more naturally active boy trained by the schoolmaster (NS, Feb. 1936).

A woman teacher could also metaphorically castrate the young boys in her care in other ways too. Women were

attacked by their men colleagues for being too soft as well as too harsh. Women teachers were among the pioneers of progressive education, with its emphasis on the free development of every child. Such methods of education were alright in the infant school, but the NAS opposed their application for boys over seven. Junior school teaching, they argued, called for a more formal approach with a greater emphasis on concentration and a higher level of self-control. In *this* context, women teachers were seen as too lax, not demanding high enough levels of achievement. They thus infantilised and effeminised the growing boy.

The plain truth is that boys of normal make-up will inevitably associate instruction by women with their experiences as infants. There is a type of man, well known to the medical psychologist, and marked by a long dependence on maternal care. This type assumes a wholly wrong attitude towards women, but some women like it. One of the biggest dangers of having women as teachers of boys is that the mother dependant type will become more common (NS, July 1935).

The Superiority of Men Teachers for Boys

Men teachers offered neither the petty restriction of female authority nor the undemanding routine of the feminine infant school, but the 'free atmosphere' of a classroom controlled by a man. A boy past the infant stage "no longer looks towards his mother . . . for help and guidance, he wants to associate exclusively with boys, he looks forward to entering a class taught by a man" (NS, May 1936). Boys thus "invite the leadership of a man" (NS, April 1937). The boy "needs as a guide and a friend, one who can put himself in the same position; one who has passed through the same experiences and understand his peculiar problems" (NS, May 1936). "Men know by instinct that the urge to endeavour and adventure which leads to mischief is a spiritual quality which can only be understood adequately by a kindred spirit" (NS, Feb. 1937).

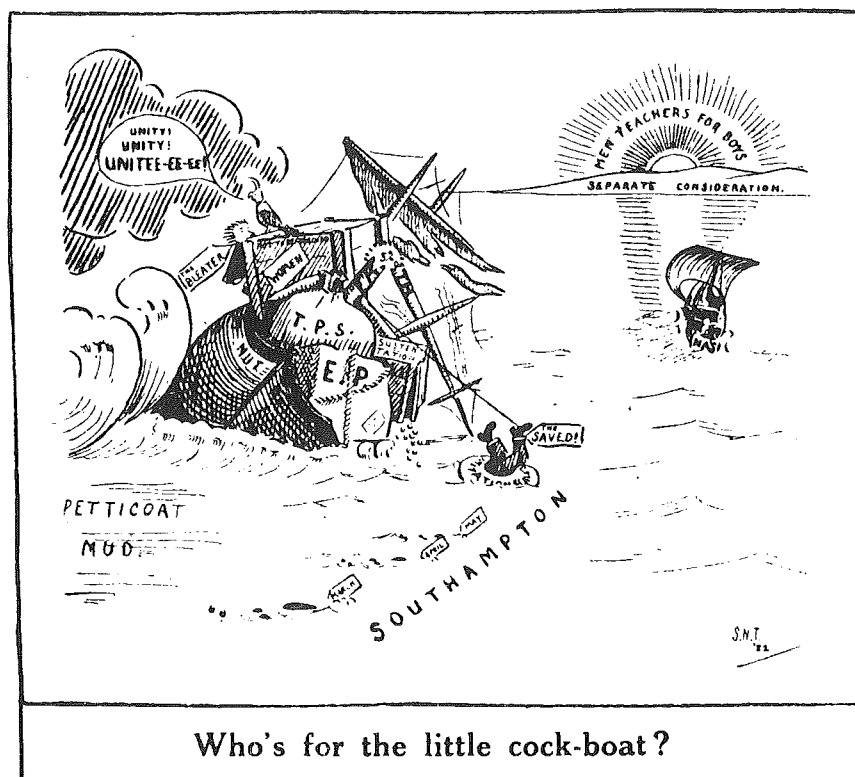
As the Bishop of Sheffield told the NAS 1936 conference, "The great secret of teaching is the love of the boy" (NS, May 1936). The relationship between master and

True venom was kept for the woman PE inspector.

Women are not excluded from the pages of the union journal; they are ever present, praised for their role as wives.

Schoolmasters wives should have a standard of living equal, if not superior to that of the single woman teachers

A boy taught by a woman has the manliness knocked out of him.



Who's for the little cock-boat?

boy was characterised by the union as a 'friendly intimacy', possible only with a man teacher. "It is not possible with a woman teacher, and it would be highly undesirable if it were possible" (NS, Dec. 1936).

Despite the use of the words 'love' and more especially 'intimacy' to describe the feelings between schoolmaster and pupil, it would be difficult to characterise this relationship as homoerotic, however, for sexuality and the awareness of sexuality were consistently only associated with the presence of women and girls. The all-male school environment was seen instead as essentially an asexual Garden of Eden, where the relation between men and boy was formed around a 'spiritual' bond based on mutual identification.

A deliberate policy of non-co-operation with any woman appointed to the headship of a mixed school.

The Quest for Promotion — The Construction of Patriarchal Relations Between Men and Women Teachers

But in this paradise lurked a serpent. Not just the spinster teacher — but the spinster teacher who sought authority over the man.

If the authority of women over boys threatened the development of masculinity in the school, how much greater was the threat of the appointment of a woman head over men teachers! The raising of the spinster teacher over the married man was denounced as an 'anti-social absurdity' by the union (NS, March 1935). "The relationship between master and boy is so intimate that the man, especially the young man, cannot get spiritual support if the leadership of a school is entrusted to a woman head." (NS, Nov. 1936).

The problem for the NAS was that there was a considerable temptation for local authorities to do precisely this. Single sex schools, especially junior schools, were being combined to form mixed sex schools and experienced and qualified women were available for promotion at a lower salary than the equivalent men.

Local authorities were reminded, therefore, that "sex was a dynamic force in the expression of personality", and of "the immense importance of the separate but complimentary parts men and women must play in the world of teaching" (NS, Nov. 1936). This complementarity was not however one between equals. Instead, it was argued, "Few men would willingly serve under a headmistress, and if such schools are to be staffed with the right kind of schoolmasters, a man head is essential" (NS, May 1936). "What right has any administration to rob boys up to eleven of men teachers even if women can take corner kicks or illustrate a tackle. Under male heads, staffing problems in mixed schools largely disappear, school atmosphere develops as it should" (NS, Nov. 1936). As the union pointed out, "there never has been any unwillingness on the part of a woman teacher to serve under a headmaster" (NS, May 1936).

What this amounted to was a deliberate policy of non-cooperation with any woman appointed to the headship of a mixed sex school. Although this attitude was denounced as extreme and a form of sex-hatred by some local authorities, who pointed out that if trained and competent women were available at a lower price than men, they owed a duty to their rate payers

to appoint them. Such authorities had to count the cost of the disruption caused to schools by the appointment of women over staffs adamantly opposed to women heads.

Not only women headmistresses excited NAS hatred. Women doctors in the school medical services required boys of secondary school age to "submit in the nude for inspection" (NS, May 1935). But the most volatile and explosive issue of all was the appointment of women to the inspectorate with special responsibility for handicraft and physical education. That women should invade such traditional male preserves of woodwork and metal work was bad enough, but true venom was kept for the woman PE inspector. "Professional men carrying on their professional work are 'examined' by women even in the most intimate areas of the curriculum" (NS, Feb. 1935).

That the authoritative female gaze should examine and evaluate male physical prowess was more than the men of the NAS could stand. A true woman would shrink from such employment through natural delicacy; hence the inspectorate only attracted hybrids of 'muscular femininity' (NS, July 1935). In 1935 the proceedings of the NAS conference were halted to show solidarity with a NAS hero, an ex-navy married man and champion boxer, who lost his job rather than submit to such an unnatural inspection.

Conclusion: Fifty Years On

The NAS justified its separate existence because it specifically defended the position of the man in teaching. The largest teaching union, the NUT, merely used

the married man's financial responsibilities to raise the salaries of unmarried women . . . how does the NUT present the man's case. Does it retain the Junior Boys' Schools for him? Does it keep all avenues of promotion open to him? Does it preserve him from the matriarchal headmistress? Does it fight for his retention in the village school? Has it helped him ward off the physical education instructress or female organiser? Does it raise a hand against inspectors of handicrafts — of all subjects in the world — of the opposite sex? (NS, 1937).

This attack on the NUT could hardly be justified by feminist activity on the part of

that union. Although it never changed its policy on equal pay for teachers of the same professional standing, the union did not press women's issues during the depression of the twenties and thirties. Instead it sought to maintain professional unity against threats to teachers' salaries and cuts in educational provision, avoiding any issue which would alienate its male membership.

The fate of the separatist women's union was no more encouraging. Although still arguing the case for the full inclusion of women in all areas of public life and for equality between the sexes, it found difficulty in recruiting new members. Its decline accelerated after the Second World War and it disbanded in 1961 when equal pay was finally implemented in the teaching profession.

The subsequent history of the NAS is in sharp contrast. From a membership of 5,000 in 1922, it grew consistently. By 1960 it had gained representation on the Burnham Committee, which negotiates teachers' salaries, and it is now the second largest teaching union.

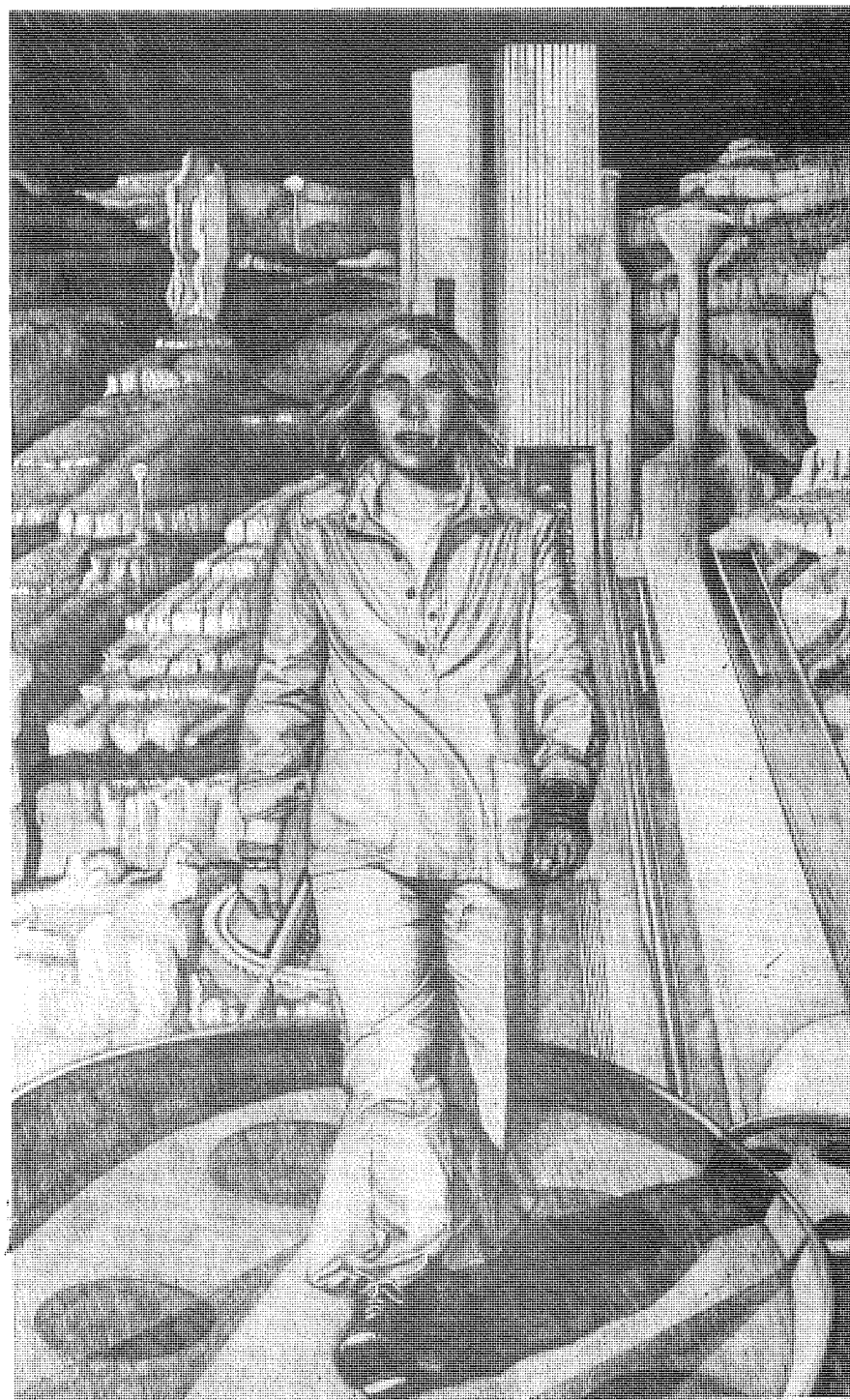
The existence of the NAS cannot be argued away as the attempt of men to protect themselves from an influx of cheap female labour which threatened to undercut the male rates of pay. It was true that the government and local authorities did use women, both qualified and unqualified, as a source of cheap labour in the schools, particularly in the early twenties; but it was women teachers who militantly organised to prevent this. It was the militance of these women, directly challenging the subordination of women, which caused the formation of the men's union to defend masculine interests.

The 1920s and '30s thus saw the emergence in teaching of a group of men organised around the principles of male domination both in the schools and in family life, whose ideology and teaching practices were even more patriarchal than that of the State. The male backlash was institutionalised and has remained both in the schools and in the union structure of teaching. □

Men organised around the principles of male domination both in the schools and in family life; they were even more patriarchal than the State, their employer.

The NUT sought unity and avoided any issue which would alienate its male membership — like equal pay.

Quotations and illustrations are taken from *Equal Pay and the Teaching Profession*, 1921, the first of a series of booklets on equal pay, published by the NAS; and their journal, *New Schoolmaster*, published monthly in the 1920s and '30s.



Judy Stevens

Ruth Wallsgrove celebrates the return to print of her favourite radical feminist book, Joanna Russ' 'The Female Man' — the sci-fi novel dedicated to the "one and three quarter billions of us".

The Four Lives Of Joanna

Recently Sara Maitland — herself a feminist novelist — wrote in a review of the latest book by Zoe Fairbairns that she was "still waiting for a really creative radical feminist novel". Zoe is a good example of someone who has not just written 'how I discovered feminism' novels. She has very successfully, in terms of sales and getting the message across, used several other 'genres': the detective story (*Here Today*), the family saga (*Stand We At Last*) and (in *Benefits*) science fiction. But you never doubt she's self-consciously taking on the genres to take feminism into new markets. Other feminist novelists have been less inventive than this with form, and there are — I agree — only a very few candidates for either a really creative or a really radical feminist novel.

The Female Man is surely one of them. It's extremely 'playful', 'visionary', 'inventive' and 'sensational' (I'm quoting from its back cover), and at the same time it analyses just what it is that men do to women, and what our choices are in response, personally and politically.

I suppose it doesn't compare with, say, *The Women's Room* for getting to women 'out there'. It must be one of the best selling feminist novels — but not necessarily to women. It occurred to me that the reason it has only just been reprinted by a feminist publisher in this country is because it's already been in mass, even pulp, circulation. It was available in newsagents when Virago was a baby.

It's a novel in which we're shown the utter reasonableness of tearing a man to pieces with your bare hands — and yet it has a couple of raves from male reviewers on the back. There's nothing else quite like it — except perhaps her other brilliant sci-fi novel that turns its attentions to 'nice', as opposed to ordinarily horrible men, *The Two Of Them*.

The Female Man doesn't 'use the science fiction form'. It is science fiction, and was published by a regular sci-fi publisher (with a regular sci-fi-sexist cover). Joanna Russ became a successful sci-fi writer in the early '70s, and *The Female Man* even won the — wait for it — 'Nebula Award' for best sci-fi novel of its year.

Science fiction has increasingly tackled political questions, which it can do well precisely because it isn't tied to describing what exists, and yet it does have rules. Things don't 'just happen' in sci-fi any more than in reality. Feminists such as Zoe Fairbairns and Marge Piercy have seen in it possibilities for exploring tendencies in our own society — and yet they don't quite catch how challenging it's become. They tell us regular stories, really. In 'New Wave' sci-fi a major point is that you don't necessarily know 'when you start' who's talking, in what world or what consciousness; and unravelling that — and therefore understanding how much it matters who's doing the talking — counts for as much as a 'plot'.

My favourite sci-fi short stories include one by Ursula Le Guin about animal, vegetable and mineral languages as described in an academic journal, and one by James Tiptree Jr. (who is not a man) seen entirely through the eyes of a being whose every emotion is determined by its biology, although it (and we) don't realise this at first. Curiously, the more obviously feminist of their stories are less experimental. *The Female Man*, on the other hand, is surely the peak of Joanna Russ' 'New Wave' experiments.

"Janet: This must be a man. I got off its desk."

The basic idea — which perhaps does



require a wasted adolescence reading sci-fi if you are to get it first time — is of four different versions of perhaps the same genetic woman, all Js, three of whom are 'female men' in different ways, all refusing to see themselves as the Other Half to men:

If we are all Mankind, it follows . . . that I too am a man and not at all a woman, for honestly now, whoever heard of Java Woman and existential Woman and the values of Western Woman and scientific Woman and alienated nineteenth century woman and all the rest of that dingy and antiquated rag-bag. All the rags in it are White, anyhow.

The book uses a standard sci-fi device, the idea of 'parallel universes', but, like the rest of the best of the 'New Wave', isn't about that. It's about — how men treat women; about sexual harassment, marriage, prostitution, 'careers'; about what women have to do to survive in worlds they don't define — and about whether we should adopt masculine strategies to beat men. One character, the one J who has no sense that being a woman in a man's world is what she's suffering from, is shown being ground down from her independence to the point of giving in and agreeing to marriage. But then she sides with the J who says there's no solution but killing all men, is less fooled (in some ways) about men than her more 'liberated' version. The book is wonderfully ambiguous about whether men can change — but *not* about asking them nicely. I doubt Joanna Russ ever asks 'nicely'.

The Female Man is an interesting contrast to Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, in this and other ways. Just as in Piercy's novel, there is a future heaven and a future hell; and in both the parallel universes idea is used to make a political point out of a sci-fi whim — that what you chose to do at any moment creates two worlds, one where you did something and one where you didn't. As both authors describe it, we as women *can* choose, we *can* create the future. But in Russ' heaven the women are quarrelsome and the penalty for refusing to believe that anyone else exists is death; and in her future hell — which in many respects is far more bearable than her 1950s-present for women — the men's 'women' really are all men, one of the Js enjoys murder and fucks a (man-shaped) robot. You could never accuse

Joanna Russ of being pompous or worthy. And her heaven is certainly not dull, nor her hell hopeless.

"Jael: I don't give a damn whether it was necessary or not. I liked it."

I wish to claim it as an utterly radical feminist novel — not revolutionary feminist, or lesbian feminist, certainly not matriarchalist or 'Society's-the-problem-ist'. It's a creature very much of its own time, the early '70s (and obviously written by a woman who had believed she could be a 'liberated' professional in the '60s). Women in it aren't spiritual or non-aggressive, or 'naturally' lesbian (though they certainly aren't naturally heterosexual, either). It doesn't put forward sexuality, however you define it, as 'the' key, though it is very moving about women making love and about heterosexuality under men's control. Rather, the basic problem is that men have the power to define women, as Simone de Beauvoir had stressed. That women are defined in terms of men, as always 'complementary' to men, as Not-Men — hence, of course, the title, women *not* being Not-Men.

The form of the novel in this case, is part and parcel with the content: that our environment creates our consciousness. J (genetically Joanna Russ, presumably) *isn't* the same woman in the four worlds (and in an oppressive enough situation one on her own cannot break away, cannot even describe what's done to her); and yet we can still do something, can still act together to change our world, with a little help from fantasies of how we could be, and a lot of disagreements about how it must be done. The emissaries from the futures are, in fact, feminist consciousness entering the present Js' lives. It's a wild book, in many ways, but it's extremely clever.

"Jeannine: I want something else, something else."

To say it contains some brilliant passages is miserably inadequate. The problem many women have with the book must be that *every* passage is saying something, and much more than you can take in one go. However, here are three of my current favourites:

Now it's true that waitresses, elementary-

school teachers, secretaries, nurses and nuns are female, but how many nuns do you meet in the course of the usual business day? Right? And secretaries are female only until they get married, at which time they change or something because you don't usually see them again at all. I think it's a legend that half the population of the world is female; where on earth are they keeping them all? No, if you tot up all those categories of women above, you can see clearly and beyond the shadow of a doubt that there are maybe 1-2 women for every 11 or so men and that hardly justifies making such a big fuss.

And the refrain of what the prize is for being a girl, for not being allowed to be Genghis Khan:

If they tell me again about the pretty clothes, I'll kill myself.

Or the excerpts from reviews-to-be:

. . . the usual boring obligatory references to Lesbianism . . . denial of the profound sexual polarity which . . . an all too womanly refusal to face facts . . . pseudo-masculine brusqueness . . . the ladies'-magazine level . . . trivial topics like housework and the predictable screams of . . .

(Her latest book is called *How to Suppress Women's Writing*.)



I feel that if, as in the sci-fi device of the novel, what we do at any moment in time determines which universe we'll inhabit, I'm in the one that came into existence while this book was being written. I suspect I'll

always live in an early '70s radical feminist world view, along with Joanna Russ and *The Female Man*, however much I may add on to my understanding of sexism and exactly how it affects women in different times and places. The book is about white middle class American women, and it doesn't say much about how male supremacy interacts with either race or class, though clearly she knows that it does. The experiences in it are very specific, as they would have to be to be convincing. But it is precisely about how white middle class women in the West start out believing they can be as 'good' (as powerful) as white middle class men, only to be taught in a thousand ways (and oh, what an overkill of ideology it is!) that women can't ever win in this system, that women don't even really exist in it.

I know that somewhere, just to give me the lie, lives a beautiful (got to be beautiful), intellectual, gracious, charming woman who has eight children, bakes her own bread, cakes and pies, takes care of her own house, does her own cooking, brings up her own children, holds down a demanding nine to five job at the top decision-making level in a man's field, and is adored by her equally successful husband because although a hard-driving, aggressive business executive with eye of eagle, heart of lion, tongue of adder, and muscles of gorilla (she looks just like Kirk Douglas), she comes home at night, slips into a filmy negligee and a wig, and turns instanter into a Playboy dimwit, thus laughingly dispelling the canard that you cannot be eight people simultaneously with two sets of values. *She has not lost her femininity.*

And I'm Marie of Rumania.

It's only when white middle class women come to understand how we can't win under men's rules that we become of any use at all politically. Those of us who were brought up by white middle class men, who married them or gave birth to them, we are in a good position to expose their tricks, if we can see past the bribes.

Of course *The Female Man* isn't the end of the story, by a very long shot. But it's one heaven and hell of a beginning.

"Joanna: For years I have been saying Let me in, Love me, Approve me, Define me, Regulate me, Validate me, Support me. Now I say Move over." □

Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (1975). It is being reprinted by the Women's Press in 1985.
Joanna Russ, *The Two of Them* (1978) — out of print at the moment.
Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1982; Women's Press 1984).
Zoe Fairbairns, *Benefits* (Virago 1979).
Zoe Fairbairns, *Stand We At Last* (Virago 1983; Pan 1984).
Zoe Fairbairns, *Here Today* (Methuen 1984).
Marilyn French, *The Women's Room* (1977; Sphere 1978).
Marge Piercy, *Woman On the Edge of Time* (1976; Women's Press 1979).
Ursula Le Guin, 'The Author of the Acacia Seeds' (1974, reprinted in *The Compass Rose*, 1982).
James Tiptree Jr. (Alice B. Sheldon), 'Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death' (1973, reprinted in *Warm Worlds and Otherwise*, 1975).

Power and the right to choose — Amsterdam 1984

"Population control — No: Women Decide!" Sophie Laws reports from the Women's International Tribunal and Meeting on Reproductive Rights, held in Amsterdam, 22–28 July 1984. What came out of the conference clearly was that reproductive rights mean different things to different groups of women — taking account of race, disability and the conditions in different countries.

On the tram going to the conference centre one morning, I ask about the outcome of the mothers' caucus which had been meeting the previous evening. One story: a woman is here representing a Bolivian miners' organisation — she has two small children. She makes her living picking potatoes. The conference registration form said "how many children will you be bringing?" — it did not specify whether or not children would be paid for. This woman set out for the conference, walked with her children into the town, to the office of her organisation — this took 8 hours. They realised there was a problem, telephoned the conference organisers: "sorry, children can't be paid for". So she walked back to her village, found someone to care for the children, and then set out again. And there she was, opposite us on the tram, with a headache.

I don't repeat the story to criticise the organisers, but to give an idea of the problems and the achievements of such a truly international conference. Also to illustrate the sharp sense I have of my limitations as a reporter from this conference. I know I missed a lot of what was said because it was so far outside my experience that I failed to make sense of it.

The proceedings of the tribunal parts of the meeting will be transcribed and published, so it will be possible to read exactly

what those women who gave evidence there said. I'll be focusing on only a few of the many issues discussed at the conference, giving a mixture of other women's views and my own reactions.

First a kind of list — to give you some idea of the context of the discussions, of the range of women present. A Tamil woman speaks of the persecution of her people in Sri Lanka, of girls selling their bodies to earn a passage to India; a Portuguese woman tells about the fight to legalise abortion there; a woman from Curacao is working on a quarterly feminist magazine. A Yugoslavian speaks about the problem of women there using abortion as their only form of contraception; Chilean women speak about women being paid a monthly benefit when they are pregnant which may equal the family's total income. A Spanish woman is on trial for performing abortions; in Zimbabwe, still, young girls abandon babies when they have given birth outside of marriage. A Dutch lesbian doctor reads a statement from the women in Amsterdam jail about their demand for a woman doctor; an Indian woman protests at routine police rape. Costa Rican women talk about pills being given out like sweets while there is not one diaphragm in the whole country; a Brazilian reports that IUD strings are often cut off so that women cannot remove them. A Nicaraguan woman

reports on the progress the Sandinistas are making with health care. Women from many countries report that half the cases in gynaecology wards are of women suffering the effects of dangerous and illegal abortions. A Dutch woman tells of her struggles as the daughter of a mother who took DES, an oestrogen prescribed to prevent miscarriage which has produced cancers in many of the children born after this treatment. Black South African women speak of Black women being sterilised without their knowledge while undergoing other abdominal surgery. They fear for Black women if South Africa follows Britain and licences Depo Provera. A statement is read from Vanuatu, a newly independent Pacific island state which has recently banned Depo Provera; a British Black woman speaks for the rights of women with sickle cell to bear children. A health education worker is present from the Union of Peasant Women of Ecuador; a number of British and Dutch women with disabilities speak about how they are discouraged from having children. Women from many countries are campaigning against drug companies' exploitative practices, and there has been some success in the work against the selling of powdered milk. A Thai lesbian talks about her acute isolation in a country, like so many, where making an independent life as a woman is highly dangerous. A Puerto Rican woman talks about how oestrogens in meat are causing "precocious sexual development" in many children, mostly girls. An Indian woman warns that 'Third World' women will soon be being used as surrogate mothers by wealthy western couples.

After dinner one night, some African women tell us how in their countries if a girl-child is born, the women give five cheers, if a boy-child, seven: feminists give eight cheers for a girl. They show us how it's done.

Limiting future revolutionaries

The slogan of the conference was "Population control: no. Women decide!", and the keynote speech, by Farida Akhter from Bangladesh, was on this subject. She explained that the essential point about population control is that it is brought to a

country from outside, such a programme often being made a condition for the country receiving aid from the 'developed' world. An associated problem is the dumping of drugs which are banned in the 'First' world, or which are just out of date or damaged in some way. Population control agencies co-operate with multinational pharmaceutical companies and allow such abuses in pursuit of profit.

She referred to the particular experience of Bangladesh, but said it was nothing new, rather just the same as in Puerto Rico, Brazil and many other poor countries. An image is put across of 'Third World' people "breeding like animals", and this "thing-like" reproductive behaviour is put forward as an explanation for their poverty. Attention is distracted from the real mechanisms of underdevelopment, essentially exploitation by developed countries. Farida charged that population control is the result of the ruling groups' fear of the majority of the people: the poor, Black, working class — that it is an attempt to limit the number of future revolutionaries.

In Bangladesh, the Ford Foundation, US AID and the World Bank are funding population control programmes, and taking no other measures to reduce poverty. They say openly, in writing, that governments are justified in resorting to any measures, suspending any regard for civil liberties, in pursuit of the goal of limitation of births. The present US administration doesn't see their own level of population as a problem and is attacking US women's abortion rights. On paper, it is against the abuse of sterilisation, but in Bangladesh people are paid 'compensation' by US AID, which amounts to giving incentives. Such payments are also made to women accepting Copper T IUDs and Depo Provera. Farida also mentioned a new policy among population control agencies of encouraging the employment of women, on the theory that women would then have more power in the family, and would limit their own families voluntarily. No feminist motives here, of course.

In societies where family planning is not accepted, and where outside agencies intervene, it is women who bear the burden of the clash of attitudes. In Bangladesh women

My apologies to women who appear in this report identified by nationality and not by name. I did not get everyone's names so I have only used names I could check.

who have been sterilised have been refused proper burial. Also in many countries, social respect for a woman depends upon her ability to produce children — in this case the use of contraception can undermine a woman's position in the family, to the extent that her husband may beat her or abandon her.

Farida warned that at the UN conference in Mexico City (which was taking place the following week) the World Bank would certainly again attempt to alarm the world about population growth "holding back economic development". And indeed I returned to England to read an *Observer* report (29 July '84) that Tom Clausen, the World Bank's president, had said that "efforts to overcome poverty were frustrated by lack of family planning programmes in the least developed nations". His organisation is to double its funding for population control.

What was truly horrifying about this article was that it was reporting a debate which turned out to be between two different racist and woman-hating philosophies — the Reagan right-to-lifers and the population controllers. The US line is that "fewer babies are born when free-market systems are given free rein to foster prosperity" — state-run economies are blamed for underdevelopment!



Campaigning contradictions

There were three workshops at the conference called "Contraception, abortion, sterilisation — what is good for you may be bad for me. Contradictions in international campaigning." Many European women I talked to were anxious to attend such a workshop, hoping to learn more about the implications of their own work for other women.

I had expected Depo Provera to come up as a focus of contradictions, following the lines of the discussion published in *Spare Rib* 116 (between Hari John and Janet Hadley of the Depo-Provera Campaign), but in fact there was little conflict as the majority of women at the conference were alarmed about DP and favoured banning it. I did however meet one Bangladeshi woman over breakfast who works for the World Council of Churches which uses it as part of their general health programme. She said that sometimes their supply of DP dries up and women who come to them weep if they cannot get it. It is important to such women that no-one should know they are using contraception. Both her husband and her mother-in-law have authority over a young woman and may push her to have more children. Pills are easily lost when living with children in overcrowded conditions, and IUDs are known to have serious hazards too. She said that her experience was that the side effects were not so serious as is suggested — only one woman from their programme had had to be hospitalised.

But in my workshop few contradictions between women in different countries were identified, though differences of emphasis were revealed, for example in how women related to the class struggle. There was discussion of the possible development of womb-leasing where 'Third World' women are used as surrogates for wealthy US couples. A Mexican woman compared this to the taking of young girls into prostitution in the US. Also the use in India of amniocentesis for identifying the sex of a foetus so that females may be aborted was discussed.

A woman from the women's liberation movement of Mauritius, at present living in London, spoke about feeling trapped, and her fear of their being isolated as a women's

movement. They are at present campaigning to legalise abortion in Mauritius, and their main allies are the population controllers: the World Bank and the local family planning organisation. They were aware of this as a contradiction, and have been concentrating their work on arguing for "a woman's right to choose" within workers' organisations, trade unions and so on. But if they are to take up the struggle against the high-tech reproductive interventions, their main ally will be the Catholic Church, which holds great ideological power in Mauritius. This observation I think holds true also in Britain, and it seems to me that the debate around the new technologies may bring out more clearly some problems of the ways in which we have campaigned for legal abortion.

Selective abortion and disability

Giving evidence to the tribunal Pat Rock, for the women with disabilities at the conference, spoke about the oppression of women with disabilities and of the implications of their analysis for other women. Although people experience different effects from different disabilities, their oppression is shared. It springs from an emphasis on people's economic value and also from our culture's fear of abnormality, illness, loss and death.

She spoke of a complex and subtle system of oppression with a long history. Under the Nazi regime, propaganda films showing extreme pictures of people with disabilities in institutions were used to frighten the German people into accepting their elimination. Dependency on one's oppressors creates special problems. Also it is difficult to disbelieve the image of disability which the culture promotes, to imagine a different life.

For women with disabilities the issue on reproductive rights is primarily one of the right to have children: there has been a recent case in Britain of a mentally handicapped couple being taken to court in an attempt to prevent them from raising their child, although a psychiatrist who had been caring for them agreed with them that they were quite capable of doing it themselves.

Looking at the slogan "a woman's right

to choose", they pointed out how this 'right' is affected by the economics and politics of the society — that in a situation where a woman who bore a child with a disability would be solely responsible for it, she has no real choice to keep such a child. Given the segregation of people with disabilities, and most people's ignorance about them, it is hardly surprising that even women who materially could raise a child with a disability want to abort.

They suggested that the simple focus on rights should be brought into question — it is necessary to take into account the different contexts of the struggle for power in different countries. Capitalism, and state socialism, cannot benefit from people with disabilities and will tend to encourage the desire for 'perfect babies'.

Later on in the week, a Brazilian doctor told me that she had been startled by seeing the women with disabilities at the conference and hearing what they were saying. The Brazilian government is at present considering a law which would legalise abortion in certain very limited cases. She and her group knew that this law would be far from satisfactory but had been supporting it and asking for international support for it. A woman had come to see her who had special problems: she has leprosy, which is treated with Thalidomide, and she had become pregnant. The woman is poor, and would get no state help with a child with a disability. Evidently they had pushed hard for this particular woman to get an abortion, and had also used the case to get publicity and sympathy for changing the law.

A further very interesting input came from a group of Japanese women. In Japan there is a "Eugenic Protection Law" (left over from the fascist period) which allows abortion for medical and eugenic reasons and also for economic reasons and for raped women. A great many abortions are carried out in Japan, the most common reason given being 'economic'. People with disabilities have recently begun to campaign against this law, and accuse women who have abortions under it of consenting to a law whose basic motivation is their annihilation. The women at the conference

felt that solidarity with people with disabilities was essential. They were very concerned about the hateful attitudes of their culture towards people with disabilities, comparing it to racism.

In many countries where abortion is restricted but legal, one of the reasons it may be allowed is on grounds of known disability of the foetus. Many of the women at the conference, like many of us in Britain, had never thought through the implications of this situation. These laws do not exist with the purpose of allowing women rights over their bodies, but in fact are intended to limit the number of people born with disabilities. This is clear. But given the economic and social conditions we live in, women do need to be able to refuse to bear a child with a disability, just as they need to be able to refuse to bear any child. People with disabilities need to be able to live in a culture which does not try to wish them out of existence. The contradictions can be surmounted by fighting against oppressive attitudes towards people with disabilities, and challenging the conditions of motherhood. But this is theory, and in a period of reaction like this one, tactical choices have to be made.

Part of the problem, as the women with disabilities pointed out, is the language of rights in which we conduct much of our politics. We are not, in fact, free individuals able to make choices as if we lived in an ideal world.

How do we know what's good for us?

Another workshop which took place in several conference sessions focused on the question of what kind of research do we want to see done and how can we ensure that it gets done.

The discussion in my group centred on abortion and on the issue of how we can assess medicines and procedures. A woman there had been working with a group in Berlin who recommended high doses of vitamin C as a method of inducing an early abortion. Her group had researched the method, she said, and used it for six years. Other women in the group were dubious about both the safety (for instance the effects on the blood system) and the effectiveness of such a method. Some women argued that new methods, (and old ones)

even when developed by women's groups, should be subjected to careful scientific testing — just as we demand of the medical profession. Others saw science as a male institution, and felt that what is crucial about this kind of practice is that it takes our bodies out of the control of the medical profession. In most countries, of course, women also have good financial reasons to avoid doctors wherever possible. Methods which women can use for themselves are always given a bad reputation. But, other women said, it is not just a matter of trying to be 'super-scientific' for its own sake to be concerned about effects on the health of women.

Women from Latin America and Africa then told about the ways women in their countries try to abort: with various herbs — "santamaria", cinnamon, and many other kinds. A Brazilian woman spoke about women using lead in Coca Cola. Everyone agreed that good research should be done on all the methods women use. Another Brazilian woman explained the problems with the use of herbs among poor women in her country. They may be using contraception, but with little confidence in its effectiveness, so that every time their periods are a day late, they will start taking extremely strong mixtures of herbs. The action of many such herbs can lead to



Carrien Ariens

poisoning — women are basically made so ill that they begin to miscarry. Then they very often go to the hospital for a D and C to stop the bleeding. She spoke about the importance of moving very carefully on these issues, of a slow empirical approach — looking at how drugs and devices are actually used in practice.

While most women present knew of herbs being used mainly for abortion, an Angolan woman said that during the war there, women fighters had used a decoction of the roots of papaya as a contraceptive. She herself had used this and had not got pregnant in eight years.

There was much discussion about how we could influence research, and we felt powerless and excluded. To end on a hopeful note, a woman from Rwanda spoke about the fact that the World Health Organisation is beginning to get interested in learning about 'popular' medicine in relation to things like heart disease. If women get more influence in institutions like the WHO, perhaps this policy may be extended to questions of contraception and abortion.

Another issue the conference raised for me was a question about whether a technology can be bad in itself, and further, how one can be alert to all the possibilities for misuse that a technology contains. One worry being raised at the conference was that the pharmaceutical companies are exploiting restrictive abortion laws in many countries to peddle dangerous 'home' abortion methods, such as oestrogen-progestogen 'pregnancy testing' drugs. But looking at the other choices women have open to them, would it be right for women in developed countries to fight to ban such drugs and devices? In this case the evidence against seems pretty clear, but often it is not. So often we seem to have to fight campaigns on specific drugs or devices knowing full well that we do not really have the information we need to make good decisions (often *no-one* has it when drugs are released onto the market). Perhaps the answer would be a campaign which focused on the generally irresponsible behaviour of such companies rather than particular products? We can also demand better information for the 'consumer' in every

case, for this can be a real protection. The conference did produce the beginnings of international coordination of women's campaigns against the drug companies.

Conference criticisms

The issue of racism was brought to the fore at the conference because a group of women from the Brixton Black Women's Health Group made a statement on the first day criticising the organisers on several counts. There had been a good deal of upset over the composition of the British presence at the conference before it started — Black groups in Britain had been contacted only two months before the conference. The B/BWHG statement said that fifteen, the number put about as the proposed size of the British contingent, implied an assumption that these women would be white. They suggested that more women from Britain could have been enabled to attend by a system of rotation, so that women went at different times.

The conference languages were English, French and Spanish — languages of imperialism. The BBWHG argued that many more languages should have been made available (other women pointed out that translation into Dutch would have enabled less educated Dutch women to attend). They said that meetings for Black women only should have been timetabled into the conference, and racism put clearly on the agenda.

They also criticised the advance publicity. There was much too little information in it, and too many assumptions were made. The first leaflet indeed required a good deal of reading between the lines — the organisers in effect demanded great trust of the participants, and, perhaps, experience of conference-going to draw on, to guess at the details not specified. Anyone who felt themselves an 'out' group in relation to the conference organisers would feel less able to take the risk that they would be well looked after. The B/BWHG pointed out, for instance, that nothing was said about how anyone who fell ill would be cared for. The women with disabilities found that the organisers tried very hard to meet their needs when they began to make them felt, but that little thought had been given to them ahead of time.

The 'closed' appearance of the conference publicity was not in all respects unintentional, since the organisers did not want to generate great demand for places at the conference which it could not fulfill. But it was very like much publicity for British conferences which intend to be much more open, and we must attend to the ways we give the appearance of being more open to some than to others.

One acute point was made about the exclusion of Black women living in the developed countries — that such women may be more threatening to white women than 'Third World' women, for they are more able to confront their oppressors on an everyday basis. The planning group's statement the next day accepted their analysis in general and apologised for the mistakes they had made.

When this debate was brought up in the plenary (after some resistance from many conference participants), the discussion which followed was in very general terms. One tension which emerged was that a number of women responded to the Brixton statement by saying that Black women needed to take the initiative, to take power for themselves. Other Black women said they felt white women had access to resources and freedoms that Black women do not have, and that therefore Black women need the help of white women. Still others were angered by the notion of asking for help — being of the opinion that white people have done enough already "and look where it's got us". An Australian Aboriginal woman said "what you do is for yourself, your children, your grandchildren, your mothers, your grandmothers. You will become more sensitive, more aware, by involvement in these struggles. You could then perhaps play a useful part in creating a world of peace for us all to live in, for your children and grandchildren."

Racism, prejudice and the WLM

So there was perhaps a little more tension even than usual when the workshop "Black and white women working together — racism in the WLM" met. It was a large group (around 40), perhaps two thirds Black women. There were women there from at least 16 countries — listing

nationalities would misrepresent the situation, for many women in the group had lived in different countries or were conscious of roots in other countries. One point raised in the group was of how different Black people's experience of migration is from white people's.

In such a diverse group, one of the first points of discussion was the question of whether racism can exist among different Black communities. One woman from the B BWHG argued that racism and prejudice should be defined as distinct categories — racism is prejudice linked to power. Powerless people can be prejudiced against one another: racism emerges when one group has power over another. Asked how she saw the British attitude to Irish people, she replied that it is racism because the British are both powerful and prejudiced towards the Irish.

An Australian Black woman disagreed: she saw racism as the process of attributing characteristics to a whole race of people on the basis of their race. Thus she herself could be racist towards Irish people if she told 'Irish jokes' although her people have no power over Irish people. She saw the power as existing within the expression of an attitude.

A Mauritian woman made the distinction between institutionalised racism and cultural prejudice — that racism is closely linked to class, as is shown by the outbreaks of virulent racism in times of economic crisis. A Black South African woman said that she cannot see racism in a static form — it is a process which has been established historically. Its effects are multiple and it can recharge itself in a circular fashion — it was the history of colonialism which created the 'First' and the 'Third' Worlds, and then the poverty of the 'Third World' is seen as a sign of inferiority. She always refers to these as "so-called Third World", to indicate that these categories are not eternal.

An Indian woman from Hyderabad expressed her concern about racism in the WLM. There are few white women where she lives. Most of the time everyone around her regards her group as very radical indeed — too extreme. But when international conferences are held here and the white university-based women see Europeans

giving respect to their group, suddenly they are worth speaking to for a few weeks. She told of cooperating with a white woman to write a paper and then finding the Indian women's names left off it — one woman was acknowledged as the woman who can sing very well. They objected: "oh, but you're activists, you surely don't care about academic credit, do you?" A Moroccan woman, living in Amsterdam, spoke about the subtle racism of white liberals — she is sick of finding herself used as a subject for somebody's thesis.

A Tamil woman living in England spoke angrily about the way the British feminists ignore the struggles of Black women. "They'll all troop off to Greenham Common in fear of a bomb dropping on them," she said, "but what have they done about the massacres in Soweto or Sri Lanka?" She said that the justification she is given is that the Black women or Irish women are working with men.

Another Black woman told of a London group where she had been the only Black woman — she happened not to be there when a photo was taken for a newspaper article. "What a pity you weren't there, it would have added colour to the picture". She said that Black women don't invent the race division: white women do.

There was discussion of how feminists should approach work on racism: a Mauritian woman was irritated by too great a focus on the individual, on personal relations, and too little action. Another Black woman living in Britain said that on the contrary she thought it much easier for feminists to see racism as an abstraction for which they could blame men. She wants white women to look at themselves first, to take responsibility for women's participation in racism. Using her experience of living in a country where the native peoples were dispossessed, she said that she acts out of a personal sense of the value those oppressed people have to her.

It is respect that Black women demand. "Until you truly believe inside yourself," a Black Australian woman said, "that these people are your equals, it will show through your eyes". The Black women in the group had a strong sense of how much white feminists need them. The issues under discussion at the conference, they said,

affect Black women more than white women — Black women's full involvement is essential to any legitimate struggle.

On the conference itself, an Indonesian woman living in Holland said that she had been to some of the Dutch planning meetings and had tried to raise the issue of languages. She felt bitterly angry that the planning group had found it so easy to get Black women in to provide entertainment, but somehow when it came to attending the conference itself they couldn't find any.

A theme which came up repeatedly from many women in the group is the need to know our own history. One Black woman who had lived in both countries compared the situation of Black people in Britain with their position in the States, emphasising the self-sufficiency which US Blacks have developed out of long years of oppression. Many British Black people on the other hand had been raised in the West Indies on the idea of Britain as the mother-country. Also the fact that large numbers of Black people have only come to Britain relatively recently is used against them by the British racists.

A Seychelles woman now living in London told something of her own history. Creole hadn't been taught in schools, only English and French, the imperialist languages. She left school at 10 and at 14 began work as a maid for local wealthy people. Still a very young woman, she came to England to work for minimal wages, tied by a three year contract, in the house of a rich family in North London. She was in the same trap as many Phillipino women. When she returned to the Seychelles, she said, the



Eva Besnyó

family she used to work for had her as a guest at their table, for in their eyes some of the value of the rich country had rubbed off on her — someone else waited on table.

There followed then a long discussion about how white women could understand racism. One white woman said she found it helpful to think through the parallel with her oppression by men. Many of the Black women expressed anger that white women seem so slow to understand about oppression when it comes to racism, though they seem quite intelligent about gender — “We’ve been their slaves, now they want teachers”.

One woman pointed out that many white women haven’t even examined the terms they use: “Third World”, “racism”, “prejudice”, etc — that these terms must be deconstructed, just as feminists have attacked the terms used around gender. Black women understand racism in all its forms, but white women tend only to see the most blatant forms — they deny it by denying that racism exists in many forms.

A US white woman said that she was worried about the effectiveness of white women working together because of the experience of having told men to go off and work it out among themselves — the results are pathetic, it has achieved nothing useful to women. She was concerned that the institutions be turned over to Black women, though she was aware of the problems.

After some discussion about the relative importance of money and of ideology in causing and perpetuating racism, some of the Black women spoke directly to the white women present. In international campaigning, the Black woman’s perspective must *always* be considered. “Go home, and analyse what racism is — find out by yourselves. Analyse that maybe it was your mother who you loved so much who first gave you the racist message. At school what did you learn about Black people? Try to find other white people who you can talk with about racism. Then go into work with Black women to act against it.”

Power

Some of my reactions to what I heard at the conference brought me echoes from the past. Much of my early political involvement was with liberal groups working on ‘Third

World’ and environmental issues. I saw myself at that time very much as a member of an oppressive class and race. When I moved towards feminism, and began to recognise my own oppression as a woman, including that which took place within left/liberal groups, I felt that I had moved towards a far more authentic source of energy. If I fully understood my own position, I would be able to genuinely empathise with other oppressed people. I still feel this to be true. Women’s altruism, created that we should the better serve men’s desires, is a real obstacle to any liberatory action. The impulse to self-sacrifice is hardly revolutionary — any philosophy whose focus is ‘women-out-there’ insults such women and falsely divides ‘them’ from ‘us’.

At times I have perceived white women’s reactions to Black women’s emergence as a powerful force within the movement as something of a return to that liberal mode. I felt connections clicking back into place hearing Black women say clearly and repeatedly that they are not interested in having good done to them, but that white women must act on racism for *themselves*. I realise that it is a sign of my own alienation that I had to go to Amsterdam to hear this properly.

It would have been completely futile to try to understand this conference in terms of the distinctions we tend to use in Britain — socialist feminist/radical feminist, for instance. Most of the Latin American women, for example, were involved in national liberation struggles, but they were real feminists also — no-one that I heard was taking the line that the only true feminism is class struggle. I didn’t hear anyone apologising for men — and even the woman representing Cuba acknowledged that they “had some way to go on sexuality”! When an Algerian woman spoke from bitter experience about the dangers for women of assuming that national liberation struggles would necessarily safeguard women, she was met with warm applause.

The women at the conference talked about power: male power, imperialist power, white power. And their energy and determination will stay with me for a long time yet. □

The Politics of Caring

Patricia Rock of Sisters Against Disablement reviews ‘Who Cares?’ by Anna Briggs and ‘A Labour of Love’ edited by Janet Finch and Dulcie Groves, two recent additions to the ongoing debate on women’s role as unpaid carers. But what, she asks, about the cared for? When will their voices be heard?

If I wanted to buy just one book and understand the whole debate on women in a caring role, I would buy *A Labour of Love*, but if I just wanted a very quick introduction to women and caring, I would settle for *Who Cares*. In some ways it seems rather strange to put these two books together because their style and presentation are entirely different. Their common ground is that they are both talking about women who are performing a caring role. In *Who Cares*, a short pamphlet from the Association of Carers, Anna Briggs very simply and carefully dispels the hypothesis that there were more people caring for dependents in the past than there are today. She undertook a large door-to-door survey to test this, and her results are very interesting.

She shows that women are still very much involved, and expected to be involved, in the caring role. In fact, there is almost a life career for women of caring. They get married, and are expected to care for young children and possibly an aged relative. Then they move on to care for an aging husband.

Anna Briggs is very interesting when she talks of the relationship to dependent relatives. She states that when men are the carers for their elderly mothers and fathers, they still see themselves as secondary carers whilst sisters take the main burden.

Daughters were often more involved than daughters-in-law, but the latter had to step in when a daughter was unable to care. I think it is rather interesting to see how the family network patterns are reinforced in this way. In particular, she goes on to say that no men in her study had given up employment to care for relatives but that women constantly did this. This simple statement has very far-reaching implications and consequences for looking at the whole area of women as carers.

She also opens the debate much more widely by saying that past researchers always took the starting point of carers being those who help a disabled person, rather than looking at it a bit more generally as carers in the family, or in fact, family members. Very often women have to care for somebody over and above their family network ties, either as a helpful neighbour or a volunteer; but she does not mention they may be not married, or not heterosexual. She speaks from a feminist perspective but it is rather simplified.

On the other hand, in *A Labour of Love*, Janet Finch and Dulcie Groves have edited a number of articles from a much stronger and radical feminist perspective. They analyse the role of women as unpaid carers. In the main they are relatives, but Finch

off our backs have published full coverage of this conference by Alice Henry in their October and November issues (vol XIV, nos 9 and 10), including more on selective abortion and an interview on feminism in Japan between Yumiko Jansson-Yandigisawa and Maria Luz Quinonero. \$15 sea mail sub, from *off our backs*, 1841 Columbia Road, NW 212 Washington, DC 20009, USA.

For more information, contact: ICASC — Nederland, Postbus 4098 AB, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Janet Finch and Dulcie Groves, eds, *A Labour of Love: Women, Work and Caring* (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1983), £4.95. Anna Briggs, *Who Cares?* (Association of Carers 1983), £1.00.



Cath Jackson

and Groves ask why women relatives take up this role in society, and try to unravel the patriarchal forces which perpetuate these expectations of women in our society. The articles explore caring being defined as a 'natural' activity for women, how the 'ideal' family image perpetuates that, and how caring becomes a significant part of female identity. The book breaks with those concepts to demonstrate that caring is *work*, and should be treated as such by society.

I was surprised to see in *A Labour of Love* that there was an article by a man. I found this rather disappointing, not because the article itself is not good, but because a book which obviously comes under the heading of 'feminism' should have included articles by women only. This would have given it an added strength. It was very clear in the introduction that both Janet Finch and Dulcie Groves, whom I met when they were first thinking of doing this book, were very aware of the many and complex issues involved in the whole arena of women and caring. But both their book, and Anna Briggs', assume heterosexuality and ignore the possible role of women as carers of

other women.

A number of the articles in *A Labour of Love* are interesting, informative, and easy-to-read. But the article by Judith Oliver, 'Caring Wife', deserves attention. Despite her work in the field of welfare rights for disabled people (she set up the Association of Carers), and having a disabled husband, her article shows no political perspective. It is interesting that the Association recently featured on TV news a woman with a disability being cared for by her eleven year old son. For two days we saw it on the news and smiled when donations of toys were sent to him. Then we heard that the DHSS (Department of Health and Social Security) had awarded a large grant to help the Association. The Association does not relieve the carer but provides meetings for carers to share their problems. Toys do not alleviate the strain and he still has to help his mother. What is needed is relief and a person to assist the woman with a disability.

The emphasis here, like in the books, is on the carer, not the cared for. What does the cared for person need or want? No-one knows because no-one has asked her and

her voice is not heard. A political perspective requires change; donating toys does not change the social situation.

Paying attention to the cared for would have given the book an extra dimension. Without the perspective of the recipient, the role of caring for people leaves itself open to a rather removed and professional debate. With the recent debate concerning the dismantling of institutions and integrating dependent people into the community, there is going to be more and more dependence on unpaid carers. It seems only fair that one should ask the person to whom the care is given what service they would like and how it should be given. From my own experience as a disabled woman and that of other disabled women, I have often found that our voice is silent.

Many books describe care in the family and social work roles, but rarely is the view of the cared for expressed. What if we do not want our nearest and dearest to care for us, and why should we? Often we want close relationships to be ones of equality, which Judith Oliver tells us is impossible between carer and cared for. I know a man who is quite handicapped and who has a wife and child. He does not expect his wife to care for him and he expects to look after his child, so he arranges for a full-time volunteer to help him. A lot of people think this is wrong, but he has a right to determine his own life style. I remember when Sue Hannaford, my co-founder of SAD, used to discuss this. She said her husband was always seen as the carer and people felt sorry for him, assuming that she wasn't able to offer anything. She was defined by her physical attributes, i.e. her disability, and that he did the 'work'; yet if the roles were reversed a different perception would arise.

Invalid Care Allowance also follows the principle of 'irreversible sex roles'. Dulcie Groves' and Janet Finch's work on the economics of caring, 'Natural Selection', is extremely readable and their discussion on the Invalid Care Allowance is informative. This Allowance has a peculiar history and is certainly discriminatory in the way it is applied to carers in the community. A man can claim it for caring for his wife, but a wife cannot claim it for caring for her husband!

Another benefit, Housewives' Non-Contributory Invalidity Pension, is for married women who can't go out to work and yet men get a similar benefit if they do work — so once again, women's role is defined as being in the home. Also, she has to be severely handicapped to qualify. I knew of a woman who had to lay on the floor to clean it because she could not bend and because she had tunnel vision. Her claim was rejected. I have met two other disabled women who could not do any 'housewife' duties (as the benefit calls them) and could just about hold a cup of tea — yet they were not considered handicapped enough to get the benefit.

In their wisdom, the DHSS have now thrown this benefit away so that the gender discrimination is avoided — or so they say. The new benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, has replaced it; it is for women and men who cannot work. Yet — you have to be 80 per cent disabled to get it. This excludes the majority of disabled people. Consequently less people claim benefit — good economics I suppose! It means DHSS can claim there are not so many disabled people and that it does not discriminate against women. Except, of course, women who did receive benefit before now will probably receive nothing unless they qualify as 80 per cent disabled, which is highly unlikely!

If we want to ensure that people with disabilities live independent lives, we have to give them dignity and choice. To do that, we have to give people a voice. When will that happen if access is not possible and people with caring needs are not heard? SAD is giving space to women with disabilities to allow their voices to grow stronger, and they are campaigning for other women to do the same. While women are kept as unpaid carers, no-one pays much attention. Once defined as 'work', the situation can be reviewed and analysed with salary scales and union fees considered. Let's hope these two books open the debate to question the role of women as carers. □



NOT SO NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Naomi Pfeffer writes in anger about feminist attitudes to the 'new reproductive technologies'. From the point of view of an infertile woman, she argues that because many feminists are ignorant about infertility itself, they have failed to understand the actual significance of the new techniques.

In the recent debate on reproductive technology, feminists have rightly claimed that this is an important issue and one which affects all women. But in the haste to consult the views of all women, whatever their race, class, sexuality, etc, the one voice that is never heard is that of the women most directly implicated: the voice of infertile women. Because of their absence, this debate appears, from the perspective of an infertile woman, to be curiously ill-informed in terms of what it is like to be infertile, socially, medically and emotionally. Instead, all the protagonists, feminists included, make ill-founded assumptions about the medical management of infertility and the impact of infertility on people's lives. I would like to introduce reality into the feminist positions.

Reproductive technology covers a wide range of techniques used for many different purposes. In this article, I am addressing myself to those techniques aimed at counteracting the physiological conditions which prevent women from achieving biological motherhood, what the Warnock Report calls "assisted reproduction". However, unlike the Warnock Report, I am

including here the techniques which the majority of infertile women will experience in doctors' surgeries and in hospitals all over the world today, techniques which, curiously, are never mentioned. I am excluding those techniques which are not used to treat infertility today and which are still only a gleam in some scientist's eye. In-vitro fertilisation (IVF) falls into the first category, not because of its widespread use; it falls into this category because IVF is made up of techniques regularly used to "assist reproduction", with the addition of the removal and fertilisation of the egg in a laboratory. This is a very important point for two reasons: firstly, it highlights the fact that IVF is not especially new or high-technology; secondly, it locates IVF within the range of techniques regularly used, where it seems a less dramatic novelty.

To place the debate on reproductive technology firmly within reality, several aspects need to be explained: the frequency of the different causes of infertility; the nature of the investigations and treatments offered; the success rates of these treatments; and infertile women's readiness to undergo treatment or look to other means

of achieving motherhood. I shall explain each in turn.

How many people are infertile?

In medical terms, infertility is not a disease in its own right; to a doctor, an infertile woman is a case of anovulation (failure to ovulate), blocked fallopian tubes, endometriosis, etc. In only a minority of women does infertility present distressing physical symptoms, the majority of women who experience infertility have no warning.

Unless we look at the frequency of each of the different causes of infertility, no weighting can be given to the usefulness or potential of the different methods of assisting reproduction. Of course, statistics on infertility are not readily available; not everyone who is infertile is aware of it or seeks medical help; and no-one has bothered to collect figures other than on a crude population basis. With these qualifications in mind, here are some figures which give a very rough idea of the size of the different problems. Anne Woollett and I calculated that if one in ten couples experience infertility at some point in their lives (the proportion of the population usually bandied about), then in the UK alone, there will be up to 50,000 new cases of infertility each year (compared with 130,000 abortions and 650,000 births). Using a 1974 survey of a London infertility clinic (Newton, Craig and Joyce 1974) the causes of infertility can be allocated as follows: 25 per cent or 12,500 women will have a disorder of ovulation; 19 per cent or 9,500 women will have tubal obstruction; 22 per cent or 11,000 women will have partners with few or no sperm; 7 per cent or 3,500 will have other gynaecological problems (such as endometriosis); and 28 per cent or 14,000 (the biggest group) will have 'other' causes, which means that the cause of their infertility cannot be identified. The size of this last group should provide some indication of the state of the art of diagnosis in infertility investigations today; a quick look at the medical journals covering infertility confirm this as doctors are forever telling each other to pull their socks up, and not offer treatment before any proper attempt has been made at diagnosis.

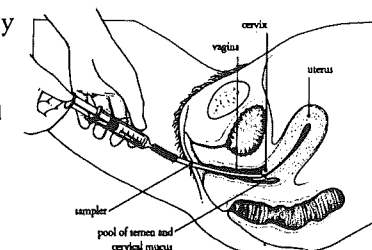
The medical management of infertility

What does medicine offer in the way of investigations and treatment? Here, I am not considering availability and access which are both very important issues, nor am I referring to the techniques discussed in textbooks and journals. What I am referring to are those techniques practised today by a whole range of medical practitioners of varying degrees of expertise. Surprisingly, the procedures most often used are those most rarely discussed. Neither the Warnock Report nor the feminist protagonists include the whole host of tests and treatments used to investigate and "assist reproduction". Infertile women do not go straight on to an IVF programme; the minority of those who do so will have a history of years of undergoing the techniques I outline briefly below.

Anne Woollett and I have criticised descriptions of infertility investigations and treatments which compare the female reproductive system to a car and gynaecology to motor mechanics. Reproductive medicine has just about invented the wheel in comparison to motor mechanics which can take men to the moon. It is easy to describe what the different techniques set out to achieve; but there is the danger of playing the same game as doctors by giving a sense of rational order to the proceedings. This would be a long way from the truth; in fact, it is difficult to give a full picture here of the haphazardness of infertility investigations and treatment. (For those who want more, details, please see Pfeffer and Woollett 1983.)

At the first appointment, both partners are seen and may be given a physical examination to check that they are properly 'male' and 'female'. Details of family and reproductive history may be taken alongside information about sexual relations and techniques to make sure that the couple know that babies are not conceived via the navel! The man may be instructed to give three samples of his semen and the woman may be told to monitor her menstrual cycle both to check if she is ovulating and to help her pinpoint the 'best' time for sexual intercourse from the point of view of conception. Some instructions may be given about the

Infertility, postcoital test



A woman is a little like a kitchen sink.

Wait now.

Before you go getting upset, and thinking we're trampling on your dignity or something, let us explain.

A woman is a very complicated mechanism. So much so, in fact, that sometimes even *she* doesn't know what goes on.

And the kitchen sink is just a useful comparison because it's easy to understand.

Because as you know, (and as every woman knows) when it comes to kitchen plumbing, if you don't use a little something every now and then to keep things functioning, they have a way of building up.

Well, the same thing can happen to a woman. Which is why douching is important. But not douching with just anything. Douching with Vagisec.

Vagisec (sold only in drug stores) is the most advanced product you can buy to relieve the moist, uncomfortable feeling that women can have just because they're women. (Gynecologists who recognize the need for douching have recommended it for years.)

What's more, Vagisec contains P.S.S.® which eliminates the internal bacteria that cause external odor. (If you use it twice a week, there's not much need to use a feminine deodorant.)

You're smart enough to prevent trouble in the kitchen.

Now isn't it about time you gave a little thought to yourself?

(To get a small sample of Vagisec and a booklet on douching, write Julius Schmid, Inc., Box 1-C, 423 W. 55th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10019.)

Vagisec
LIQUID

'best' position in which to have sexual intercourse to ensure that no sperm escape! So, in the space of a few minutes, both sexual identity and sexual habits will have been held up for inspection, and instructions to the man to masturbate (for the semen test) and the timing and technique for sexual intercourse will have been given. I say this to underline the fact that the medical management of infertility is largely the medical management of sexual relations.

At subsequent visits, some of the following investigations may be offered to the woman (infertility investigations and treatment focus almost exclusively on women even where it is the man who is infertile): blood tests for hormone assays; hysterosalpingogram (a painful X-ray of the uterus and fallopian tubes); a laparoscopy (an operation under a general anaesthetic where a fibre-optic telescope is used to look at the pelvic organs); post-coital test, a test to see if sperm can penetrate the cervical mucus, which requires having sexual intercourse prior to rushing to the hospital where the cervical mucus is sucked out from the woman's vagina for examination under a microscope; a sperm-mucus cross hostility test, a more elaborate version of the post-coital test which looks for sperm antibodies; and a host of other tests including an X-ray of the skull to look at the pituitary gland.

Should one of these tests indicate where the problem may lie, then some form of treatment may be offered. If not, then the woman is likely to go through them again, or she may be offered treatment anyway in the hope that it will work. (Infertility textbooks are one of the few medical texts which honestly discuss the placebo effect when any treatment, however irrelevant, has a positive effect on the patient.) Treatments include hormones to induce ovulation, surgery to repair blocked fallopian tubes, and AID (Artificial Insemination by Donor) to bypass the treatment of male infertility. Finally, and only rarely, is IVF offered or sought out.

"Scandalously poor" standards

It is common for women to undergo these tests and treatments again and again to no effect, and to be fobbed off with little

explanation, or explanations which are medically unfounded, such as tight underpants causing low sperm counts or "lazy" ovaries. Few eyebrows were raised when Robert Winston, the gynaecologist at Hammersmith Hospital, said that

there is concern amongst reputable gynaecologists, interested in human reproduction, that the standards of infertility treatment in this country are scandalously poor. Women are given drugs to induce ovulation when they ovulate already; much tubal surgery is performed with instruments more suitable for sharpening pencils; infertile men are fobbed off with drugs which have no proven effect on sperm quality and many women are advised to adopt bizarre coital positions or employ peculiar douches which add unwellcome variety to their sex lives but do little for fertility. (Winston 1984.)

As a doctor, he acknowledges but fails to do justice to the intrusiveness of these procedures into the most personal areas of women's bodies and women's lives, an intrusion which is the more humiliating because it lays bare failure.

How successful is medicine in assisting reproduction? It is impossible to say how effective overall any treatment for infertility may be. Whilst objecting to all alternative therapies as 'unscientific', gynaecologists are unwilling to have their own tested according to any rigorous statistical techniques. Procedures vary from doctor to doctor: not all women with the same condition receive the same investigations or treatment and many women are offered treatments which are inappropriate. Thus, women with unexplained infertility may be offered a drug to induce ovulation, on the off-chance that it may have some effect. There is no convention as to what constitutes a 'successful' outcome of a treatment of infertility; for example, is successful treatment of a disorder of ovulation measured by ovulation, pregnancy or live-birth? Nonetheless, here are some figures which should help give some impression of medicine's achievements.

Failure to ovulate is considered the most treatable of causes of infertility: two out of every three women are said to become pregnant. One survey compared the efficacy of ovulation-inducing drugs with a placebo. The drugs show a significant but far from impressive efficacy compared with the placebo. (Evans and Townsend 1976.)

Blocked fallopian tubes present a more difficult problem; the success of surgery depends on where the blockage is and the skill of the surgeon. In the least 'serious' cases, surgery can result in pregnancy in 50 per cent of women, but in the most 'serious', pregnancy is well-nigh impossible. However, not all these pregnancies will go to term; tubal surgery leads to a higher rate of ectopic (mis-placed) pregnancies and miscarriages. (Pepperell et al 1980.)

Artificial insemination using donor semen is said to have the same rate of success as 'natural' insemination. (Pepperell et al 1980.)

IVF is not new, high-tech medicine

How does IVF fit in with these other treatments? In terms of technology, IVF combines several of the techniques I described above: a laparoscopy to obtain the eggs produced after the woman has taken an ovulation-inducing drug, and masturbation by the man to obtain sperm. What IVF adds in terms of new techniques is the fertilisation of the egg by the sperm in a laboratory dish rather than in the woman's body. The fertilised egg is then returned to the woman's uterus using techniques similar to those used to insert an IUD: Thus, contrary to some opinion, IVF is not new, high technology medicine; in fact, some infertility doctors hope one day to offer it to women in out-patient clinics. And whilst the cost of IVF in its developmental stage is relatively high, it may, with refinement, become much cheaper. Infertility investigations and treatment are very unpopular with some hospital administrators because some of the tests are expensive. The poor rate of success of these treatments together with their high cost makes them an easy target for cuts. IVF on an out-patient basis can look very attractive in terms of potential value for money. Although IVF is not very successful now, unlike the other treatments I described above, its success rates offer hope and scope for improvement. IVF by-passes a woman's damaged fallopian tubes and, at the moment, is offered to women where surgery has failed. Interestingly, and worthy of further consideration in the context of arguments about who has access to these technologies,

a recent survey of an NHS IVF clinic found that a relatively large proportion of the women were working class. (Alder 1984.) Pelvic infections are more prevalent amongst poorer women.

Recently, IVF has been suggested as the treatment of other types of infertility, especially infertility where no cause has been discovered, and even for male infertility. Before this sounds any alarm bells, I must point out that IVF is still very unsuccessful. Despite stacking the odds in favour of the technology by selecting only women with a particularly good chance of success, (Steptoe and Edwards' submission to the Warnock Report indicates that only half the women wealthy enough to approach them were accepted on their IVF programme at Bourn Hall), the latest figures published show that only one in twelve women who undergo IVF gives birth (Practitioner 1984). These figures do not indicate how many of these women have multiple births, further evidence of the crudeness of the technology. In fact, what became clear when a divorced mother of three sterilised by tubal ligation was recently delivered of quads conceived through IVF, was not that doctors have adopted a more sympathetic attitude towards women, but that women of proven fertility are attractive candidates for IVF programmes.

If feminists discuss AID, IVF and the other methods which are as yet fiction rather than fact, without looking at what goes on every day in infertility clinics *now*, they avoid the issue of infertility. Looking critically at IVF in this context highlights the range of alternatives actually available to infertile women, a range of techniques which are both unsuccessful and demoralising. We should be asking: why are infertile women expected to tolerate in silence abysmal medical treatment and what solutions should we be fighting for?

Infertile women stereotyped

Because no-one has bothered to consult infertile women, a curiously distorted stereotype has emerged. The word 'desperate' appears so frequently in conjunction with infertility that the reader

A woman is a little like a kitchen sink.



Vagisec
LIQUID

Ad illustrating an article on vaginal infections that appeared in a 1971 issue of *Up from Under*, a New York feminist magazine.

B. Adler, 'An interview assessment of 20 women on an in vitro fertilisation programme' (unpublished paper, 1984).
 Braham, *Lancet*, 28 July 1984.
 J. H. Evans and L. Townsend, 'The Induction of Ovulation', *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 125:321, 1976.
 J. Newton, S. Craig and D. Joyce, 'The changing pattern of a comprehensive infertility clinic', *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 6:477, 1974.
 R. J. Pepperall, B. Hudson and C. Wood, *The Infertile Couple*, (Churchill Livingstone, 1980).
 N. Pfeffer and A. Woollett, *The Experience of Infertility*, (Virago, 1983).
Practitioner, September 1984.
 R. Rowland, 'Social Implications of the New Reproductive Technologies', (unpublished paper, 1984).
 R. Winston, 'The Quads: Nothing to Apologise For', *Observer*, 13 May 1984.

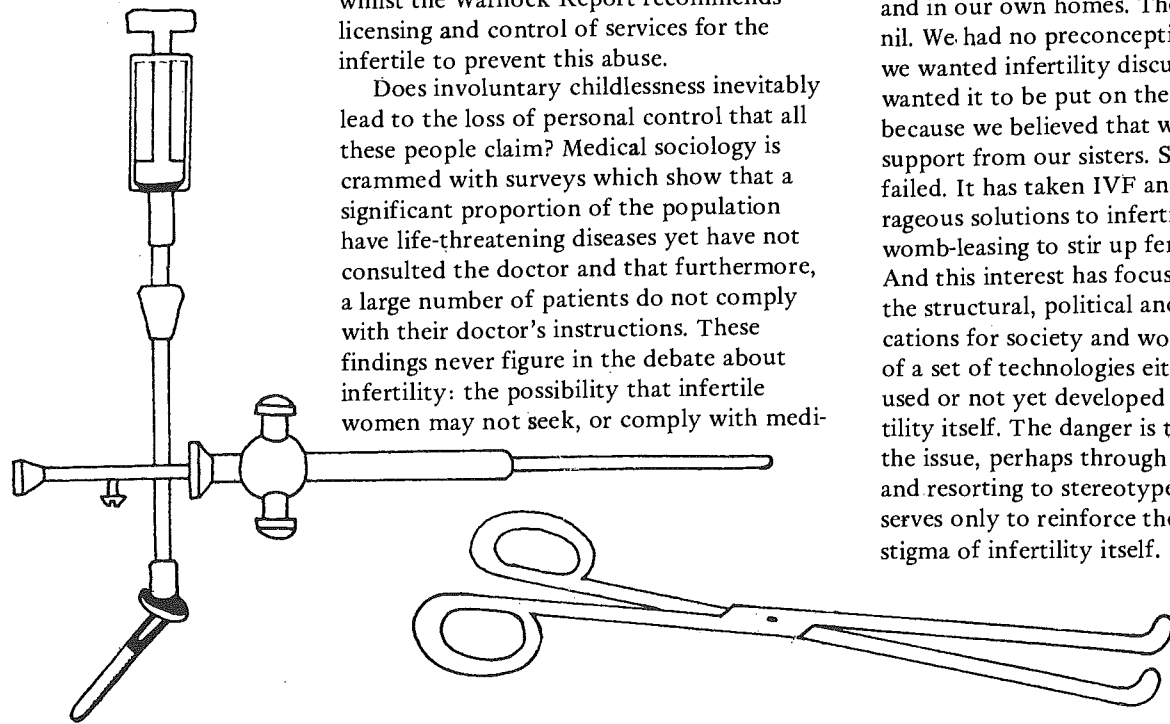
could be forgiven for believing that infertility is in fact a disease of the personality rather than the body. Infertility is a very negative experience, and at times, most infertile women are bound to feel desperate. But desperation is only one of many emotions that infertility can arouse, and infertile women certainly don't have a monopoly on desperation. However, desperation combined with infertility appears to be particularly powerful and dangerous, not only for the rest of society but for the infertile themselves, so much so that institutions are required to protect them from its effects. This view appears common to all: Robyn Rowland, a member of FINRET (the Feminist International Network on the New Reproductive Technologies) argues that "this overwhelming need for a child makes them vulnerable to all manner of manipulation by those who promise they can create that child for them" (Rowlands 1984); and a barrister-in-law argued in the *Lancet* "unfortunately to ban all professional help to infertile couples desperate enough to seek surrogacy offers the worst of all worlds . . . it will drive those for whom there seems no other option into the hands of unskilled, unscrupulous, or foreign (sic) operators" (Braham 1984); whilst the Warnock Report recommends licensing and control of services for the infertile to prevent this abuse.

Does involuntary childlessness inevitably lead to the loss of personal control that all these people claim? Medical sociology is crammed with surveys which show that a significant proportion of the population have life-threatening diseases yet have not consulted the doctor and that furthermore, a large number of patients do not comply with their doctor's instructions. These findings never figure in the debate about infertility: the possibility that infertile women may not seek, or comply with medi-

cal treatment, that they may look to other routes or alternatives to motherhood is never admitted. Yet clearly it does occur.

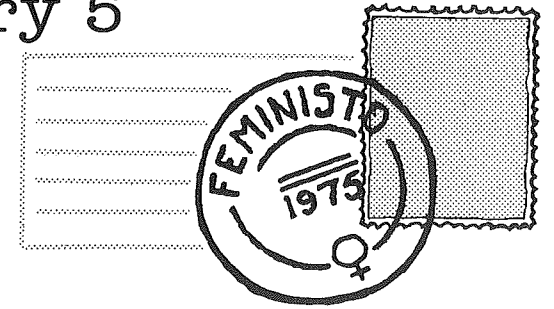
Infertile women share one common feature: a frustration of their expressed desire to become mothers. This common feature does not however mean that all women who experience infertility respond to it in the same way. Many women have clear limits beyond which they will not go. These limits are not evidence, as some doctors imply, that their motivation for motherhood is less strong than their sisters who persist. I know infertile women who will not countenance AID, IVF or adoption because these do not fit in with their ideas about their bodies or their lives, and I know women who have undergone these procedures and who are now mothers. Ignoring these real differences between women serves further to alienate infertile women who are struggling to take control of a very negative experience and denies the mixed feelings, the pain and grief involved.

I write this article after many bitter and angry attempts to put down what I feel about the feminist response to reproductive technology. Several years ago, Anne and I made valiant efforts to set up workshops on infertility at women's health conferences and in our own homes. The response was nil. We had no preconceptions about how we wanted infertility discussed, we just wanted it to be put on the feminist agenda because we believed that we could find support from our sisters. Sadly, our efforts failed. It has taken IVF and the more outrageous solutions to infertility such as womb-leasing to stir up feminist interest. And this interest has focussed largely on the structural, political and ethical implications for society and women as a whole of a set of technologies either infrequently used or not yet developed — not on infertility itself. The danger is that side-stepping the issue, perhaps through embarrassment, and resorting to stereotypes, ultimately serves only to reinforce the shame and stigma of infertility itself. □



Writing our own history 5

FEMINISTO, ART and PARCEL of the W.L.M.



Feministo was a unique feminist art event. Women artists sent each other small objects, embroideries, paintings and photographs through the post — breaking out of isolation to express their feelings and ideas about the lives they led as women. Phil Goodall looks back on the event and talks to Lynn Alderson and Sophie Laws about how it worked and the reactions to it.

Lynn: *What was Feministo and how did you get involved?*

Phil: Feministo was a network of women who sent work to each other by post. It started in 1975 with Kate Walker and some women she knew who were artists, or interested in art activity. That year, the first women artists conference was held in London, at Chalk Farm. It was on art history. Sue Richardson, Lyn Foulkes and Monica Ross went from Birmingham, having heard about it on the grapevine. Sue went to the workshop run by Kate Walker about this idea for a postal art event, and that was the first contact Birmingham women had with it. She came back and fired the rest of us in Birmingham women's art group with it.

We were already in existence as a women's art group. We got together earlier in 1975, and met in our homes and at the local adult education institute with our babies.

L: *You all had children?*

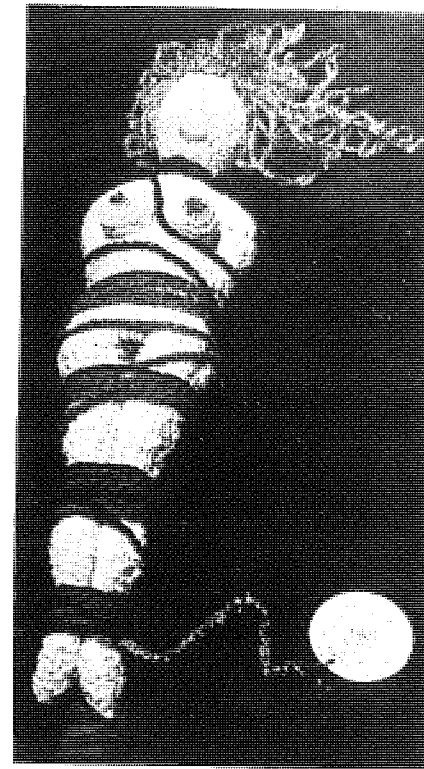
P: All but one, we took childcare in turns, or put them in the creche. We spent a lot of

time talking — about being artists, and about feeling we had 'failed' in certain respects as artists, and the problems of being connected with men who were artists, as many of us were. So a number of women felt that their skills were disappearing because of the contradictions they faced between traditional female roles and being women artists.

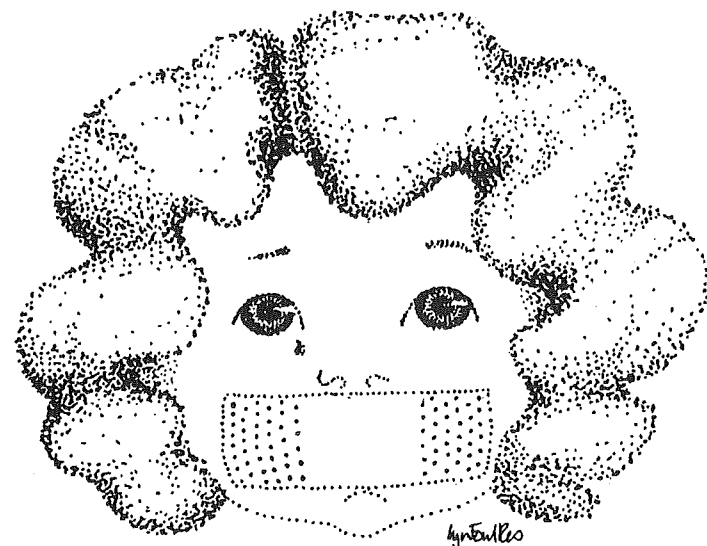
Setting up that group was an attempt to counteract that and to examine the assumptions and values of predominant (i.e. male) art practice at the time. When we came to know about the idea of a postal event, that appeared to be a good way of thinking through these issues and continuing practical work, of keeping us going.

L: *Why postal?*

P: I think Kate's idea was quite an ambitious scheme, to connect women with each other right across the country, involved in 'Art' or not — she wanted women to be in creative dialogue through producing objects for each other. Objects that spoke about their lives. Something like 300 women wrote in after we put a notice into *Spare Rib* inviting participation. Not all of them by any means



Michael Ann Mullen



got back in touch with us, but it was an indication of the sort of interest there was.

L: *The 'failure' you spoke of, did you see that as being because of having children and husbands?*

P: In the women's art group we spent meeting after meeting trying to resolve this. I think it was a mixture of social and individual circumstances — meeting the norms, being in relationships or marriages, the socialisation of women to feel ambivalent about jobs and family, having children and discovering the constraints. Then there was the extreme difficulty of keeping up the continuous flow of ideas and work: So there was that strand, but also an increasingly strong analysis of the character of mainstream art at the time. The dominant aesthetic was concerned with formal issues in art, with appearance rather than meaning or subject matter. On the whole, it tended to be non-figurative, abstract. This meant that social and political issues were not seen proper to modernist art, in spite of political art in other times and places. The facts of women's alienated lives, our sexuality and subordination were taboo. Though art is littered with images of women that position them as erotic passive objects, *our* reality was invisible.

In retrospect, I realise that we were part of a wider revolt against modernism, but at the time it seemed very much like us as women discovering for the first time why we couldn't operate within that particular framework and artistic practice.

L: *The kinds of things you produced were very domestic — attached to concrete objects and the things of everyday life.*

P: Yes, that was a clear and definite strategy, to work out ways of representing our everyday lives. We did that in a variety of ways, we made and sent work in various media — embroideries, fabric collages, drawings, photographs and photographic montages. There were also three dimensional objects.

Sophie: *Dolls I remember.*

P: Yes, work that examined images of female passivity, the stereotype of woman as doll is one version of a passive malleable object. Another recurring theme was images of butterflies pinned down, or caged, images about the containment and the social confinement of women. These were metaphors for lived experience, ways of expressing the forbidden or the invisible realities.

S: *There were a lot of self-portraits in the exhibition weren't there?*

P: Yes. That's part of the self-exploration. There were masks, clowns and split or broken self-images. I think that the self-image work is like the autobiographic diary tradition of women writers. It's an important thread of feminist work, of examining and re-constructing representations of ourselves in our own terms — taking control. Paintings of women are often voyeuristic, and assume a male audience or owner. But images by women of themselves cut across that male gaze, either by being introspective or by gazing back out at the viewer inspecting him/her, rather than appealing, or by looking beyond the viewer.

However, the self-portrait also reflects the difficulty for women in this culture of finding legitimate objects to work on. That's very clear in the 19th century. Women were excluded from doing the 'great' subjects. Social custom meant they couldn't work alone outdoors without a chaperone. So pulling together the material to do a big urban landscape, or paint an important event, or a field with farm-workers was rarely possible till the 20th century. I think self-image work is to do with the very confined cultural space women still occupy, too often we feel we have to fall back on ourselves as

individuals. It's worth reminding ourselves that feminist art history, and theory were still in the making in 1975, and artists had little to go on, indeed we were active in that making.

L: *Had you been involved in consciousness-raising?*

P: Yes. Consciousness-raising was based on building trust amongst women and making space to be open about our lives. For many the personal was a way of understanding the political and of changing. This was the basis of the hard work of taking life apart, stopping it seeming natural and politicising it. Feminist was a continuation of the c.r. process through visual means, we wanted to move those insights into a wider context and make them available as an analysis and a revolt.

S: *Was the postal event between women in groups, or were a lot of women very much on their own?*

P: There was the South London Women's Art group as well, and some individual women got involved. There were other women's art groups, who were active in other ways. There was a sense in which the postal event was seen as very amateurish and it was something that women who saw themselves as professional artists, probably didn't want to get involved with. Because it was messy and shocking.

L: *In what way was it messy?*

P: It was aesthetically messy. The postal event was a process, not a finished thing, it wasn't a static statement. Politically messy, because women were exposing themselves in difficult ways and making representations that went against the grain. I don't think there was ever a single coherent political viewpoint. There was a huge debate over exhibiting. Even in our group there were a lot of tensions among women who felt they had a body of skills they wanted to preserve and develop and I think felt quite uncomfortable being seen alongside others who had no conventional art skills and who were feeling their way — another argument was over woman only spaces, versus using mainstream galleries.

I did feel very threatened a lot of the

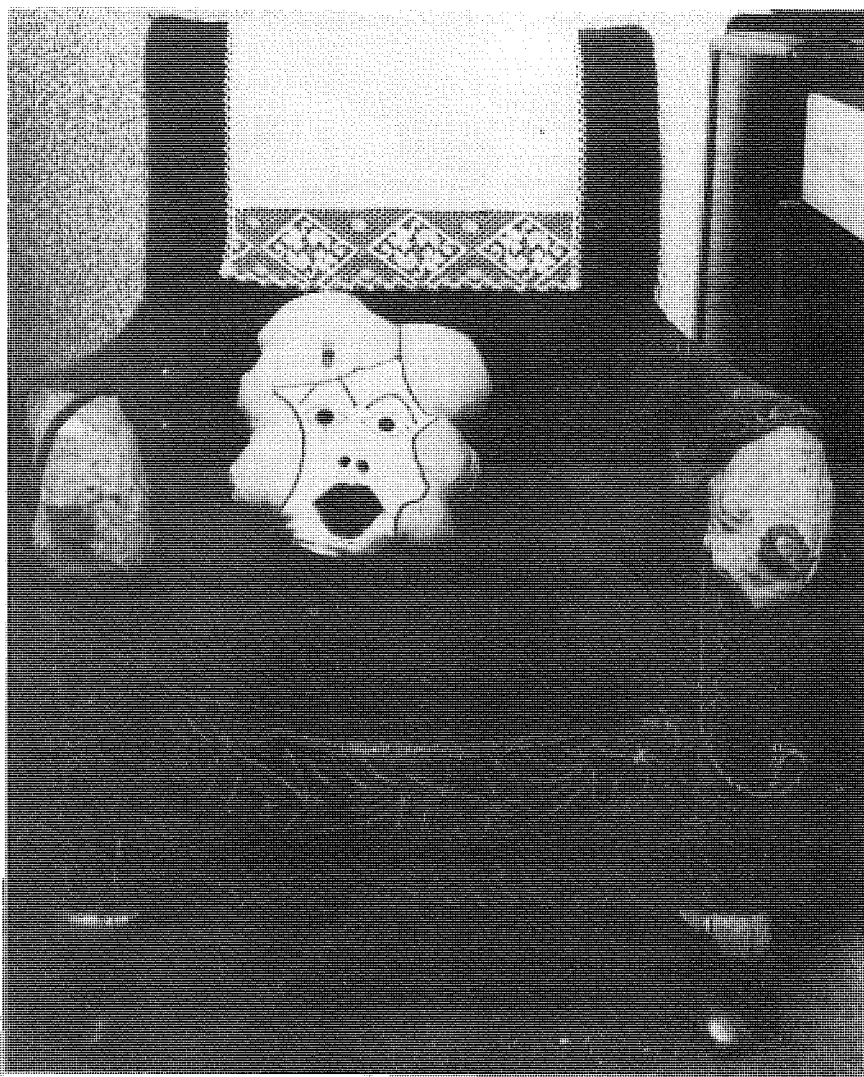
time because I felt my own skills had become atrophied. I felt that what I was doing was quite incoherent at times. Criticism came from feminist artists and the art world itself, not just around this exhibition but about a lot of feminist work — it was accused of being tacky, ill-thought-out and badly-put-together. But it was partly a survival strategy, and it was often important to respond quickly to somebody's art work/



Michael Ann Miller

message. Clearly it is necessary to form the most appropriate art strategies we can, several have been developed by feminist artists since the postal event. By its nature a strategy has limits, each one has to be provisional. We were working against dominant beliefs with the insights available to us at that time.

We also had a long discussion about whether we ever wanted men to see it at all. We felt very strongly that we were speaking to, about and for women. There were heated discussions. The network was going well and the idea was that women would collect work in community and women's centres, and that might encourage new groups and stimulate discussion about women's position



in art. However there was also a strong argument that we should use the galleries to intervene in the establishment because the things we had produced were so powerful and significant. So, in the end the decision was taken to exhibit.

We showed it first in Birmingham, at the Arts Lab and the City Reference Library. We wanted it to be in *really* public places. There were community venues as well, like the Saltley Festival. It went to Manchester, Liverpool, Coventry, then Kate had the idea of trying for the ICA. There we showed it like a huge collage, as a way of showing the collective process.

In 1977 there was an international celebration of 100 years of women's art in Berlin and we were invited to take parts of *Feministo* to this exhibition. There was so much. It was quite an eye opener to see the beginnings of an international feminist art movement. The last exhibition of *Feministo* was in Australia in 1977.

After the exhibition process was over, we felt some themes weren't fully dealt with and we wanted to make a record of the event as well, so we made a film, and new women joined in. We were trying to find different ways of representing the same issues — for example, women feeling "just part of the furniture" was a strong theme. But sadly it was never finished. People had been working on the whole thing for more than 2 years by then and wanted to develop in different directions.

L: There were a lot of constraints on what you could do? For example, having to send things through the post creates its own limitations.

P: I think that was another statement against the prevailing norms in the art world too. Because at that time exhibiting, on the whole, meant huge pieces of work, and very large scale work seemed to us to be associated with both high art, and with masculinity like their expansive use of public and private space. Women artists often worked smaller than men. We'd all experienced difficulty integrating work into our lives, so making space and time that wasn't divorced by being studio-based was important. Smallness was also an attempt to signal these conditions — kitchen table rather than easel. So it was working against irrational criteria

that didn't recognise our needs and was arbitrary about 'good' or 'bad' art.

S: I remember thinking that the exhibition seemed so painful, the tiny pieces being so small and enclosed. The personal letters too. I saw it in sharp contrast to work like Monica Sjo's which seemed to be doing something quite different. Did you feel you made a choice to make things like that?

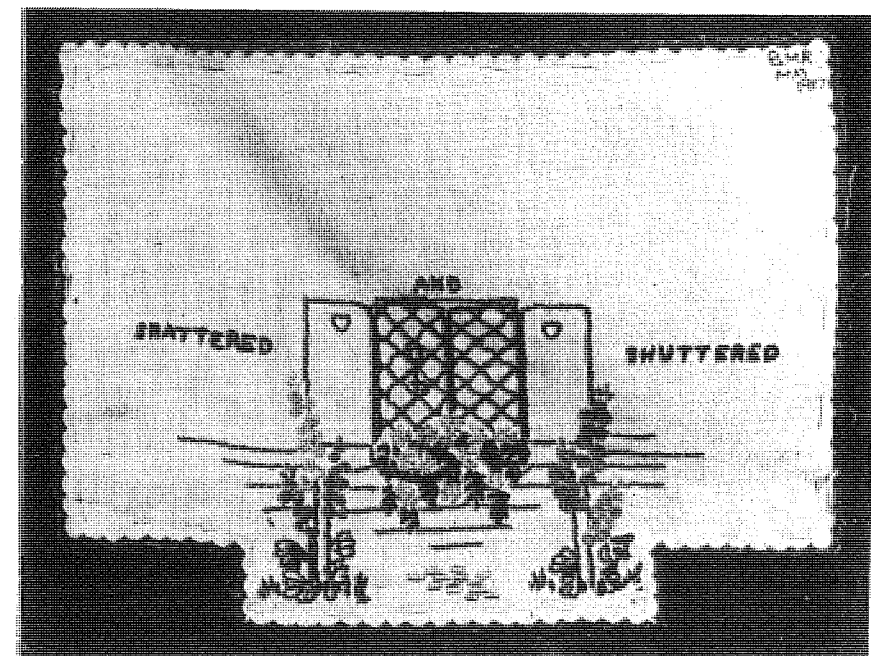
*P: Yes, I think so. We were in touch with Monica Sjo, she worked with us later on a magazine — *Mama*, about feminist art. Monica's work drew on myth and matriarchal history and was partly concerned with constructing positive female images, or role models. Some women were critical of this approach. I felt meanings drawn from ancient sources had little significance for women now, and that the search for positive images is not a straightforward matter.*

S: How did women respond to the exhibition?

P: Each exhibition brought letters, women met us and talked about the work. There was a comments book at the ICA which was red-hot with 'disgusted from Surbiton' and the women did find it very exciting and painful. They were very struck by finding their own experience figured there. It was an important stage in developing a visual culture that women could identify with. But it didn't have one effect that we hoped might happen, which was for lots of women to get involved and for the postal event itself to become a much larger process. We were perhaps over-optimistic about that and when you think there are so few art forms that people participate in as practitioners, then it's hardly surprising. Visual forms, painting, drawing and so on are the ones we have least daily experience of, whereas pop music, for example, a lot of people have played the guitar, have some experience of making music.

L: Were you trying to make it accessible to women who weren't formally trained?

P: Yes, we did want people to make things for themselves and that was a good, democratic basis to operate from but retrospectively, it was rather too much to expect that people would just take up



Michael Ann Mullien

pencil and paper. That was why embroidery was valuable. We felt that using the skills that women had would encourage them to participate. But also using things like embroidery, re-cycling bits and pieces, transforming household debris to make objects with, worked against the dominant high art mould.

S: Was there a system for passing them on or back to the women who made them?

P: No, we had no prearrangement about what a woman did with the things she received, whether they were to be treated as gifts, or sent back to the maker, or passed along. For a while they became collective property, or non-owned objects, and they simply went around, and then were exhibited. At the end it was left to each individual whether she wanted her own pieces back, or to keep some of the things she had been given. I got some back, not others.

L: So were you sending to women you didn't know at all by this point?

P: Yes in some cases but I think on the whole it was to people we'd had previous contact with. However a few women sent things from abroad. We did send to women who'd written in, but not many of these encounters developed into a long standing

Things women who worked on Feministo are now doing:— cartoonist/illustrator. Installations and performance on violence and technology. Member of a band, and co-editor of 'Crafty Women' a forthcoming Virago book. Starting a feminist video company. Working in NALGO. Ceramic sculptor and painter. Studying film. Interior designer. Design and photography.



Michael Ann Mullin

dialogue. I think that was one of the difficulties of the process.

S: *How did the art world respond?*

P: One or two of the papers reviewed it and were interested and sympathetic. Januszek on the *Guardian* was one. But on the whole, characteristically, the art press was silent. This being ignored has been a consistent problem for most feminist art in the last 12-15 years. In a sense, that was where our politics were least worked out, I don't think that at that point we had a strategy for dealing with the dismissive silence of art criticism. But there were other groups of women working around a politics of intervening in criticism, of which we were not aware till much later. In 1977 there were few magazines that would take articles about women's exhibitions, the feminist press was still being formed, there was no clear way of establishing a different critical voice.

S: *What kind of impact did it have on the lives of the women involved?*

P: Very significant on the ones I was closest to. It did bring us back into a consistent relationship with art and all the women I know have gone on to do both collective and individual work, academic and art-work. It was the first stages of an attempt to deal with gender as a legitimate artistic/cultural subject and political project. It was important for these reasons for me and other women. Some of us did work together afterwards, in different combinations. Now each of us is working independently.

S: *Did Feminist Art News relate to Feministo at all?*

P: In a sense, since a nucleus of 'Feministo women' wanted to get a newsletter started.

But it was actually the last National Women's Liberation Conference held in Birmingham in 1978, that a decision was taken in the women artists workshop to start a newsletter as a basis for support and action. Four newsletters were produced by groups round the country and after that it developed into Feminist Art News.

L: *Why did the original Birmingham art group collapse?*

P: I can only really talk about my own differences and I think after 3 years there were a lot of differences. Some of them

were personal clashes, and some to do with what was the appropriate strategy for women artists which partly focused on skills and aesthetics. That is whether you should continue to operate with a high art model, or a more open and democratic one. To me a serious problem was a view that anything representing women was radical, that the personal was automatically political. A lot more needed to be untangled about femininity and our struggle in and against our own socialisation. I also began to be increasingly uncomfortable about traditional feminine skills, knitting and sewing and similar things. I felt, in a sense it was at risk of talking down to women as an audience. Although I still think there's value in that approach. It did seem to be reproducing women's role and not necessarily changing it. I found myself more and more at odds with some of the work coming out of the women's art movement, including my own, and it led me to withdraw.

L: *What kind of work do you do now?*

P: Design and photographic work, and I write, and teach. I went through a break from any kind of visual arts activity. Partly because I decided to do an MA in 1978. I wanted to come to terms with the more theoretical debates, trying to understand what we'd been up to - feminist strategies. It had a temporary disabling effect. I didn't feel I could actually produce anything visual, at that time.

I've had a long term interest in design and found myself moving more towards that. The daily experience of the man-made world, housing, commodities - how women's identity and worklives have been structured through design and planning. This is only just being opened up to feminist analysis, and it's crucial in a period of recession to establish a politics of design that works against capital's use of design. I work in a mixed design group and am now visually and politically active. □

Monica Ross is an invisible voice in this article. She discussed the draft of this interview and edited it making many helpful suggestions. Monica kept the documentation of Feministo and her clear memory of events was invaluable.

Further Reading.
Publications in which a record and commentary on Feministo can be found.

- Courage*, 5, Berlin, May 1977.
- Roszicka Parker, article in *Studio International*, London, 1977.
- Phil Goodall, review in *Spare Rib*, 49, June 1977.
- Roszicka Parker, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife', *Spare Rib*, 67.
- Caroline Tisdall, *Guardian* 11.8.76.
- Waldemar Januszek, *New Manchester Review*, Nov 1976.
- Liquorice*, 8, Nov 1976.
- Mama*, a *Feminist Arts Magazine*, published by Birmingham Arts Lab Press, 1977.

£5 for first 6 issues

Available now:

No.1. Looking back: papers on women's magazine problem pages, authority and gender in the workplace, race and ethnicity, and 'the problem of men'.

No.2. Feminist experience in feminist research, edited by Olivia Butler.

The Editors
Studies In Sexual Politics
Sociology Department
The University
Manchester M13 9PL

Outwrite

women's newspaper

GET YOUR FREE ISSUE NOW!

For news from women worldwide!

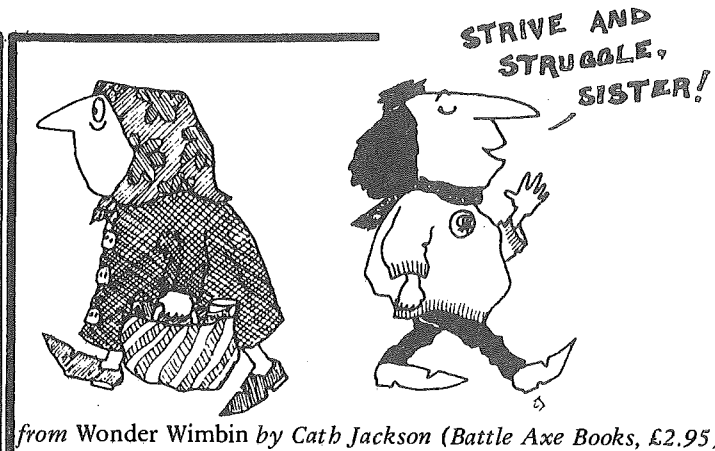
Each month news and features on women's achievements and struggles for women's liberation... against racism, male violence, imperialism, lesbian oppression... for control over our bodies... and much more.

Please would you send me a **FREE COPY** of Outwrite Newspaper and subscription details.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

Return this form to Outwrite, Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2. T5



from Wonder Wimbin by Cath Jackson (Battle Axe Books, £2.95)

Save Trouble and Strife

and Subscribe

Trouble and Strife Subscriptions, c/o Women's Centre, 50 Bethel Street, Norwich, Norfolk, Britain.

For one year (3 issues):

Britain & N. Ireland ... £5	Overseas: Irish Republic. IR£6.50
Supporting Sub £15	Europe, anywhere seaimail £6.50/US \$12
Low-income Sub ... £3.50	Airmail: Middle East £8/US \$14
Institutions: Inland. . .£15	Africa, N&S America £9/US \$16
Overseas . . .£16.50/US \$29	Far East & Australasia . . .£10/US \$18

Please send me *Trouble and Strife* for one year, starting with issue

I also enclose a donation of
Total cheque/PO

Name

Address

County/Country

Tick as applicable: seaimail airmail institution 5

Please send my friend *Trouble and Strife* for a year, from issue

Name

Address

County/Country

Gift from

Tick as applicable: seaimail airmail G5

Advertisements

No. 5 Spring 1985

How men can act innocent; and Advice to white collectives wanting to employ Black women	2
Bound and Gagged by the Family Code: interview with Algerian feminist Nadine Claire.	5
Clinical Smears: problems with Well Women Clinics <i>Lisa Saffron</i>	13
Racism: not a moral issue <i>Ruth Frankenberg</i> and <i>Janet Martens</i>	17
Makers of Men: the anti-feminist backlash of the National Association of Schoolmasters in the 1920s and 30s <i>Margaret Littlewood</i>	23
Joanna Russ' <i>The Female Man</i> : a classic reviewed <i>Ruth Wallsgrove</i>	30
A Truly International Conference: a report on the Women's International Tribunal and Meeting on Reproductive Rights in Amsterdam, July 1984 <i>Sophie Laws</i>	34
Review of Two Books on Caring for the Disabled <i>Pat Rock</i>	43
Not So New Technology: Infertility and Feminism <i>Naomi Pfeffer</i>	46
Writing Our Own History: Art and Parcel of the WLM. <i>Phil Goodall</i> talks to Lynn Alderson and Sophie Laws about <i>Feministo</i>	51

£1.75/\$3