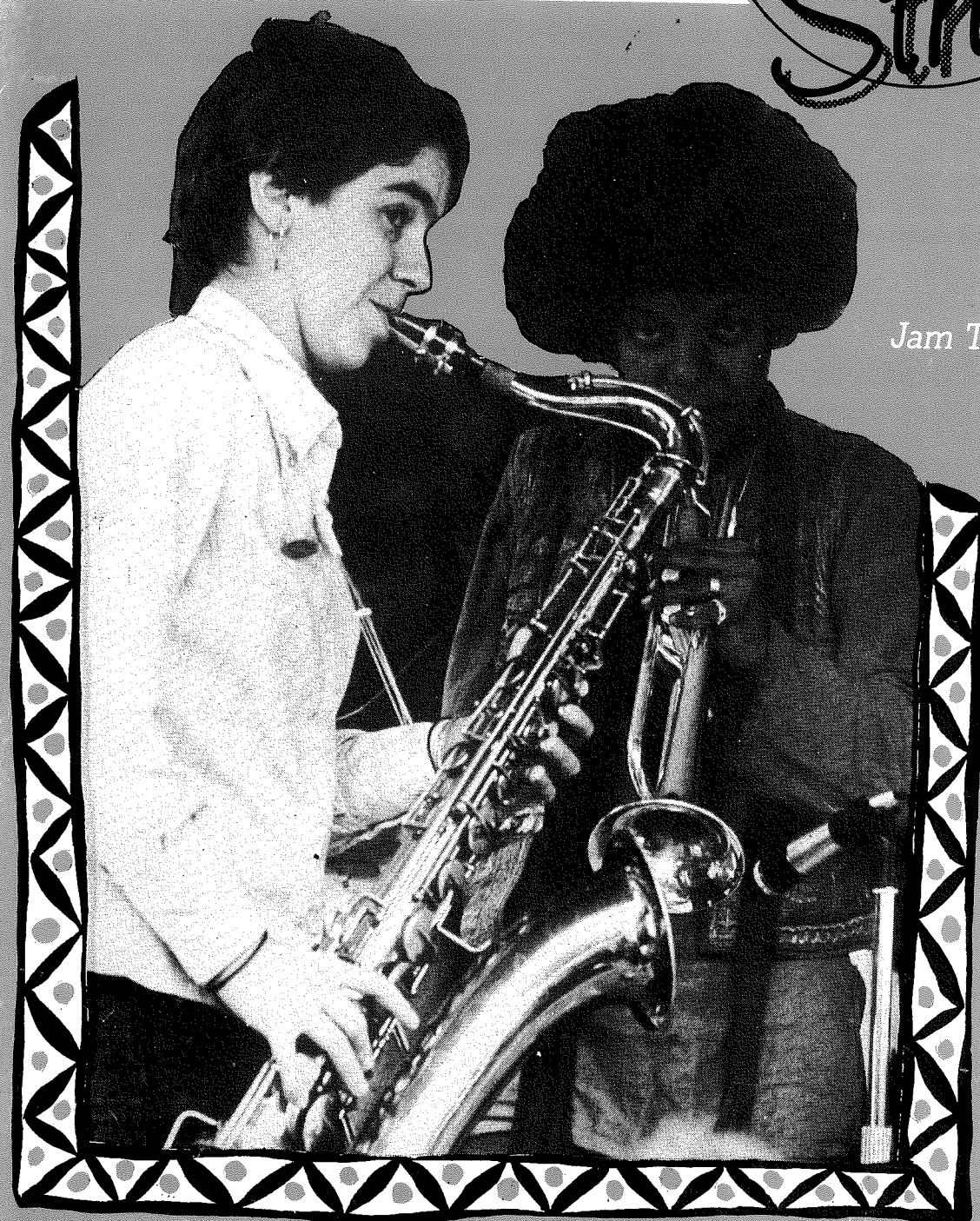


a radical feminist magazine No. 9

# Trouble and Strife

£1.95



*Jam Today – women's  
music*

*Racism, rape,  
riots*

*Disability and  
lesbian sexuality*

*Bananas, bases  
and patriarchy*

*Women and  
madness*

*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.*

*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 Anjona, Alice Henry, Jay, Jayne Egerton, Rachel Hasted, Sarah Scott, and thanks to Susie Nelson for the fixative. With many thanks to the Women's Reproductive Rights Information Centre and the Women's Health Information Centre for the use of their resources.

We would like to apologise to our readers and Sujata Gothoscar for mistakes in the spellings of names and places in our interview with her in the last issue. Sujata's corrections did not arrive from India before we went to press.

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. The collective is also responsible for titles and illustrations. Unsolicited articles are welcomed; please enclose a stamped addressed envelope. We do not intend to publish poetry or fiction.

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**WOMEN DEMONSTRATE AGAINST MALE VIOLENCE  
NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION AND RALLY FOR WOMEN ONLY  
ONLY**

**SATURDAY 26th JULY 1986**

(originally planned for International Women's Day)

**Assemble: Speakers Corner at 12 noon.**

We urge all women to take direct action as violence is issue that affects all of us. We need women from all over the country to mobilise in massive display of strength and solidarity.

We welcome ideas and suggestions for the demonstration and would particularly like women's bands, musicians and entertainers to join the March and make it the event of the year. **SPREAD THE WORD.**

We are desperately in need of funds please send donations if you can. For further information write to:

**N.O.W. (NETWORK OF WOMEN)**

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**TEL NO: 843 0578 (Mon to Wed only)**



**WOMEN'S HOLIDAY HOUSE**

Cheap and friendly holidays for women and children in the Yorkshire Dales. For information and SAD access code send sae to: The Old Vicarage, Horton-in-Ribblesdale, Settle, North Yorks. Phone: 072 96 207

**WANTED**

The Women's Press is looking for short stories for teenage girls about relationships — with boyfriends, schoolfriends, lovers, families, teachers etc. We'd like to see stories from young women themselves and women who feel imaginatively in touch with their teenage years. We're looking particularly for contributions from working class and from Black, Asian and Irish women, and hope the collection will include a wide range of experience of girls living in Britain today. Please send stories, which should be not longer than 3000 words to The Women's Press, c/o Christina Dunhill, 6 Martaban Road, London N16, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope if you would like your story returned. Closing date: 30th September.

**"BEYOND SADISM" — CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

We are compiling a radical feminist critique of sadomasochism/pornography, with a focus on lesbian sm/porn, to be published in early 1987. Please send your essays/poetry/fiction/analysis by mid-September 1986 (article ideas/summaries welcome sooner) to J Thompson / E Carola, 88 Crossflatts Ave, Leeds 11. Personal accounts of how you feel sadomasochism has affected you are very welcome.

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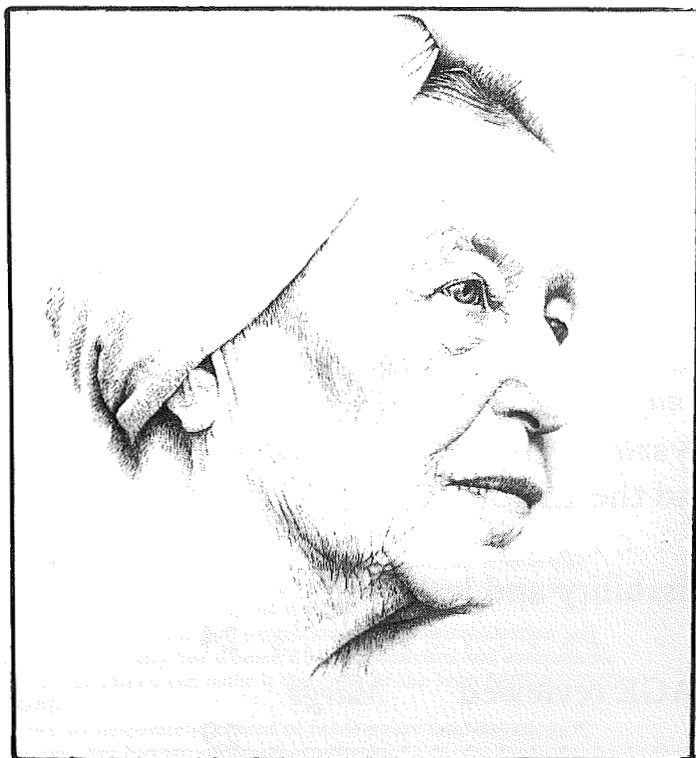


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# SIMONE DE

*Simone de Beauvoir died in April 1986. These extracts, from the final volume of her autobiography and from interviews she gave to the German feminist Alice Schwarzer, show her close involvement with the Women's Liberation Movement in the last fifteen years of her life.*



At the end of 1970 some members of the Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes got in touch with me; they wanted me to speak on the new abortion bill that was soon to come before parliament. They thought it far too half-hearted and they wanted to launch a campaign for free abortion. They suggested that to arouse public opinion, some women, well-known or obscure, should declare that they personally had had abortions. Twenty years earlier, in *The Second Sex* (1949) I had protested against the repression of abortion and I had spoken of the tragic results of this repression; so it was natural that I should sign what was called

the 'Manifeste des 343', which appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in the spring of 1971.

To continue this campaign, the Movement organized a march through Paris on 20th November, a day when feminist demonstrations were to take place all over the world. Our march was in support of freedom of motherhood, birth-control and abortion. I took part. Our placard-carrying procession went from the Republique to the Nation, filling the whole roadway; some of the militants waved floor-cloths, some lengths of wire with dirty washing hanging from them, paper dolls or balloons. One of them handed out parsley, the symbol of clandestine abortion, which others put in their hair. There were about four thousand of us, mostly women, though some men joined in, nearly all hairy and bearded . . .

The reason why I have taken part in demonstrations and committed myself to specifically feminist activities is that my attitude with regard to the state of women has evolved. As far as theory is concerned my opinions are still the same; but from the point of view of practice and tactics my position has changed.

As I have already said in *Force of Circumstance*, 1965, if I were to write *The Second Sex* today I should provide a materialistic, not an idealistic, theoretical foundation for the opposition between the Same and the Other. I should base the rejection and oppression of the Other not on antagonistic awareness but upon the economic explanation of scarcity. As I have also said, this would not modify the argument of the book — that all male ideologies are directed at justifying the oppression of women, and that women are so conditioned by society that they consent to this oppression . . .

# BEAUVOIR

I have read the American feminist literature; I have corresponded with their militants; I have met some of them, and learnt with great pleasure that the new American feminism quotes *The Second Sex* as its authority: in 1969 the paperback edition sold seven hundred and fifty thousand copies. No feminist questions the statement that women are manufactured by civilization, not biologically determined. Where they do differ from my book is on the practical plane: they refuse to trust in the future; they want to tackle their problems, to take their fate in hand, here and now. This is the point upon which I have changed: I think they are right.

*The Second Sex* may be useful to some militants; but it is not a militant book. When I wrote it I thought the state of women and society would evolve together. I wrote, 'By and large, we have won the game. There are many problems that we look upon as more important than those which affect us specifically.' And in speaking of women's condition in *Force of Circumstance* I said, 'It depends on the future of labour in the world; it will change only at the price of an upheaval in production. That is why I have avoided confining myself to feminism.' . . .

Now when I speak of feminism I mean the fact of struggling for specifically feminine claims at the same time as carrying on the class-war; and I declare myself a feminist. No, we have not won the game: in fact we have won almost nothing since 1950. The social revolution will not suffice to solve our problems. These problems affect rather more than half mankind: at present I regard them as essential. And it astonishes me that the exploitation of women should be so readily accepted . . .

In short, I used to think that the class-war should take precedence over the struggle between the sexes. Now I think that they should both be carried on together.

In all the years since 1970 Simone de Beauvoir has never refused anything to the women she worked with politically, or in whom she confided on a personal level. . . . She gave her support, and indeed still does, to acts of political provocation, took part in various campaigns and contributes her important strategies.

One of the many activities undertaken by the movement early on was to set up an illegal abortion network and to introduce the new, non-surgical, suction method into France. It was by no means clear at the time whether the Pompidou government would react in a repressive way against feminists, as it had done against the Maoists, for example. So to cover ourselves, we performed the first abortions in the apartments of so-called 'public figures' (so that if there was a scandal, it would be a real scandal!). Simone de Beauvoir did not hesitate to make her apartment available . . .

We all remember the de Beauvoir of those days very well. To begin with, we treated her with a mixture of respect and familiarity, but before long we all became extremely fond of her. She was always on time for our working meetings (unpunctuality is one of her pet aversions), and always got straight down to the matter in hand.

It was a period of innovation — everything seemed possible, political work was like a drug filling our entire lives. Evenings of meetings, campaigns, discussions, meals. These meals with de Beauvoir, 'les bouffes', soon became a favourite routine. We took turns cooking the meals (although she never did. She hates cooking!). There were generally six or eight of us, all women. There was much eating, drinking, laughing and making of plans . . .

Nowadays feminists refuse to be token women, like I was. . . they're right! One must fight! The main thing they've taught me is vigilance, and not to let anything pass, not even the most trivial things. □

Extracts are taken from:  
Simone de Beauvoir: *All Said and Done*, published 1972, translated 1974, Penguin, pp479-80, 483-84, 490-91.

Alice Schwarzer: *Simone de Beauvoir Today: Conversations 1972-1982*, Chatto and Windus. The Hogarth Press, 1984, pp14-16. 'Introduction' and pp69-70 'The Second Sex': thirty years on'.

## LETTERS

*Not so political prisoners*

Dear Amnesty International people, I would like to have some information about your policies concerning two different groups of political prisoners:

1) Lesbians, who are, although lesbianism is in most countries not illegal, in many places persecuted. They are usually arrested because of other political work or for 'anti-social activity' (like in the Nazi concentration camps). Do you pay attention to the fact that lesbians may not be harassed because of political activities, but purely for their sexual preference?

2) How do you work for wimmin who are imprisoned in Britain and other western-european countries for peace activities? One of your principles is to support only people who don't use or advocate violence. How do you define violence? Is fence cutting or damage to property that excludes the possibility of hurting people violence in your eyes? I have been imprisoned in Britain for "trespassing" into USAF Greenham Common and face a five months' prison sentence in (West) Germany for blockading nuclear weapon convoys. I regard myself as having been (and will be again) a political prisoner.

I would be very happy to receive some information from you to clarify your policies. In peace,  
Fiver,  
Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp.

Dear Fiver,

Thank you very much for your letter of 8.4.86. In answer to your question regarding Amnesty International's policies towards lesbianism, Amnesty International works for release of prisoners of conscience; that is, those people detained because of their beliefs, colour, sex, ethnic origin, language, or religion, who have not used or advocated violence. As you yourself state, lesbianism is not, as such, a political issue, and therefore does not fall under our mandate. Amnesty International does, at all times, campaign for the abolition of torture in all cases, and against the use of cruel or degrading treatment for all prisoners, irrespective of their sexuality.

Your second question asks if Amnesty International works for women imprisoned for peaceable activities. Such activities as fence cutting, trespassing, and damaging property are regarded as criminal activities and not merely a peaceable expression of an opinion. They would not therefore be regarded as prisoners of conscience.

I hope this answers your questions.

yours,  
Jacqui Bond,  
Press Office Volunteer,  
Amnesty International,  
5 Roberts Place,  
off Bowling Green Lane,  
London EC1R 0EJ.

*Raising a roar*

Dear *Trouble and Strife*,

An examination of my own response to Pat Barker's novel, *Blow Your House Down*, in the light of Patricia Duncker's analysis of feminist fiction and women's writing in "Writing and Roaring" (*T&S6*) has led me to speculate on whether this can be said to be a political feminist novel.

As a feminist who embraces Patricia Duncker's definition of feminism, I acknowledge that feminism must also be a process of decolonisation. I'm always discovering colonised parts of myself and expect to spend the rest of my life routing the enemy

from my mind. *Blow Your House Down* enabled me to confront the foe in the interior of my colonised being and take an important step — that of dismantling the reflection in myself of the pornographic structure which has defined my sexuality. This structure which I reject intellectually still has some hold on my feelings. It is one of the ways in which the enemy retains his destructive grip on the territory which should have been mine to develop from birth. Who knows what the territory would have looked like if women's sexuality had been free to develop without the dominance of the male prescription for all sexuality.

*Blow Your House Down*, although clearly based on recent historical fact, is nevertheless fiction, the traditional novel form. It risks being a 'roar offstage'. But Pat Barker grasps a nettle few writers are willing to grasp, that of women's sexuality as defined by and exploited by men, in the poignant arena of prostitution. This is a stage where the enemy cannot walk on, disguised by romanticism, to muffle the roar.

Pat Barker describes an imbalance of power in which women are trapped by an economic system which leaves them only their bodies to sell, and in which men are at liberty to use and abuse them. There can be no doubt of her meaning when she writes at the end of Ch5

What got her was the hypocrisy of it all. They went on about being married but when you got right down to it, past the white weddings and the romance and all that, what they really thought was: if you're getting on your back for a fella, he ought to pay. That was what they really thought. And where did that leave you? You might as well be standing on a street corner in bloody Northgate — at least it'd be honest.

Within this analysis of the power relations between men and women, implicit throughout the novel is the women's acceptance of the way men see women, the way they define women sexually, the way they do violence to women and so on. That is the world they live in. It is the unrefined version of the world we all live in.

But Pat Barker permits no eroticism in her depiction of the traditional pornographic structure. Moreover the suggestion of transcendence in the third part of the novel is in no way a romantic return to any such tradition; being expressed in the form of compassion and love between people who, by means of age and mutilation, are liberated from pornographic values.

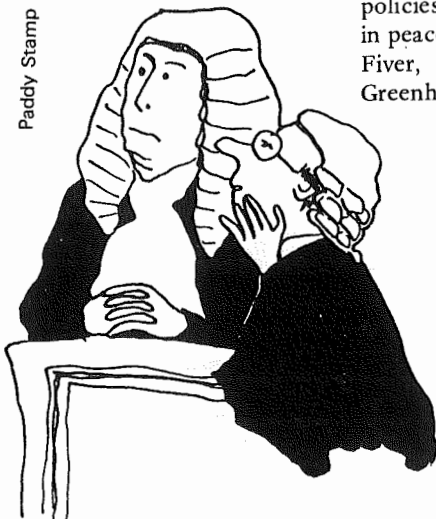
Description of individual men in *Blow Your House Down* is minimal. Even Bill is not so much a person, more a facet of Maggie's fear, and a feature of her struggle. A 'man' is an obnoxious necessity required by the women to make their living, that is to pay the rent and buy food and clothes for their kids. The word 'man' is freed to be used ironically. A 'man' is a horrible human being as well as a pastry shape cut by a child. The writer strips the word of its status and loads it with negative meaning.

Relations between men and women are characterised on the one hand by the women's rejection of individual men — these women do seem powerful as a group in spite of the negative images in the book — and on the other hand by the oppressive power of men over women, both in personal relationships and in the exploitative economic structure of the city. Women are exploited for their labour in the chicken factory. Pat Barker turns this into a metaphor which evokes an image of women processed, killed trussed and plucked on the production line. Her horrific development of the metaphor is calculated to deeply shock.

Such horrors are likely to remain unchallenged in our culture to reappear again and again in tabloid newspapers, and even celebrated by male hacks in cheap paperbacks, but in my mind at least a roar has been raised.

Horrors of all kinds persist because there is not a loud enough roar against them. While saying we abhor them, we all, in a corner of our being, accept and even harbour the horrors. If we had all, every man,

Paddy Stamp



he's been reading  
someone called Andrea  
Dworkin, your honour,  
and says he'd like us  
to view his crimes  
as political acts...

listen, mate: as far as  
I'm concerned, you're just  
an awkward sort of a girl...



Paddy Stamp



woman and child of us, been raped, we would all stand up and shout "no more rape" and there would be no more rape. We would no longer accept and harbour the idea that for women to be subjugated sexually is a necessary part of human sexuality.

But there are ways to find the roar within ourselves in spite of lack of direct experience, and this is what I feel is the value of Pat Barker's novel. Having read it I can separate myself a little further from the natural world (or what, as Patricia Duncker writes, has been given to us as the natural world) and to see it a little more as the "world made strange". It is this that makes it a political feminist novel. It may change nothing in the world at large, but it creates the possibility for revolution in the mind of the individual.

If I have used Pat Barker's book or Patricia Duncker's article for anything which either of them did not intend I apologise and can only say that this is how I read them, and I welcomed them. Also I'm very interested in the project on women's writing and feminist fiction of which Patricia Duncker's article is a part and would like to read more about it.  
Jane Vellacott.

#### *Rewriting History?*

Dear Sisters:

We read with astonishment that part of your 'open letter' in *T&S8* in which reference is made to the 1977 National Women's Liberation Conference in London. In a hard-working group of about 15 women who organised that conference there were *two* Communist Party members (of whom one was EW), and while it might be flattering to her and her fellow party member to suggest that their personalities were so powerful that they were able to persuade all the others to do what they or the CP wanted, it is extraordinarily insulting to the other feminists on that collective to suggest that they were manipulated in any such way. It is probably not worth bothering to say that

the CP issued no directives about the Conference at all and had no view whatsoever about the poster. Our recollection is that the word 'liberation' was on the poster in the end, having been left off accidentally when first designed, but we may be wrong. But in any case the poster was the responsibility of the whole group. Collective responsibility worked well in that group, and we feel that women who were not part of it and who therefore know nothing about it are not in a position to make accusations, and that to do so is to display a mentality very far removed either from sisterhood or from liberation.

We do entirely agree, however, that to dredge up 'ancient sectarian trivia' in this way is an 'unpleasant trait'. It is hard to believe that when women are facing so many real difficulties some feminists still think it useful to indulge in this kind of red-baiting paranoia.

Incidentally, this letter should not be read as a comment on 'Women Alive', with which neither of us has any connection.

In sisterhood,  
Angela Stewart Park\* and Elizabeth Wilson  
London N5.

(Members of the 1977 National Women's Liberation Conference Organising Group).

\*Neither brainwashed nor ever a Communist.



Paddy Stamp

#### *Women Alive reply*

Dear sisters

The Women Alive organising group would like to reply to the letter in last month's *Outwrite* from the *Trouble and Strife* collective on the subject of the Women Alive weekend on July 5 and 6 this year.

The idea for Women Alive was first raised in late '84 by a group of Communist Party women. Like the *Trouble and Strife* collective we too felt the need for women to meet to consider where the women's liberation movement had got to. Our initial letter, which was mailed out very widely to women's organisations, did indeed note that there had been no national feminist conference for all women since 1979. We felt that, given the major changes that had occurred since then both in terms of feminism and the women's movement and the political climate nationally, a forum where women could get together to discuss and debate these changes was needed urgently.

Our concern was that Women Alive should contribute to the development of feminist debate and thinking. We were not claiming in any way to be a substitute for the national women's liberation conference.

We do, however, wish to be able to provide a forum where women with the widest possible range of experiences and interests can get together. We do not feel that there is anything 'liberal' or 'apologetic' about this, since it seems to us to be the core of what the women's movement aims to be about. If the women's movement is not committed to attempting to represent all women's experiences and needs and to building non-oppressive alliances across our present divisions and differences then in our view it will not be capable of bringing about the changes in women's lives that we all wish to occur.

It was for this reason that one of our main aims with Women Alive was to involve from the beginning as many women's organisations as wished to take part. As keen readers of *Trouble and Strife* we are sad that

they feel so antagonistic to Women Alive.

However, we do feel that the *Trouble and Strife* collective's accusations in terms of the title and content of Women Alive are inappropriate. And we would gladly have answered their questions about it if they had contacted us.

We make no apology for calling Women Alive an event rather than a conference. We feel conference to have academic overtones and did not wish to discourage some women from coming. But more than this, Women Alive will not only be a place for hard-talking and hard-thinking, but will we hope be enjoyable. As Pat Murphy has said, 'to make a virtue out of being disempowered is to participate in being a victim'. Women Are Strong and Girls Just Wanna Have Fun are important political slogans. This doesn't of course mean we pretend women aren't oppressed. Subjects being discussed at Women Alive include 'How 'aid' makes women poor', 'Low pay and Poverty', 'Irish women and violence', 'Women and Prisons'. But with the odds stacked against women, then we have a right to celebrate not only our existence, but also our skills, our cultures, our humour — as well as the ways we fight back against male violence, patriarchy, racism and imperialism. Indeed some of the ways we fight back against oppression is through feeling strong or being funny.



Paddy Stamp



Moreover, we do not wish, as the *Trouble and Strife* collective do, to make a divide between 'culture' and 'politics'. Some of the most powerfully political feminist messages are in the form of poetry, novels, film and music. Part of the feminist project has been to demonstrate the link between being faced with page 3s and pin-ups and the undermining of our confidence as workers, politicians, etc — ie that 'culture' and 'politics' are inextricably linked. Thus, 'Images of Black Women', 'Guilty Pleasures', 'Modern Women's Utopias' and the women's cabaret night will be just as central to Women Alive as sessions on 'Disability and Reproductive Rights' or 'Women and Revolutionary Struggle'.

Women are Alive. The question is not as *Trouble and Strife* suggest to 'Awake' us/ them, but how to build a feminist movement that taps into our experiences, empowers us all, and transforms society so women are truly free. We hope that women will come to Women Alive on July 5 and 6 at South Bank Polytechnic, London, to debate and discuss how we can all contribute to this.

In sisterhood,  
The Women Alive organising group.  
London EC1.

#### Refreshing honesty in print

Dear *Trouble and Strife*,  
We wanted to let you know how much we

enjoyed and appreciated your magazine. We both think there is a real need for a genuinely radical feminist publication that isn't afraid to face the seriousness of the issues confronting women today, and that isn't worried about dealing with the abstract as well as the concrete. It's especially refreshing to see feminists being honest in print about their differences — even though we share the problems, we can't always agree about what is to be done about them. But having a forum for intellectual debate should certainly help towards tolerance and compromise (if necessary) and will hopefully help towards finding the right answers too!

In short, keep up the good work. Special thanks to Liz Kelly for the article on the porn controversy in the States, and to Rachel Hasted for the courageous and thoughtful look at feminist historians' dilemmas. We have special sympathy for you, Rachel — one of us is a medieval historian and the other is in English. I think we both thought we were alone in feeling uneasy about being the mother of invention — in feminist circles at least (!) — but now we know we're not. Keeping both moral and intellectual integrity intact is terribly difficult but obviously crucial in the struggle for true equality. So thank you, *Trouble and Strife*.

Yours in sisterhood,  
D M Purkiss and I P Dowling,  
Warwickshire.



## THE TRIBE OF DINA: A JEWISH WOMEN'S ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY: MELANIE KAYE/KANTROWITZ & IRENA KLEPFISZ

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# RACISM RAPE & RIOTS

*"The outpouring of male violence on those nights can claim to have been triggered by sane and just objections to police brutality. The expression of this objection was not just, nor sane, nor unambiguous. And least of all was it unambiguous toward women of any race."* Anna J Hearne writes:

In the Autumn of last year (85) there were riots in the racially-mixed inner-city London boroughs of Brixton and Tottenham. These riots brought to the fore many issues which did not pass with the riots, and existed before them; issues which I believe need some thought by women of colour and white women.

I am not speaking of what is neatly referred to as "Inner-City deprivation and Racial Tension." The issue I am specifically referring to is a consideration of women, in regards to male violence, particularly rape, in a situation where racism is practiced and hostile racial inter-action thrives.

As a woman of colour living in Brixton, I found much male violence and absurdity in the riots which was vicious, deceitful and hostile to women. It is a violence I cannot condone. I am regarding the riots as a whole, looking at them as a circumference which includes, and recognises, the basic sadism of the British majoritively white police; but does not exclude the ravaging response of the young males in the black community. Riot as it actually happened did not, in my opinion, improve the quality of life for women of colour, either in terms of the racism she endures from the white police, or the sexism she endures (and sometimes condones) from the males of her own community and race.

The outpouring of male violence on those nights can claim to have been triggered by sane and just objection to police brutality.

The expression of this objection was not just, nor sane, nor unambiguous. And least of all was it unambiguous toward women of any race.

In the Nov '85 issue of *Off Our Backs* there was a scant article on international news pages reporting the riots. As a feminist woman of colour I found the tone of the article dubious, particularly the sentence in which the writer refers to the rapes. Ruth Wallsgrove claims "*The New Statesman* said that two women were raped during the Brixton trouble, though I've seen no confirmation or details of this." It was not just the *New Statesman* who said this. It was the women themselves. The writer's attitude seems somewhat dismissive to the horror and reality of rape which is something that all women, both women of colour and white women, live with throughout the world. As women we know *full well* that very often we do *not* openly hear about other women's rapes when they happen. Rape is a constantly silenced horror in patriarchy, and one about which the victim's word is perpetually doubted, belittled, and dismissed.

This does not mean that rape is not a crime and it does not happen. It happens in all sorts of contexts. Be the context domestic, social, racial or otherwise, that basic sexual context of rape of women is something patriarchy, and men of all its classes and races, constantly re-affirms.

Perhaps in the misguided interest of racial



steven

parity — the writer's report implies some suspension of belief in the idea that women were actually raped on riot night. Women were raped that night. Both white women and women of colour. Women were raped the night of the Brixton riots, as indeed women of all races are frequently raped (by men of their own or other races) on an ongoing basis in Tottenham, Brixton, and all other parts of the patriarchal globe and world.

The reporter says she has heard no confirmation of this. I have. The women who spoke of the rapes exist, and are *some* of the women raped that night (for there were more than they abused). The two women spoke the truth when they claimed to have been gang-raped. Their statement concerning *sexual* crime against them was twisted by white police to give it a *racial* emphasis. Let us, as women, see through the racist police twist, not doubt the women's own word on rape as patriarchy does so brutally. Men do not need the excuse of race riot to rape. They do it constantly. Alternatively, riot does *not* mean men suspend raping.

It is regrettable that as a woman, and as a white woman choosing to report the riots the writer got caught in mentioning rape in this tone. I wonder if she would have, had not these rapes taken place in the context of what was *supposedly* an anti-racist stand by majoritively black males?

The male violence of any race does not make life, or liberty, or pursuit of health and happiness easier for women. Male violence in the Inner-City, racially disad-

vantaged areas does not improve the quality of life for the women of those areas. *Any* form of male violence damages. Be it from the police. *Or* the males of the community. And *both* groups *do* practice violence against women. After white police and black males alike have ejaculated violence over the street and the skyline in a mutual sado-masochistic orgy of male violence (enacted in the name of racial confrontation), the violence in the ghettos and inner cities continues. And eventually, invariably, it rebounds damagingly on a woman. Or a girl child.

There are many historically twisted attitudes involving racism and rape which we inherit. Attitudes inherited by white women born of white communities, and inherited by women of colour from their communities. Some need questioning and wrestling with, for they do not reflect any real respect for either the fight against racism, or for women against violation.

Historically there are undoubtedly moments when black men, and males of colour, have been falsely accused of rape by white males, who wish to lie about rape in order to racially persecute, and mutilate, another man. The lie of falsely accusing men of rape in order to oppress them on racial grounds is an age old, and evil device, which has been used much by white western culture. It is a lie which can make things difficult for women when the time comes for her to fight against her own rape, or to denounce rape, and male violence in certain contexts. The racist rape frame-up is a lie which can cause confusion, particularly for a woman of colour, in regards to her own experience of sexual abuse. Especially if it was at the hands of a male of her own race. It is a lie which can also make it confusing for well meaning white women who have a sincere abhorrence for racism.

Obviously it is purest misconception, and racism, to go blindly along with this lie of the white frame-up of black males for rapaciousness. It is also purest misconception and sexism to re-act with an assertion of its opposite, claiming black males don't rape. Black men do rape, as do white men. Black men and white men rape black women and white women. And we all, women of colour and white women alike, know in our

guts, if not actually from brutal experience. To in any way, at any point, deny males of colour, or any other oppressed male group has its rapists among them, simply because the white oppressor male culture has used this false accusation of rape as a racial frame-up, is to fight one lie with another lie.

It is only with truth lies can be fought. The truth is that males of all classes, races, creeds, colours and even ages, rape. And among this despicable number many too many black males have figured. Black males who have raped not only women of the oppressor race, but women (and girl children) of their own race.

Historically, women of colour have been put in an insidious position in regards to race and rape. A woman of colour intuitively senses, and actually knows of the historical rape frame-up of the males of her race. Often, out of a misguided pressure of racial loyalty she will choose to feel silenced about her own rape, especially if it was at the hands of a black male. Which it often is. It is still extraordinarily hard for a woman, or girl-child of colour, to say and face what it means to have been raped by a male of her own race.

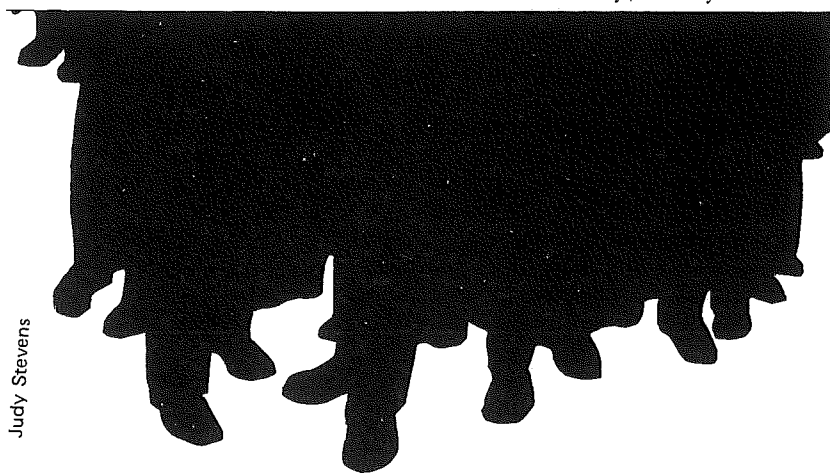
Black women and women of colour have been regarded as available rape-meat by white males since the plantation on. When a male of colour rapes a woman of colour he rapes primarily a woman, but also he assaults his own race. Under European imperialism and slave structures, white men have raped and assaulted his race before him. The black awareness of this, and where it places her as a woman of colour in the world is almost too painful for many women of colour to face. Virtually it means she is without racial or sexual support from any. Either her own, or any other race. She is alone with her racial and sexual reality in a very uncomfortable cultural and personal place. So often she goes on pretending, inadvertently denying, and protecting her own illusions about brotherhood and race, and through them, protecting the black male rapist. As indeed her own mother may well have done before her. The woman of colour rationalises "he", the black male rapist, isn't that really; at least not as bad as the white male rapist. Not her brother, not her father, not her



cousin, not her son, not her neighbour. Not her race, not oh not. The males of her race proving to be as violent, and abusive, and as hostile to her as a woman, as the rest of the racist and sexist world.

But there is little to choose between rapists. Race does not vindicate them. Nor does blood relationship. Be it the blood relationship of race, or a blood relationship of family group. In a very real sense a woman of colour abused and raped by a black male inherits the complex contradictions of loyalties, and social pressure to repress her anger, such as an incest survivor inherits. The conjunction of white racism and black male violence to women has helped ensure that horrid legacy for women of colour. And she owes neither of them, either white oppressor, or black male violator a jot of thanks for it. For the woman of colour who loves her race, black male rape is, in more ways than one, 'black-mail' rape.

At all times all women do well to remember that the rapists of one race, or group, or family, are as culpable as the rapists of another. Neither oppression or privilege exonerates the crime of rape. Nor does the fact the rapist might not be a stranger. For women of colour our heritage of silenced sexual abuse at the hands of men is double-edged bitterness. The girl child of colour is often subjected to much unhealthy conditioning about this. She learns early, through racism, that the sexual abuse of a woman of colour is not a priority to the white world. A white world which has a long history of not giving a damn when, as J





Edgar Hoover so delicately put it "some niggah bitch gets herself raped." The girl child of colour experiences too, how often within the black community, the violence and abusiveness of the black male toward women is tolerated and silenced, often by the black woman herself, as part of her unending attempt to protect the male of her own race, and seemingly her own race against white racism.

The stark truth is that these hideous societal attitudes toward herself, and her sexual violation, are sometimes internalised by the girl child of colour. Part of her learns to believe that her abuse at the hands of males (particularly of her own racial community or even family) simply doesn't matter. Not as a priority. It is merely part of life, over which she, as a woman of colour, must learn not to make too much fuss, and repress, or ignore, or forgive in order to present a united front with the males of her race. Even if they have sexually violated her. These are bitter truths and I realise there is much pain for the woman of colour in facing them. But it is important to assert that the black woman *does not owe* the black male unending protection because of the rigours of racism. Particularly if it is at the expense of truth, and of herself. As women of colour we cannot help ourselves, racially or sexually, by continuing to participate, condone, or deliberately overlook the rape, male violence, sexism and hostility to women in our communities and heritage. White women will not help us by condoning

it likewise, albeit in the name of anti-racism. I have actually talked to a well-meaning white woman who expressed the view, that her concern with racism was such, that, were she sexually assaulted by a black male she could nor would not possibly protest, defend herself, or condemn him for it on the grounds that *he* was racially oppressed and *she* was a racial oppressor!

As a woman of colour I was alarmed to hear her say this! Not least of all because I know full well males of colour do not rape white women only, but sexually violate women of their own race also. And here she was offering them licence to do just that! While her attitude is an extreme example of a particular sickness in white women's liberalism, I do not honestly believe she is *entirely* alone in this mentally unhealthy willingness to excuse rape or violence in males, on the grounds that they are racially, or socially oppressed and disadvantaged.

Surely a white woman mustn't corrupt her reasons for fighting racism with the idea that sexual violence is tolerable — even commendable — in the black male because of his racial oppression? Most racially oppressed men are just as shitty and sexist as the rest of the gender. A white woman's challenging of racism must surely be based on her own sense of honour and awareness that racism must be fought because it is an odious evil in itself? And not an evil either she, or women of colour can combat by being prepared to overlook or collude with the evil of rape *by, or of, any*.

Racism and rape do not (unfortunately) cancel each other out. (Both are so prevalent did they do so, we would have long been rid of both.) But the two evils cannot be traded off against each other. Although patriarchy has done this.

As women we must try to cut through that knot. For it strangles.

None of us will cure the hideous evil of rape by treating it as a racial crime out of our own misguided sense of race and prejudice. None of us will cure or curb the evil of racism by belittling the evil of rape because of racial factors.

Neither black, nor white males, should have their male violence inclusive of rape and violence against women, protected by white women, or women of colour.

It is an unholy protection of unholy acts and women should *quit* doing it.

Rape committed by white males under cover of racism, or rape committed by oppressed males under a banner of anti-racism, are both equally vile. Both can, and do, and are happening. Neither deserve our protection. Whether we are white women, or women of colour, of any race or nation. We need to recognise the various ways we have been indirectly conned through racism, into protecting rapists and male violence. Rape is a primal, if not *the* primal and most heinous crime against women. It is not excusable in any male, be he of privilege, or be he racially oppressed, or be he otherwise oppressed.

However, it must be noted that, in contrast to the white woman who claimed she would accept rape in the name of being anti-racist, I also have met white women who described and decried what was ugly about the black male rapist in racial, not sexual terms. As a woman of colour this mindless unexamined, white prejudice does not help me in the least. By it I am either silenced (again) by racism, or "catch-22'd" into a racial defence of a male who has committed sexual violation of a woman and perpetrated the act of abuse I find most abhorrent in all the world.

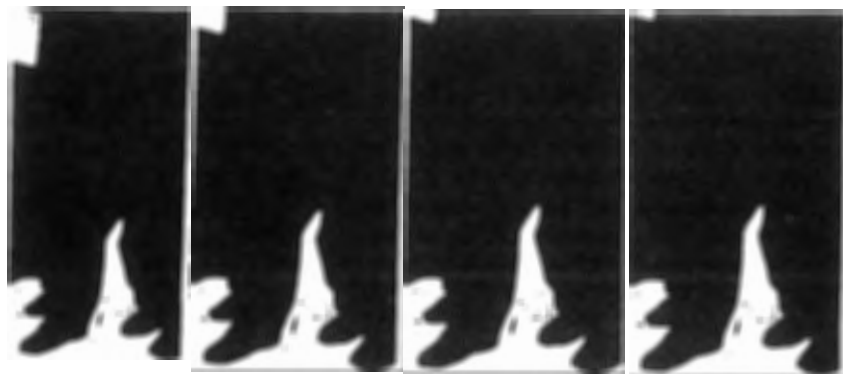
Rape is rape. Whichever way the racial cake cuts in a situation, and rape should not be called for anything less than the violent sexual crime it is. Each rapist must be named and dealt with for what he is. Each racist must be named and dealt with for what he or she is. When we do overlook or excuse rape and violence against women on racial grounds, it is tantamount to a form of silencing, or submitting to our own negation as women. It is dangerous for us as women; morally and physically.

The Brixton riots, and the Tottenham riots, supposedly a black male stand against white racism and police brutality, were not separate from rape and the violation of women. Violation of women who were white, and violation of women who were of colour. I feel, and heartily believe white women and women of colour should hesitate very strongly before glamorising or asserting these activities as they actually happened were a righteous, revolutionary, or real anti-racist process.



That the British police have a long history of sadism, racism, violence and hypocrisy is no news to any but the most privileged. Once Britain had an 'Empire' in which the basic sadism and racism of its colonial police force flourished and was encouraged. Now the empire has dissolved, but the basic sadism and authoritarianism of certain British institutions remains unresolved. In the case of the police their hostile energies are now increasingly directed against citizens of the British Isles. Thus post colonial hostility is primarily, but not exclusively, directed against the black British. It would be purest sophistry for me to say I have a real respect, sympathy or trust for the police. That was long ago literally battered out of me by they themselves. What I do suggest is that: One does not counteract one social moral violent male sickness by condoning another.

There is much in the West Indian male response to oppression that is sick. Not least of which is a high degree of male violence, including deeply sexist, hostile male attitudes and violence against women. Rastafarians and state police in both Britain and Jamaica, have institutionalised themselves, and their relationship with each other, to such an extent that they are virtually brethren under the uniform of the skin. Quarrelling brethren. But brethren. Most West Indian male youths now adopt as a matter of cultural course, a degree of the mode and jargon of Rastafarianism. Rastas and police particularly have an ongoing, sado-masochistic, violent love/hate



Judy Stevens



affair of mutual attention, fascination, loathing, obsession and interaction. On either side it involves very little respect for women.

White women who choose to ignore this level of sexist male violence in Third World communities and communities of colour in the interest of appearing non-racist, play with a dangerous lie.

Women of colour who choose to ignore or condone this level of sexist male violence *do not* help ourselves in the fight against racism or sexist oppression. It is time that the contemporary pretense by women of colour that the problem of male violence we face is exclusively (or even basically) from a white world of police force alone was crushed in favour of a more real awareness for dealing with violent and oppressive male energy as we actually face it in the western inner-cities, and in many communities of colour throughout the world. The truth is that as women of colour we are often 'double-policed' by the official white police force, and a mounting level of ghetto and race rationalised violence and contempt for women practiced by black males and males of colour. The woman of colour will remain dangerously vulnerable at that precarious crossroad between rape and racism unless she is prepared to give up protecting and supporting the *supposed* "black brother" on racial grounds. Unless she is prepared to defend and *distance* herself from *his* violence and sexism and hostility to women, she will continue to be a victim of both the black and white worlds. As were the original women victims of the Brixton and Tottenham riots who were violently abused by white police in the course of protecting their sons — sons who were, among other things, men of violence. It is time long overdue black males learnt to look after themselves, and not set up their mothers or sisters in the front firing line of their violent involvements.

The Brixton and Tottenham riots manifested as an absolute orgy of male violence in which both oppressed, and oppressor, participated, and in which women and non-participant males were not, at any point, fondly protected (as the report in *OOB* seems to imply). In these riots the absurd and vicious arrogance and sadism of the police met the absurd and vicious arrogance and insolence of West Indian macho. These absurd and

vicious arrogances may be differently motivated but for women both spell bad, bad news. Members of the West Indian community concerned with condemning and protesting the original police brutality against the first woman victim who was shot by police bullets, spoke out, unheard, against a rising tide of chaotic macho and violence in which more innocent citizens, including women and black people, were abused. And abused not by police alone. The stark horrible clarity of the original abuse conducted by the police became ever increasingly obscured. Neither of the original women victims of the police brutality were, in any way vindicated or honoured, or helped, by these riots.

That British policing has been used as a tool of repressive state policy and is often dominated by racist, often cruel, neo-fascist ignorant and brutal attitudes is, as said before, a known fact to all but the most privileged. As a woman of colour I welcome any real help and support against this very real police threat, but the fact of this real threat does not make righteous the escalation of violent West Indian macho, including violence against women.

If a white woman sincerely wants to deal with her own racism (particularly in England which is the cultural headquarters of that Anglo Saxon racism as inherited by America), a lot more of her is required than to gobble up great globs of male violence as anti-racist and revolutionary. For sincere whites there is no easy social, political rhetorical formula against racism. In the end, the voyage of each woman against her own racism is a personal and painful thing. One which she will either shoulder, or shirk, depending on her own consciousness. If a woman of colour sincerely and successfully wants to challenge her oppression the sexist violence of our own fathers, our own brothers, our own cousins, our own sons is *not* a violence we can continue to ignore, forgive, or indirectly condone in the name of racial or any other type of loyalty. Of us too more is required than to gobble up great globs of male violence on the grounds that it is 'different' or 'excusable' when practised by one of our oppressed "brothers." □



# The women in 'America's backyard'

*Is it possible to connect radical feminist analysis with anti-imperialist perspectives? Cynthia Enloe examines the impact of US military and economic intervention in the Caribbean and Central America upon the balance of power between women and men in those areas.*

Sugar. Coffee. Cotton. Limes. Cocoa. Bauxite. Rice. Bananas. These are the raw products for which the countries of Central America and the Caribbean are famous. Each has its own peculiar politics. Each has its own history. Most have been nurtured not just by the region's warm climate and rich soil, but by foreign capital and hierarchies of class and skin colour. When armed forces have been sent into these countries it has usually been to protect those hierarchies and the rewards they have reaped from their control of sugar, coffee, bananas and other products for export.

In the last decades other, less traditional industries have been added: tourism, cattle, garment-making, electronics assembly, oil refining and, most recently, office work.

Both the more traditional and the recently introduced industries have been enmeshed in global power struggles from the outset. The colonising governments (Spain, Britain, the Netherlands, the United States, France) and the internationally competitive companies (Gulf and Western, Tate and Lyle, Bookers, United Fruit, Alcan, Kaiser, Del Monte and Dole) have waxed and waned in their fortunes, have bargained and fought each other, and have withdrawn from some places in order to intervene in others. But the extreme vulnerability of the local peoples to decisions made outside their own societies has remained constant.

## Bananas

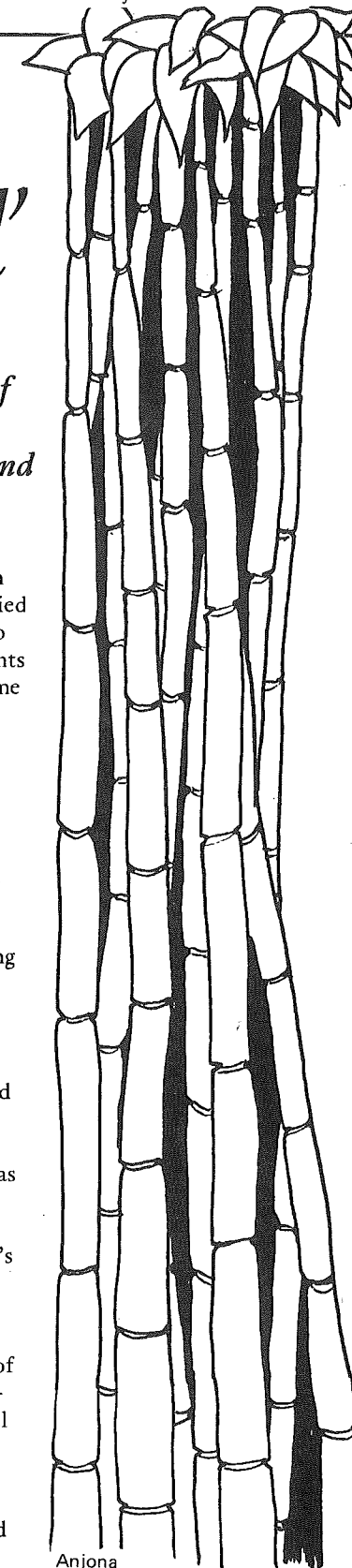
Take the banana. The banana's history is embedded in the history of European colo-

onial expansion and, later, North American neo-colonial control. It is also integrally tied to the ways in which women's relations to men have been shaped by local governments and foreign companies, bolstered from time to time by US military intervention. The banana is a good place to start a feminist analysis of American militarisation of the region.

The banana is not native to Central America. Its original home was Southeast Asia. By the 1400s the banana had spread westward to become a basic food on the Guinean coast of Africa. When Spanish slavers began raiding the coast and shipping captured Africans to the West Indies and South America, they shipped bananas as well. It entered this hemisphere as the slavers' choice of a cheap and popular African staple to feed enslaved women and men.

The yellow bananas familiar to North American consumers were not developed as a distinct variety until the 19th century. They were first served at the homes of wealthy Bostonians in 1875. United Fruit's corporate empire, which over the next century came to behave like a colonising state itself in much of Central America, grew out of the American popularisation of this humble globe-trotting fruit. That marketing success wove an invisible but crucial political link of interdependence between the women of North America and the women of Central America.

In the 1950s United Fruit took the lead in launching a brand name for its own



Anjona

bananas — “Chiquita”. Standard Fruit, its chief competitor, followed quickly on its heels with its own brand name — “Cabana”. Thus began a marketing war to convince the American and European housewife and her local grocer of the superior qualities of the rival companies’ products.

**Where are the women?**

The conventional way of thinking about how and why American officials want to preserve the ‘banana republics’ in Central America — by force if necessary — focuses on class alliances made by United Fruit and Del Monte executives with, on the one hand, local political and economic elites, and, on the other, with Washington policy makers. They all have a common stake in keeping banana workers’ wages low and their political consciousness undeveloped. But who are these workers? Pictures that I have seen of Honduran banana worker union members always appear full of men. Do only men work on the major banana plantations? Or is it only the jobs of male workers in the banana industry that allow for unionisation? Where are the women?

One reality is that women do work that makes bananas profitable for this triple alliance of elites, but the work they do (weeding) is so marginalised that they develop a different sort of political consciousness and are excluded from the unions by their fathers and brothers who imagine their conflicts with management more ‘political’, more ‘serious’. Another reality is that women are not doing waged work on the plantations of United Fruit or Del Monte, but are at home, doing unpaid subsistence farming, child care and cooking. Feminists in scores of industrialised and Third World countries have revealed how even mining and agricultural operations that recruit only male workers still depend on women’s work. For without women being relegated to doing the hard but unpaid work of subsistence farming and household maintenance the

companies would not be able to pay their male workers such low wages. The unpaid work that women do, and the patriarchal assumptions on which that work depends, allow for the survival and reproduction of those paid workers.

Given these realities, the ‘banana republics’ that US militarisation is intended to sustain are patriarchal in at least two ways. First, the colonially seeded culture of ‘machismo’ legitimises local class and racial stratifications so that the subjugation of all women is used to perpetuate the inequalities among the country’s men. Second, the gender, class, and ethnic strategies of labour and profit that foreign companies use perpetuate low wages and weaken union organising. If we were to investigate further, we would also find how these factors operate *together* to sustain the kind of internationally dependent, militarised society we call a ‘banana republic’.

The economies of Central America and the Caribbean have been undergoing important changes during the 1970s and ‘80s. Most of those changes have been initiated by foreign corporations and governments in order to resecure their hold on the region. In part because of the growing militarisation and its resultant social unrest and in part out of their own in-house global strategies, some of the largest banana companies are threatening to cut back their Central American operations. Both Honduras and Nicaragua have been told that countries such as Ecuador and the Philippines now look greener for banana operations. But the corporate decisions have been reported only in terms of their effects on unemployment in already fragile Central American economies. Scarcely anything has been said about what it means for relations between women and men.

If we knew that women and men in Nicaragua and Honduras had identical roles in the international banana industry, then it

would be superfluous to ask those questions. But we know this is not the case. Women and men have been affected by these recent corporate decisions in very different ways. For instance, Honduran peasant women reportedly are trying to develop cash generating projects such as the making of straw hats and the processing of cashew nuts. This is a political development, a step women are taking to reduce their earlier dependence on exploitative middlemen, *coyotes*, and to gain some social autonomy as women.

But the pressure to start these new co-operative projects is also coming from the gendered ripple effects of the banana companies’ cutbacks. For the unemployed banana workers are overwhelmingly the men in these women’s families. Women as mothers and wives are joining women’s straw hat and cashew nut co-operatives at least in part to off-set the decline in household income. But what are the long range implications of male banana workers’ unemployment and women’s cash-producing projects? Will the political prominence of the Honduran banana workers’ union fade? Will Honduran women demand a larger say in leftist political organisations? It is not unreasonable to predict that whatever change or resistance to change does occur will get played out not in the plaza but in thousands of peasant homes.

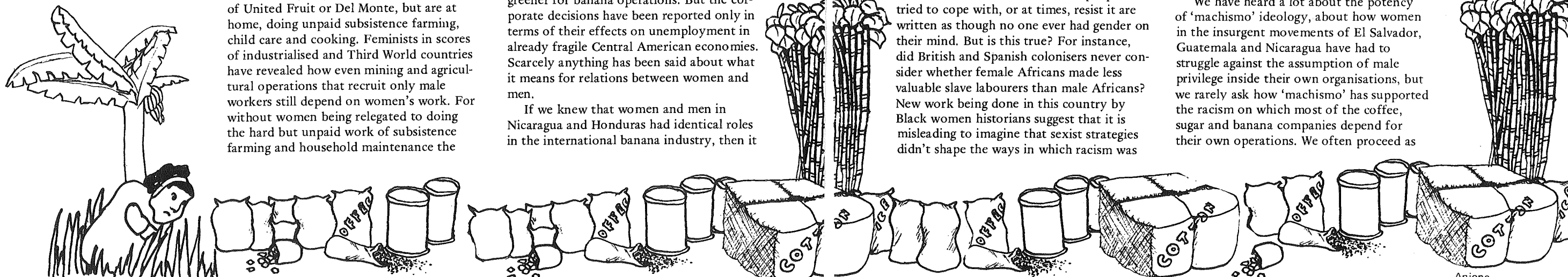
**Sexist strategies**

Most historical accounts we have of foreign industrial and military intervention and how Caribbean and Central American people have tried to cope with, or at times, resist it are written as though no one ever had gender on their mind. But is this true? For instance, did British and Spanish colonisers never consider whether female Africans made less valuable slave labourers than male Africans? New work being done in this country by Black women historians suggest that it is misleading to imagine that sexist strategies didn’t shape the ways in which racism was

developed to rationalise and organise slave labour. They suggest that these early uses of sexist strategies have had lasting effects, helping to sustain patriarchal notions within the Black communities, notions which present obstacles to effective political action even a century or more after slavery’s abolition.<sup>1</sup> What then of the present day politics of Jamaica, Trinidad, Dominica, Guyana? Until shown otherwise, it seems unwise to theorise about post slavery ‘plantation societies’ of the Caribbean as if women and men experienced slavery in identical ways or as if the politics of post slavery communities were free of the legacies of the colonists’ patriarchal strategising.

Essentially we should be asking how divisions of labour have been constructed, divisions that have made the cultivation of sugar and bananas, for instance, sufficiently profitable to support the overseas companies and their local allies. Furthermore, questions about how the racist origins of these profitable divisions are dependent on sexism aren’t relevant solely to those countries in the region with histories of slavery. In Central American societies, where colonial use of African slaves was less prevalent, racism nonetheless was used to create domestic hierarchies of colour to co-opt those who tried to assimilate into the Spanish culture and to exploit the Indian. Were the creation and, even more interesting for us today, the continuation of these divisions of Central American labour accomplished without any dependence on sexism?

We have heard a lot about the potency of ‘machismo’ ideology, about how women in the insurgent movements of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua have had to struggle against the assumption of male privilege inside their own organisations, but we rarely ask how ‘machismo’ has supported the racism on which most of the coffee, sugar and banana companies depend for their own operations. We often proceed as





if ideologies of male dominance in Central American history and ideologies of Indian inferiority are completely unrelated. Moreover, in most of our political organising it is the latter that gets treated more seriously, as if the imposition of Spanish language and values and its complementary exploitation of Indians is what 'really' explains how profits are squeezed out of sugar cane, banana trees or coffee beans. 'Machismo's' role in the process is hardly considered, or, if it is, it is not discussed in ways that could tell us how sexual divisions of labour have been used to support racial and class divisions of labour.

#### *Invisible women*

Sugar. Coffee. Cotton. Limes. Cocoa. Bauxite. Rice. Bananas. Each deserves consideration on its own in order to spell out how they are woven together into an imperialist web over the last three hundred years. And if we look at how sexual divisions of labour have been created as the pillars of these industries we will not find precisely the same patterns.

Women in the region have been making their own critiques to address the assumptions of gender's political irrelevance and women's uninvolvedness. For instance, the Jamaican populist women's theatre collective, 'Sistren', has created a play about women sugar workers. They are reminding Jamaican poor women (and us, as well) that although Jamaican post-independence politics has been dominated by men because it was mainly men who led and filled the ranks of the pre-independence militant sugar workers unions, the sugar industry was not an all-male affair. Women too worked to make profits for the giant British company. Yet they and their labour have been made politically invisible in ways that continue to obstruct Jamaican women's entry into

the nation's political life.

Similarly, before the US military invasion, Grenadian women were organising to make their work in the cocoa industry (a principal export sector) more visible. Grenadian women in the revolutionary movement began to insist that the men take their work seriously. They also began developing government policies which would dismantle the sexual divisions of labour on which the island's cocoa business has relied. These important sexual politics were cut short by the landing of the US Marines. It is likely that the post-invasion Grenadian society is being 'developed' on an even more stark sexual division of labour by the expansion of the tourist industry and by the (not terribly successful) attempts by Washington officials to 'secure' Grenada by inviting American light industries to establish cost-cutting assembly plants there. Both tourism and light assembly are notoriously feminised industries. The chief political difference between them and the cocoa industry is that women's cheap labour contribution is a lot harder to make invisible in the former.

#### *A Nation of Chambermaids*

As landlessness increases in Central America, women and men may be making quite different choices about how to survive. There is no reason to assume that landlessness is any less gendered than plantation labour. One indication that this is happening is the rising numbers of women migrating from the countryside to the towns to seek jobs as low paid seamstresses or if they are less lucky, domestic workers. According to one estimate, 64 per cent of all women working for wages in Guatemala City today are employed as domestic workers. Many of these women are Indian women working for Latino families. Many of these women are the sole caretakers of children<sup>2</sup>.

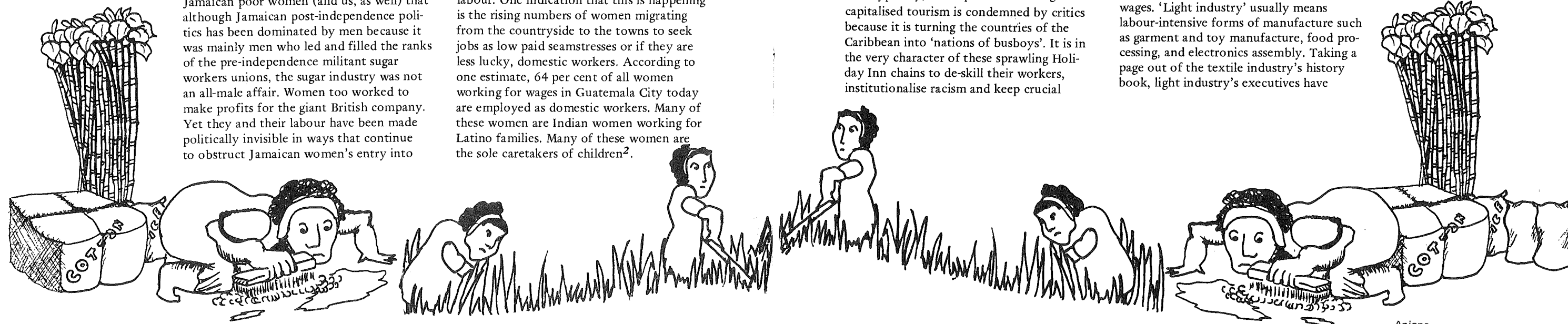
Simultaneously, prostitution is being integrated into this gendered and globalised political economy. A woman working as a domestic servant may be fired by her employers if she becomes pregnant — by the man of the house who wants to cover up his own actions, or by the woman of the house who prefers to deal with her husband's 'indiscretions' by turning her anger on the victim. Those women, as well as women from the countryside who weren't lucky enough to find jobs (or who found jobs in a factory assembling bras or transistor radios, only to be laid off soon afterwards), still have children or parents to support. Thus they often turn to the last resort, prostitution.

Even more striking and noticeable than the increase of domestic work has been the emergence of the tourist industry. Tourism has become the Caribbean replacement for its declining sugar industry. Sometimes the shift happens very explicitly, as in the Dominican Republic last year when Gulf and Western, the hydra-headed American conglomerate, sold off more than 200,000 acres of sugar cane fields to American entrepreneurs who plan to turn the land into tourist havens. Already, by 1984, tourism had leaped ahead of sugar to become the Dominican Republic's top foreign exchange earner.

Typically, this rapid rise of foreign-capitalised tourism is condemned by critics because it is turning the countries of the Caribbean into 'nations of busboys'. It is in the very character of these sprawling Holiday Inn chains to de-skill their workers, institutionalise racism and keep crucial

decision-making powers in the overseas headquarters. Furthermore, the lengths which Holiday Inn, Club Med, and the others take to make their American, Canadian, French and British patrons comfortable, offering familiar foods and surroundings, siphons off whatever foreign exchange the friendly host regimes were hoping to keep for themselves. One frequently hears Caribbean male nationalists expressing dismay as they watch this process and hear their countries labelled in this way. Observers who bother to put on their gender-glasses note that the tourist industry employs a vast number of women in its lowest-paid jobs. Approximately 75 per cent of all the 250,000 Caribbean tourism workers are women<sup>3</sup>. Many of these women are seeking hotel jobs because of lost jobs in agriculture. Many women are also desperately searching for income because it is they, even more than the men, who have had to find daily ways of coping with their government's decisions to give in to pressure from the International Monetary Fund to cut public services and raise food prices.<sup>4</sup>

Light industry is the latest economic sector to be opened up in the Caribbean and Central America. Much of this development is based on the lessons learnt from Puerto Rico's earlier 'Operation Bootstrap', a programme aimed specifically at women, based on forced sterilisation and reducing women's wages. 'Light industry' usually means labour-intensive forms of manufacture such as garment and toy manufacture, food processing, and electronics assembly. Taking a page out of the textile industry's history book, light industry's executives have



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defined their operations' assembly jobs as 'unskilled', ie repetitive but requiring a high degree of precision, low-waged and therefore ideal for women.

Reagan's advisors are urging friendly regimes in what they now (misleadingly) call the 'Caribbean Basin' (which includes Central America and Columbia) to accept more light industry foreign investment. The aim is not so much the promotion of Caribbean economic development, or even of American profits. It is to cement a strong alliance between those weaker regimes and the United States by creating economic dependency. But this scheme ultimately won't work unless the local regimes and American investors can attract women workers. This in turn will depend on their success in sustaining those myths of masculinity, femininity, motherhood, skill, and family which together make and keep women's labour cheap. Women who write plays about domestic violence, women who risk overseas migration, women who unionise, who demand more training, who see single motherhood as a political issue, these will not be the sorts of women to guarantee the success of Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative and the security objectives the CBI is designed to serve.

### *Sexual politics*

Feminists in the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand have described in alarming detail just how US military bases have distorted the sexual politics of the countries. A military base isn't simply an installation for servicing bombers, fighters and aircraft carriers, a launch-pad for aggressive forays into surrounding territories. A military base is also a package of assumptions about male

soldiers' sexual needs and about the local society's resources for satisfying those needs. Massage parlours are as integral to Subic Bay, the mammoth US naval base in the Philippines, as its dry docks.

Lucy Komisar, a freelance reporter, has written an account of how sexual politics in Honduras are being fashioned so as to meet the alleged needs of the American military there<sup>5</sup>. Komisar went to visit the shanty town of brothels that has grown up near the Palmerole military base, one of the bases used by the US military in its series of 'Big Pine' joint manoeuvres. She found Honduran women serving as prostitutes to both Honduran and American soldiers. Her report revealed in microcosm what Honduran public health officials have noted more generally; that there has been a notable rise in cases of venereal disease in Honduras in the three years since the start of US military build-up. Hondurans refer to the particular virulent strain of VD as 'Vietnam Rose', a nickname which wrongly blames the victim but points out the similarities Hondurans see between their own situation and US intervention in Vietnam. Honduras has been 'occupied' financially, industrially and sexually.

Lucy Komisar lets us hear from some of the people behind the statistics. First there are the young Honduran women, as young as 16 years old, who have been virtually kidnapped and brought to the brothels as captives. One woman who tried to escape was caught and returned by Honduran policemen. There are other women who on the surface seem to have come to the brothels freely, driven by the need for money. They split their fees with the owners of the shabby cantinas where they conduct their business. But many of the women living on the fringes of the base fall somewhere in between. They have been drawn so deeply into debt to the men who supply their food and minimal housing that they can never pay off their debts and gain their freedom.

The men involved are both American and Honduran. Komisar found that local policemen enforce the prostitution system. They in turn are controlled by Honduran army officers, a reflection of the growing capacity of the military to intimidate other Honduran institutions. The American men are from both the enlisted and officer ranks. It could be argued that the experience of militarisation is responsible for American enlisted men's belief that one of the prerogatives due an American male GI overseas is the sexual services of local women. However, unlike Vietnam where most American military women were nurses, in Honduras American field units include several dozen women soldiers. Do they go to the cantinas for their 'R and R'?

It would be wrong to imagine that this sort of sexual exploitation is sustained solely by Honduran military intimidation and the influence of American patriarchal culture. As in other base towns around the world, the system requires explicit American policy making. Komisar reports, for example, that American army doctors from the Palmerole base routinely conduct medical exams on Honduran women working in the nearby brothels. Their job is to ensure that American male soldiers will get access to the sex they want without jeopardising the army's operational readiness.

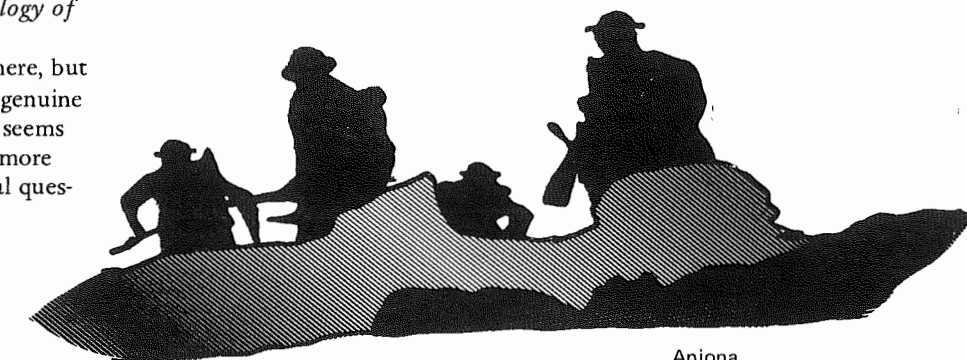
### *'Soldiers' or 'men'?*

In our attempt to discover just how much militarisation is a gendered process, that is, a process that won't work unless men accept certain norms of masculinity and women abide by certain strictures of femininity, we must consider three other dynamics in addition to military prostitution. The first is *rape*. The second is *military recruitment*. The third is the *ideology of national security*.

We can only make suggestions here, but we might at least raise the level of genuine political curiosity. For instance, it seems remarkable that there hasn't been more curiosity, more committed political ques-

tioning about why the rape of civilian women by male soldiers has been so widespread in Central America. Typically rape is listed among an assortment of repressive acts, as if rape were not qualitatively different both in its motivations and its repercussions. But in fact why do male soldiers in Guatemala or Contra soldiers in Nicaragua sexually assault women so insistently? Is it one or more product of masculinity militarised? Is it part of some self-conscious planned strategy of intimidation? Of whom? Of the women themselves or of their husbands, sons, and fathers whose sense of male honour is tied up in their capacity to protect 'their' women? Guatemalan army commanders have been quoted as saying that killing Indian women and children is part of a deliberate strategy of counter insurgency; the foundation of the Indian guerrillas organisation is seen to be the 'family nuclei' and therefore whole families have to be murdered if the insurgency is to be crushed<sup>6</sup>. But this still doesn't explain the rapes and sexual torture that soldiers engage in before they murder Indian women. Are we witnessing men acting as men or men acting as soldiers? Are we seeing men acting out of control or men acting in control?<sup>7</sup>

Then there are the gendered politics of military manpower. When I hear that Barbados is expanding its military manpower I wonder how it is that Barbadian standards of masculinity can be so transformed that the cricket player can be overtaken by the soldier (or the militarised policeman). Not all societies in the Caribbean and even in Central America (eg Costa Rica), so merge soldiering and manhood that they become almost indistinguishable. Certainly it makes the military



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Footnotes

1. For instance, see a provocative article by Black feminist historian, Fran White, *Listening to Voices of Black Feminism* (Radical America, Nos. 2-3, vol. 18, 1984).

2. For moving descriptions of the daily lives of domestic workers in Lima, Peru, see the book by Ximena Bunster and Elsa Chaney, *Sellers and Servant* (Praeger, New York, 1985).

3. This figure comes from one of the few general books criticising neo-imperialism in the Caribbean to include information on women; Tom Barry, Beth Wood and Deb Preusch, *The Other Side of Paradise* (Grove Press, New York, 1984).

4. Lynne Bolles, *Kitchens Hit by Priorities: Employed Working Class Jamaican Women Confront the IMF* in June Nash and Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly eds, (SUNY Press, Albany, 1983).

5. The full version of Lucy Komisar's article appeared in *Honduras Update*, No. 11, vol. 3, 1985, available from them at *Honduras Update*, 1 Summer Street, Somerville, MA 02143, USA.

recruiter's task easier if to be a soldier proves a man is masculine. But the two are analytically and historically separable. If they weren't, governments would not need to waste their credibility by trying to enforce conscription laws.

So when the Reagan administration urges governments in the Caribbean and Central America to increase their numbers of soldiers it is asking them to engage in some tricky cultural manoeuvres. Unless those regimes can count on young men enlisting simply to escape the despair of unemployment or the threat of repression — and both of these are available to Caribbean and Central American recruiters — they will also have to convince their male citizens that soldiering is the ultimate proof of manhood after all. They will also have to convince women in their countries that men who join the newly expanding armies are more genuinely 'real men' than those able to get decent civilian jobs. What is happening to Barbadian and Costa Rican women's beliefs about masculinity? Are they changing in ways that will ease Washington's militarising plans? If women in these countries are resisting such cultural changes, then it is likely that their alienation from their governments, and possibly from the men in their lives as well, is intensifying.

**Propaganda war**

Finally, we could perhaps understand militarisation better if we looked at how 'national security' is defined and how it is gendered. I think it is useful to try to figure out just how much the militarisation of any society requires its citizens to rethink what they need to feel secure. Feminists who have studied European and North American societies in wartime have shown the huge differences between the beliefs of men and women about what they need to feel safe. They have also revealed how governments, intent upon legitimising their expanded wartime powers, have used propaganda which

emphasises women's need for protection and men's duty to serve as protectors in order to win legitimisation<sup>6</sup>.

There's strong reason to believe that some of the same efforts might be needed if Caribbean and Central American regimes are to gain their people's acceptance of the larger manpower quotas, greater security budgets, wider emergency powers, and more foreign bases on their soil that Washington is fostering. Does this mean that the US-fueled militarisation of these countries is dependent on an even more entrenched version of *machismo*? This may not be easy in the 1980s. Today there are more women in these countries raising children on their own, farming on their own, learning how to read and write for themselves, joining crafts co-operatives. Surely these women are becoming increasingly sceptical of national security doctrines that portray them as the objects of male protection.

The militarism of the United States and other countries needs us all to behave *as women*. Otherwise their militarising goals won't be achieved. They need some American women to feel protected by a massive arms build-up and by their sons and husbands in uniform. They need wives of soldiers to accept the extra duties of household maintenance when their husbands are on manoeuvres in Honduras and El Salvador, to ignore the rumours they've heard about the Honduran brothels. They need some — not too many — American women to view the military as the place to prove their equality with men. They need some Latinas, maybe new arrivals from war-torn Central America, to work in Silicon Valley's electronic weaponry. And they need other Latinas to see their boyfriends answering the army recruiter's call as a step toward Americanisation.

In Central America and the Caribbean, militarisation requires women both to work for low wages for foreign companies and to

support those companies' low-paid male workers by performing family work with no pay at all. It also requires women to do the stress-inducing juggling of household budgets so that the government can cut their social service budgets in order to live up to agreements with the IMF. If local poor women can't manage this demanding task, if they refuse to privatise their economic struggles and instead take to the streets, then the US fostered militarisation will be jeopardised by faltering local governments.

**Blinkered world-view**

The well-known commentators that dominate most critical discussions of imperialism and interventionism apparently believe that there is almost nothing to be gained by looking at women's lives. Emmanuel Wallerstein, Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, Perry Anderson, Noam Chomsky — some of these men are from the first world, others from the third. Together, they have helped fashion the intellectual tools many of us use to explain how EXXON, NATO, the IMF, and Hollywood have come to distort relations between the world's rich and poor. But they have developed this critical worldview without giving much thought to gender. They almost never ask whether it matters that the Third World's investment-attracting 'cheap labour' is *made* cheap by being feminised. They do not question whether the IMF's standard package of austerity measures, imposed on Third World governments, changes the relations between women and men in those countries. Nor do they question whether the expansion of Third World militaries from foreign arms sales and overseas military aid is at all dependent on changing notions of what constitutes 'masculine behaviour', both in those countries and in the donor country. These commentators almost never prompt us to try to figure out what the connections might be between international debt, foreign investment and militarism on the one hand,

and rape, prostitution, housework, and domestic violence on the other. The message is that the former are inherently 'serious' and 'political', whereas the latter are 'trivial' and 'private'.

If we base our political organising on analyses which ignore gender, feminism quickly shrinks to a shadow of its former vibrant self. Where *are* the women? Do ideologies of masculinity and femininity shape power? By failing to ask these questions we limit feminist politics to challenging sexism inside our own political organisations, to creating women's solidarity projects that only marginally relate to a mainstream anti-intervention movement.

The last twenty years of the women's movement have taught us to be very wary of any theory which places the economic and emotional relations between women and men outside the arena of 'serious' politics. Many of us are dis-satisfied today when male activists of any political movement leave it to the women to take up 'women's issues', as if they were peripheral to the movement's aims. We must move beyond these unexamined assumptions about the irrelevance of gender in the anti-intervention movement. We must start asking questions about women's lives, where they are, what they are doing. Only then can we start to formulate a distinct feminist analysis of international politics.<sup>9</sup> We are beginning to understand how American-promoted military expansion is dependent on the control of relations between women and between women and men. Our next move must be to insist that sexual politics and the relevance of gender be made a central topic in any movement dedicated to fighting militarisation. □

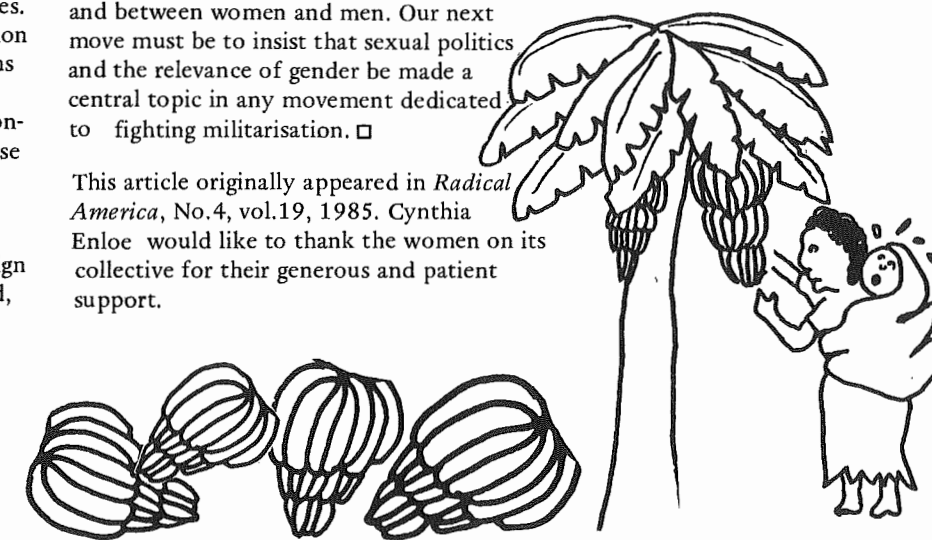
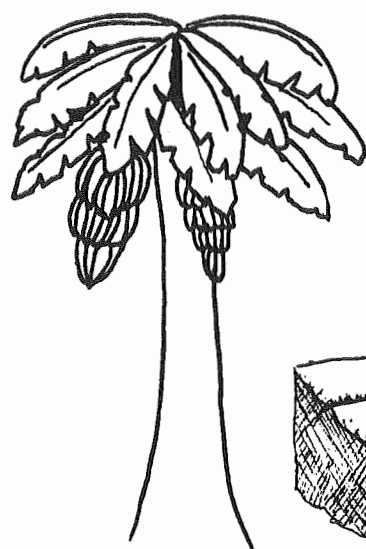
This article originally appeared in *Radical America*, No. 4, vol. 19, 1985. Cynthia Enloe would like to thank the women on its collective for their generous and patient support.

6. Michael McClintock, *The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in Guatemala, vol. 2* (Zed Press, 1985).

7. A horrifying but politically important analysis of how patriarchal ideas fuel the military's torture of women is by Ximena Bunster, an active Chilean feminist, *Surviving Beyond Fear: Women and Torture in Latin America*, in June Nash and Helen Safa eds, *Women and Change in Latin America* (Bergin and Garvey, South Hadley, Mass., USA, 1985).

8. Two of the most recent feminist studies of World War II are: Ruth Pierson's study of the Canadian government's manoeuvres *They're Still Women After All* (McClelland Stewart, Toronto, 1986) and Claudia Koonz's study of the often successful Nazi appeals to women in the 1930s and 1940s, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (St Martin's Press, New York, 1986).

9. A good English-language collection of many Third World women's analyses of local militarism and foreign exchange intervention is in *Connexions: An International Women's Quarterly*, special issue on 'Women and Militarism', winter 1984 (available from Connexions, 4228 Telegraph Ave, Oakland, CA 94609, USA.)



# A woman's right to cruise

*Kirsten Hearn, fed up with the mating rituals of the severely able-bodied, writes what she was unable to say at the recent ILIS conference in Geneva.*

Six hundred lesbians attended the eighth International Lesbian Information Service (ILIS) conference in Geneva this year. The overwhelming majority of them were white, European, gentile, middle-class, employed, educationally privileged, aged 25 to 35, childless, symmetrical, slim and severely able-bodied. Some Black, Jewish, Irish, working class and disabled sisters and lesbian mothers were to be found if you searched hard enough.

Conflict was the order of the day. The agenda reflected only marginally the lives of Black, Jewish, non-European, Third World, working class and disabled lesbians and those of lesbian mothers. Racism, anti-semitism, classism and ableism were greatly in evidence.

Here, I want to talk about my experience as a disabled lesbian. I am a middle-class, childless, high-waged, 30 year old, blind lesbian WASP (white anglo-saxon protestant) who lives independently. As usual, lesbians with disabilities were forced to talk about issues concerning the access and participation at the conference. Our frustrations forced us to take time at the final plenary to outline these, which meant that there was no time to talk about the real reasons why we are excluded from the International Lesbian Movement. Our statement for the final plenary session is printed at the end of this article.

Since I was not given an opportunity at the conference, I would now like to take the space here to talk briefly about the issues we had originally wanted to raise at the conference in Geneva.

Ableism is the label given to a set of assumptions, stereotypes, oppressive ideo-

logies and practices which deliberately seek to totally exclude lesbians who do not adhere to the accepted lesbian identity. In this case, this means physically and/or mentally functioning 'differently' from the accepted norm, eg not having the full use of some or all senses, parts or all of one or more limbs, parts or all of one or more organs or body systems, the conventional use of the powers of memory, reason or comprehension, etc.

Ableism defines the lack of or immobility or different use or more of these functions as personal to the individual and therefore of no concern to the so-called majority of 'normal' people. This de-politicises the exclusion of lesbians with disabilities from the lesbian movement and its other struggles.

Unlike other struggles, disability is seen as a personal tragedy and as a Bad Thing, whilst it is now accepted (hopefully) in the women's movement that being a lesbian is positive. No-one would ever dare to suggest to a lesbian that they might prefer to be heterosexual and therefore, should seek a cure. It is impossible to change one's sexuality by having a physical operation, though psychological methods have been used: it lies at the root of the oppression that heterosexual people assume that lesbians and gay men would want to.

One of the bases of ableism is the assumption that as lesbians with disabilities we would want to be cured. I astound many lesbians by stating that I neither seek a cure nor would ever want to be able-bodied because I not only enjoy my life as a blind lesbian, but feel that it is a positive part of me and a part of which I am intensely proud. I celebrate my culture in all its non-

visual ways as proudly as Black women, Jewish women and lesbians celebrate theirs.

## Body image

Part of the oppression I face in my attempts not just to exist but also to participate in the lesbian movement is the fact that not only am I defined as a fat woman, but I move differently too. I use a white stick and touch and listen instead of look. I feel forced to change my body size, but even if I were able-bodied I probably couldn't. If I found myself thinking that I should, which I do from time to time when I'm depressed, I know that I'm acting out the oppression which says that dykes should not be fat. I have a hard time trying to work out which is the reason for my feeling excluded from the lesbian movement and have decided that even if I were thin I still would not pass as acceptable because of my disability. I can hide it, when I'm sitting, but not when I move. I can hide it when I am talking to someone, but only for short periods because I cannot make eye contact and respond visually to body language. I am often thought to be rude, drunk or not interested. Other lesbians with disabilities can't even hide their 'different' bodies even when they are seated.

Severely able-bodied lesbians look at us and go, "Urgh, what's *wrong* with her?". You only have to go to a disco to realise to what extent lesbians have bought the image of the slim, agile, symmetrical body.

## Cruising and making relationships

I thought cruising was something sailors did before I joined the lesbian movement. I would go to discos and bars with sighted

friends and they would get talking to women whilst I got drunk. (Well, what else can you do when they've left you in a corner and gone off dancing?) If women ever talked to me it was always because of my disability.

I always thought that going to bars and discos was the way you got to know lesbians. Now I know that this might be the case for some severely able-bodied dykes. A 'straight' lesbian friend recently gave me a lesson on cruising. She said I should look around the room, trying to catch women's eyes, exchange looks, follow their movements, then go across and stand near them, exchange a few more looks, then go and ask them for a dance etc, etc. My reply was, "A nod is as good as a wink . . .".

I pondered the possibility of cruising tactilely, but decided that since this was a mixed gay disco, I might find myself touching up a short gay man.

Whether lesbians have ever tried cruising me I do not know because they have never made it verbal. Recently I have been thinking of a new design for a badge: "Don't eye me up, proposition me".

Whilst lesbians with different disabilities who are sighted may be able to do some of this 'eyeing-up stuff', the possibility of them being able to swagger suavely across the dance floor in their wheelchairs or on their crutches, with their sticks or calipers, is pretty remote.

For any of us, our experience demonstrates that the reaction of severely able-bodied dykes when being cruised by one of us is likely to be embarrassment or terror. We are generally not taken seriously in these situations, since we are not supposed



Judy Stevens



to have any sexual feelings whatsoever, let alone the ability to carry them out. In my experience, making relationships with lesbians with or without disabilities has always happened when the other woman has known me first.

Once again, it is a pre-requisite of getting to know dykes and forming relationships that we must behave, look and move as the so-called majority does. And it's just tough if we can't.

#### *Sex and sexual practice*

Different women with different disabilities have different needs and abilities before, during and after sex. Some of us can only lie in certain positions or may have to use different parts of our bodies. Some of us have more strength and energy than others.

A previous sighted lover once said to me that we were equal in bed because the lights were out. Whether or not sight was necessary during the sexual act, she was ignoring my disability and its effects on my self-confidence. Many lesbians with disabilities, taking in the oppressive ideologies that we do not deserve, wanting and needing to be loved, will find ourselves under-confident, over-anxious to please and willing to submit to almost anything the other woman wishes us to do or have done to us. This often spills over into our behaviour outside our sexual practice with each other.

Some of us feel we need to demand monogamy for fear that we will not have the choices our able-bodied lovers have and therefore should hold onto what we've got. Sometimes, by having several lovers ourselves, we are able to hold on to more positive relationships because our needs are met by them individually and differently. Some of us are forced into accepting our partners' non-monogamy, again for fear of losing what little we have of them.

#### *Power imbalances in relationships*

The monogamy versus non-monogamy argument and the choices open to us are very much dependent on the power imbalances in our relationships. As lesbians with disabilities we often experience great powerlessness within our relationships. This power imbalance exists whether our lovers are able-bodied or disabled.

Two of my previous lovers have been fully sighted. One of them had a mobility

disability. The severely able-bodied one had both the power of mobility and sight. She was independent and could socialize freely. When we went away together I was dependent on her, because we were in a strange environment. This also happened, to a lesser degree but equally painful, when I had a partially sighted lover.

The lover with the mobility disability needed me to help her up and down steps and help her carry things. I believe that this relationship worked better because we could trade off our needs. However, another power imbalance came into play here, because she was bisexual.

When a lover is needed to do other things outside the sexual relationship, such as reading print to a blind lesbian or helping a woman with a mobility disability get around, these needs are often used as payment for something else. For example, "I will do your washing if you agree that I can be non-monogamous". There is also a tendency able-bodied lovers of lesbians with disabilities to think of forgetting the disabled lover's disability as a compliment when it is vital that she remembers it.

#### *Isolation*

All this results in many of us feeling increasingly isolated within and outside the lesbian movement. Because we have disabilities, we are not thought to have any sexuality at all, therefore how can we possibly be lesbians? Whilst many of us are out in the movement, our participation is not made easier by all the things that have been mentioned in this article. Lesbian activists such as myself often totally lack confidence and believe that we are unloveable. We may be able to function in meetings or write in magazines such as this but we often have much more difficulties in functioning socially within the movement, let alone making relationships.

Whilst we know what we are missing, what of our isolated lesbian sisters in the institutions and the residential homes? What, too of those lesbians with multiple disabilities or less acceptable ones such as learning disabilities? Whilst some of us have the ability/power to get to meetings, bars and discos, others have to rely on Dial-a-Rides or relatives. Even heterosexual life in institutions and in our families is often a no-go

area. Coming out as a lesbian to carers, relatives and the Social Services (which the obtaining of a Lesbian book or magazine or going to a meeting or disco requires), often means the withdrawal of these services and support systems and, in some cases, incarceration in mental hospitals. Until the lesbian movement recognises that all lesbians with disabilities have a right

to full participation and starts organising differently, none of us, not even the most out activists such as myself, are welcome in the movement. By this we don't mean just pity or embarrassment, or just plain access as outlined by us in the past, but an acceptance that we are viable, loveable, and totally worthy members of the lesbian sisterhood.

## *Our absence is required*

*Statement from lesbians with disabilities to the plenary session of the Eighth International Lesbian Information Service Conference, Geneva, 1986.*

I am making a statement on behalf of the women with disabilities at this conference. This statement may be quite long, because we have a lot to say.

Firstly I would like to ask that during and after my speech, nobody applauds me, because we do not want your acclaim. I would like to be listened to in silence.

This conference has been designed for white, middle class, able-bodied, gentle women. As women with disabilities we feel totally excluded from all its activities. The venue is not fully accessible because the lift is not always operational. The venue has a complicated layout which means that blind women find it hard to be here. There is a great deal of information given out in print which we cannot read. Everybody speaks too fast and takes no account of the needs of deaf women here, and there is at least one partially deaf woman here. In general we find the physical experience at this conference very difficult. We also find the experience of communicating very difficult. International conferences are hard for women with disabilities to attend. Many of us do not receive the education that allows us to speak a second language. Our communication difficulties ensure that it is even harder to talk with women.

We find on coming to a conference like this that we spend our whole time talking about access. We did not come here to talk solely about access. The issues that face

women with disabilities are not merely concerned with physical access. We wanted to come here to raise the issues of the oppression of all peoples with disabilities.

The real issues facing all peoples with disabilities, lesbians included, are that we are feared and hated. Many of you will not believe that we are; many of you will have the idea, propagated by the 'charity system' that we are helpless but somehow slightly loveable. This is not what you really think of us. We experience violence every day of our lives, both overt and covert. Our histories show that we have always experienced violence of some form or another. In olden days, we were put outside the settlements, villages or on the mountain sides to die. We were beggars in the streets. Then we were institutionalised and shut away for our own good. During and before the second world war we were experimented upon and then murdered in the Nazi concentration camps. Before and since then, medical science has sought ways to prevent our existing, has sought ways to eliminate us. Babies with disabilities die every day of our lives. They die not through their disabilities but because they are murdered by the surgeons. Many babies starve to death. In such an atmosphere, how can we feel welcome in this world?

Disability is considered to be negative. People feel sorry for us. The charities reflect this, and medical science propagates it, too,

by trying to get rid of us. This is a brutal form of hatred, every bit as reprehensible as female infanticide in certain other countries. We want this to be recognised.

We believe that, through such ideologies, women at this conference are not taking account of our needs. Our oppression is never seen as real. We believe that the society image of us means that they take that on board and do not listen to what we say.

Let me give you a few examples from this conference. We have found it very difficult at this conference to gain assistance, except for the help of two people, the sisters (from England) sitting here. With the exception of these two women, hardly anybody has given either myself or Agnes, from France, who is also blind, any assistance. Yes, sisters, you have come up and occasionally said, "Hello". Perhaps you have also sat for a minute or two and spoken to us. Sometimes you have even applauded our speeches, but that is all you have done. Despite our appeals for assistance you refuse to take responsibility for being what you are; that is, able bodied oppressors. You forced two women to take on that responsibility, which they gladly did, and we thank them for it, but you made sure that they had no opportunity to be free to do other things and you made us feel like burdens. This is an experience we have everyday of our lives.

We live in societies which refuse to take account of the needs of those who may be different in certain ways. There is an assumption that there is a normal type of body. This normal type of body is supposed to be symmetrical, physically and mentally, with fully functioning body systems. In fact if we did a small experiment here now, we may find that at least fifty per cent of us do not adhere to such body types. So there is no real reality of normality in that way. Yet the societies in which we live are designed for the so-called 'normal' able bodied, symmetrical person. They exclude us by their transport systems, their information and communication systems and by the built environment. Further exclusion is added through attitudes which are oppressive and through direct discrimination and hatred, illustrated by the history of our

people. This is reflected in the lesbian movement.

We wanted to talk to you about body image, about symmetry, about the way in which we relate to each other, about sex, about many other things. You have forced us to talk about access. When the hatred really rises, it rises when you are asked, or invited, to be sexual with us. You don't want to do it. The day before yesterday in the workshop, I asked a question. "Have you women in the room ever had a sexual relationship with a woman with a disability?" I did not get an answer. I'd like to hear an answer today at some point. I very much think that the answer will be in the negative.

In the lesbian world, we have an ideal of what is beautiful. It is symmetrical, it is slim, it is physically fit and it is white. Anything else is not attractive. Anything else is not to be considered. As women with disabilities we find your attitude towards us, your ways of organising which are inaccessible to us, your oppressive ideologies towards us totally exclude us from participating in the lesbian world.

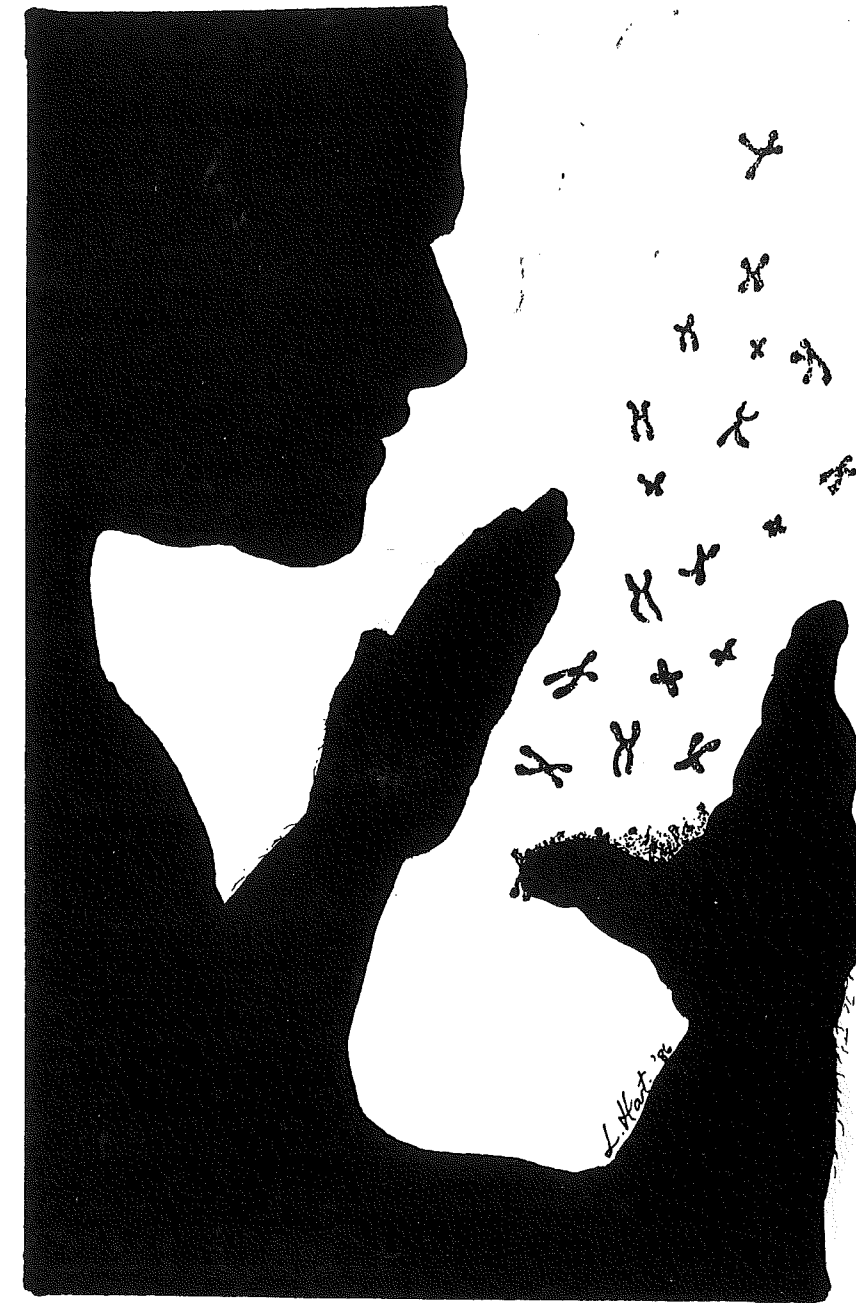
Many of my sisters are in institutions, with no opportunity to decide on our sexual orientation, or at least be able to participate in some form of sexual activity. Many of us are ignorant of what the word 'lesbian' means, although we have sexual feelings towards our sisters in institutions. Many of us are totally denied any expression of sexuality at all because the world believes that people with disabilities are asexual. I believe the lesbian world believes that too. You totally deny us any rights to participate.

I have talked about physical image. I have talked about the way in which we are excluded. I have talked about the dependency that we experience. Now I want you to hear one more thing from us.

Now I want you to hear that we are proud to be disabled. That we enjoy our lives. That you and your ideologies about us being lesser are lies, are hatred, are fear. They are fascist. We will not accept such fascism. We demand to be heard, we demand to be allowed to live and enjoy ourselves with our lesbian sisters. You have to move over and let us.

# BREEDING CONSPIRACIES

## Feminism and the new reproductive technologies



*Is the development of reproductive technology really a male conspiracy? Marge Berer argues that the new technologies should not be rejected out of hand, but that the defence of women's reproductive rights demands that each must be considered on its merits.*

Ten years ago, abortion was the major reproductive rights issue in Britain. The biggest difference between then and now is that the debate on abortion was primarily a political debate, not a debate about technology. Abortion technology was assumed to support women's needs: the question was whether women had access to it on our own terms and when we needed it.

When we look at reproductive technology as a whole — whether we are looking at contraceptives, birth technology or infertility treatment — we can say very little about the politics involved without first examining the advantages and disadvantages, risks and benefits of each technique to specific women. As techniques have proliferated, so the issues have become complicated and not easy to disentangle. Slogans no longer seem to work. There is a revolution going on in biology, of which reproductive technology is only a small part. Any analysis requires a great deal of scientific knowledge. Perhaps that is why so many of us have been slow and reluctant to confront the issues. Not all of us have been so slow.

The Feminist International Network on New Reproductive Technologies (FINNRET) was formed at a women's studies conference in Holland in 1984. Since then some of its members have been prolific in spreading the message (as they see it) on how we should all view the new technology. Several of them have published books and done speaking tours in a number of countries, and there have been articles about the dangers of the new technology in dozens of feminist publications in as many countries.

Women in FINNRET have said that they do not all agree among themselves, and reports from meetings they organised in Germany and Sweden in 1985 and Belgium in 1986 certainly indicate that women attending those meetings had their differences. Yet at the meeting in Sweden the name FINNRET was changed to Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering — FINNRAGE. The group does indeed have an agreed common line, as their manifesto shows.

Thirty six writers contributed to *Test-tube Women*, and eight out of the nine women who contributed to *Man-made Women* are among them. *The Mother Machine* was written by one of the eight.

It is my impression that most of the eight women involved in these three books are the guiding force behind FINNRAGE and primarily responsible for its public face: they are Gena Corea, Renate Duelli Klein, Jalna Hanmer, Helen Holmes, Betty Hoskins, Janice Raymond, Robyn Rowland and Roberta Steinbacher. Can those of us who are daunted by science and its obscure language save ourselves gruelling work by accepting their opinion rather than forming our own?

#### *Test-tube Women*

More than half the pieces in *Test-tube Women* are about not-so-new technology like abortion, contraception and sterilisation. The rest is about newer technology and its application — artificial insemination, prenatal screening, in vitro fertilisation, genetics and cloning. The range of topics is enormous and the idea of bringing together analyses of older and newer technology under the same cover was a good one.

I want to concentrate on the newer technology, but it would be wrong not to acknowledge the excellent pieces by Vimal Balasubrahmanyam on population control, Phillida Bunkle on Depo Provera (injectable contraceptive) Anne Finger et al on disability and motherhood, Ruth Hubbard on childbirth, and Coalition to Fight Infant Mortality on that issue. Rebecca Albury's paper compares abortion and IVF services in order to raise questions about technology and motherhood which bridge 'old' and 'new'. Although her views on infertility and how women cope with it need challenging, it is a thought-provoking paper and deserves a whole review on its own.

However, because this book broke so much ground on the newer technology, it should have taken the responsibility to provide solid, factual information, to give women a basis on which to judge the technology ourselves. That it fails to do.

The glossary, a brief four pages, is a good example of this. The term 'embryo division' is defined as dividing a fertilised egg, usually when it is four cells, into individual cells which can then potentially develop into four separate embryos which can then be "subjected to genetic manipulation".

There is no indication that this procedure is strictly theoretical, not already happening. 'Genetic manipulation' is not defined, though 'gene therapy' is (is it the same thing?). 'Gene therapy' is defined, as the replacement of a 'bad' gene with a 'good' gene (their quotes). Good and bad are not defined.

But there are whole papers that do the same. Julie Murphy's piece on 'Egg farming and women's future' is supposed to be about the technique of removing eggs from women's ovaries for in vitro fertilisation and other purposes. It is so thin on information that the only memorable thing about it is the number of times the word 'egg' appears on every page (about 30 times in the first two pages alone).

#### *Fantasies that play on fear*

Jane Murphy's piece on cloning is equally short on factual information. She does define cloning, but in a way that assumes it can and will be used to control what genes every embryo, and therefore person, is allowed to have. She is horrified by this, as well she might be, so never questions how feasible this is. She describes an interview with a scientist working on cloning which also conveys her horror of him, and not much else. It turns out that this scientist is interested in cloning because he thinks it may lead to useful information about cancer, and therefore to possible ideas for prevention or cure of cancer. Is this a valid reason to do research on cloning? She doesn't say, and she doesn't ask. Instead she draws him out on how it might be used on another planet, and then goes on to describe a totally discredited book about an experiment in cloning people which never took place, by a man called Rorvik. With so much of her article spent on Rorvik's fantasy, reality gets lost completely.

What is wrong with many of the pieces on the new technology is that they are, in fact, fantasies, just like Rorvik's. They posit futures that frighten because they are awful: and that seems to be their purpose. They are effective because some of them are imaginative and well-written fantasies. The writers do not examine the technology for what it is, but can dismiss it for what it might become. They do not then need to offer reasons for why it has come about,

nor explore the reasons why women are queuing up to take advantage of it. Instead, they make you fear it, as Eve was made to fear the apple, because of the knowledge it would bring.

They remind me of someone describing the minute details of an abortion to someone who has never heard a description of any other form of surgery. They play on and encourage fear of science and technology, suggesting that you reject the technology before you know much about it. Articles by Gena Corea, Betty Hoskins and Helen Holmes all contribute to this, and the science fiction at the beginning and end of the book strongly reinforce it.

#### *Man-made Women*

*Man-made Women* concentrates on sex selection, both prior to conception and during pregnancy, but takes pot shots at other new reproductive technology. Much of what I said about the pieces on new technology in *Test-tube Women* can also be said about this book, only more so.

Science fiction scenarios abound, sometimes killing women off completely and sometimes merely enslaving us in 'reproductive brothels'. Women are painted as totally passive and brainwashed victims of a male conspiracy to take over all our reproductive functions, even to the point where we are victimised before conception: 'previctimisation', as Janice Raymond coins it in the preface. The anti-abortionists will love the concept.

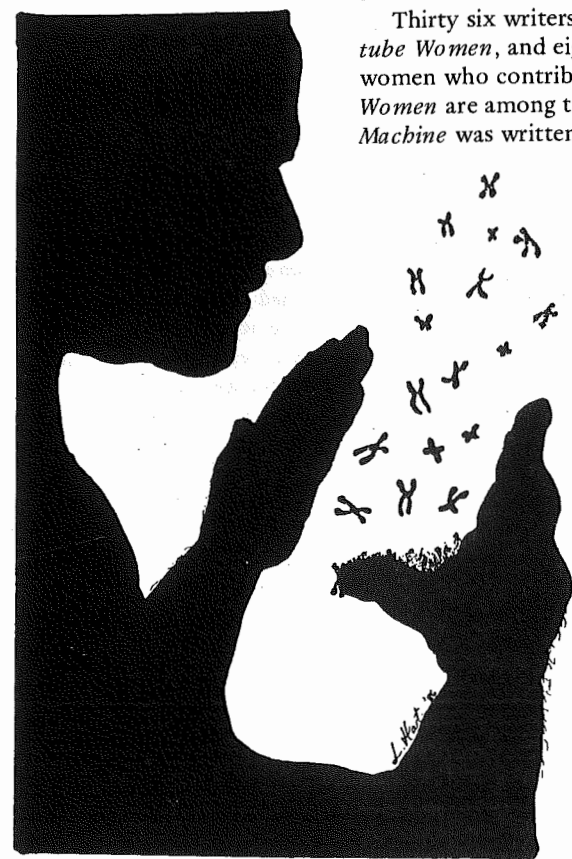
It is also badly edited. The writers repeat the same points and, what is worse, quote each other ad nauseam.

The title of Helen Holmes and Betty Hoskins' paper starts off the book by asking if sex selection techniques will lead to femicide, the mass killing off of women. They contribute some solid information when they summarise attempts to control for sex before conception, none of which work, and various attempts at sex selection once a pregnancy has been established. They take no comfort from the fact that techniques before conception have not worked, though that is where the real threat comes from. They assume that sooner or later a technique will work, and go on from there. They talk about the consequences of sex imbalances

*Test-tube Women*, ed. Rita Arditti et al (Pandora Press, 1984).

*Man-made Women*, Gena Corea et al (Hutchinson, 1985).

*The Mother Machine*, Gena Corea (Harper & Row, 1985).  
*The Reproductive Revolution*, Peter Singer and Deane Wells (OUP, 1984).





if sex selection before conception were widely available.

They do not acknowledge that because sex selection at the moment means abortion, women only use it when there are heavy additional social, economic and political forces (like population control policies) that give them virtually no choice. Madhu Kishwar's paper on amniocentesis and sex selection during pregnancy in India makes precisely that point, and makes this book worth getting hold of. I'll return to it later.

After it, the book begins rapidly to go downhill, with Gena Corea's article on the reproductive brothel, a vision first created by Andrea Dworkin, which Corea describes in detail.

### *Breeding sows*

Corea says a model already exists because farm animals already live in reproductive brothels, with the new technology being tested and used on them in preparation for being applied to women. To show us what is in store she quotes a manager of a meat company:

The breeding sow should be thought of, and treated as a valuable piece of machinery whose function is to pump out baby pigs like a sausage machine. (p41)

Applied to women, she sees the following sorts of scenarios waiting for us in the near future:

The missing link to the assembly-line, brothel approach to human reproduction is being forged in in vitro fertilisation clinics around the world where teams are working intensively to control the cycles of women. In the brothel, on the appropriate days of their cycles, women would line up for Pergonal shots which will stimulate their ovaries. Engineers would superovulate only the top 10 to 20 per cent of the female population in the brothel.

Then, after following the development of the eggs through ultrasound and blood tests, they would operate on the women to extract the eggs. Perhaps they would allow the women to heal from the operation every other month so that the women would only be subjected to surgery six times per year . . .

They could then freeze the eggs for future in vitro fertilisation and transfer into a 'non-valuable' female. A woman could be used for reproduction long after she is dead . . . So could women who were never born. A female embryo could be developed just to the point where an ovary emerges and then the ovary could be cultured so that engineers could get eggs from it. The full woman would never be allowed to develop. (p46-47).



And so ends the need for women. Or does it?

### *Femicide — why wait?*

Roberta Steinbacher and Helen Holmes follow, quoting statistics from a number of surveys of sex preference of both men and women in the USA and internationally. The statistics do indicate an overall preference for boys, at least as first children.

Unfortunately, they do not say enough about the questions asked to make it clear whether the answers would be a good prediction of actual human behaviour — in other words, whether the preferences would survive in the face of pregnancy. The one survey of pregnant women.

they quote showed a majority without a preference for a boy. They attribute this to the actual presence of the baby, powerful enough to wipe out previous memories about preference. Unlike me, they take little comfort from this, and they do not question the validity of the other statistics because of it.

Instead they jump from the surveys into predictions of femicide, using the historical precedents of genocide of Native Americans in the USA and of Jews in Germany. On what basis do they make this comparison? It is a key comparison, it seems, since not only they but Robyn Rowland and Renate Duelli Klein make it. The genocide of Native Americans was accomplished with guns, starvation, forced migrations in inhuman conditions, and more. The gas chambers of Hitler's extermination camps used a technology no more complicated than the running of a car in a closed garage. If femicide were the goal, why bother with the complicated technology and why wait until some uncertain date in the future when the technology is perfected enough to use it for that purpose? They have not asked themselves. With such comparisons, the real possibility of genocide loses meaning.

In the eyes of these writers, social, economic and political control of women does not hold a candle to the power of medical technology. The future they predict assumes a form of fascism that makes Hitler's look like child's play, a fascism made possible by technology rather than by political ideology and power. Added to this, they write as if scientists are capable of perfecting any technological feat they can

dream up — not only technically, which in itself is a big assumption, but by implication financially and politically. They do not seem to notice the cost in hard cash of everyone selecting the sex of their children, or of making and maintaining enough glass wombs to make women's wombs redundant, or of 'fixing' the genes of every embryo. That, for me, is the difference between science fiction and analysis of science.

### *Allying with anti-abortionists*

FINNRAGE urge resistance to the technology. How do these writers propose going about that resistance? In *Man-made Women* Robyn Rowland takes up the problem of how to control or stop the development of the technology, which she believes it is necessary to do. She is aware that control would have to be exercised by the state, and is also aware of the dangers to women in increased state control of reproductive services. However, the technology frightens her more than the state. She goes so far as to suggest that, "feminists may have to consider alignments with strange pillow-friends: right-wing women perhaps" (p85) in order to get the technology controlled, and she has already practised what she preaches.

In early 1985, Rowland, accompanied by Duelli Klein, spoke at a press conference in London organised by anti-abortion MPs, in support of a bill that would have banned research on human embryos and placed strangling restrictions on the practice of in vitro fertilisation in British clinics. The bill was called 'The Unborn Children Protection Bill', and it was obvious that it threatened more than just IVF. Rowland was touted to the press as a feminist who was on their side, and though she said when she spoke that she supports abortion rights, she was the one contradicting herself, not them.

The principle behind the Powell Bill was that the state has both a duty and a right to control reproduction. Anti-abortionists supported Powell because they do not think sex, marriage and reproduction should be separated, and they do not believe anything artificial should interfere in "natural" reproduction. That includes intervention with birth control or abortion, as well as any assistance in becoming or remaining pregnant. They believe women

should accept the birth of children, just as we should accept the inability to have children, in both cases, whether we want children or not. There is nothing feminist in such an ideology, but it *is* consistent.

Few reproductive rights supporters were active in opposing the Powell Bill, and it was my strong feeling at the time that they were suffering the same contradictions as Rowland. Not only is it contradictory to support state restriction of infertility research and treatment but not of abortion. To kid oneself that the state is more benevolent than science to women is politically naive and dangerous.

### *The Mother Machine*

*The Mother Machine* makes the same assumptions as *Man-made Women*, and sets out to document the validity of those assumptions exhaustively. Corea interviewed and quotes dozens of people involved in the field, many of them scientists, and read hundreds of documents on the subject. She talks about eugenics, artificial insemination, embryo transfer, in vitro fertilisation, sex selection, surrogacy, artificial wombs and cloning. She gives graphic and often brutal descriptions of how this technology is applied in animals, particularly cows, before it is tried on people.

The chapter on embryo transfer is a good example of how Corea uses guilt by association to discredit the technology. Much of it centres around two doctors in the USA, brothers aptly named Seed, who want to earn both fame and fortune from embryo transfer clinics they plan to open across the country. It is a story of abysmal failure, not only to get official support from the hospitals where they worked or most colleagues, but also to get finance, women willing to submit to being their 'patients', or success in achieving any pregnancies. Their plans sound technically ridiculous to me. If Corea has proved anything in this chapter, it is that confidence men exist in the world of medicine as elsewhere and that private medicine practised in a free-enterprise manner is extremely likely to produce stories like this one. That is, however, not the point Corea is making.

In the chapter on in vitro fertilisation which is overall more informative, she explores the ways in which it might be used

In *T&S* 3, there was an article by Diana Leonard explaining many of the new reproductive technologies (some of them actual, some still only theoretical) — IVF, super-ovulation, surrogacy, cloning, sex selection and sex determination, and artificial wombs. That issue also included a report by Jalna Hanmer and Elizabeth Powell-Jones of the first national feminist conference on the technologies. In issue 5, Naomi Pfeffer wrote on why feminist attitudes towards the new technologies and infertility make her angry.

other than to overcome infertility. She describes how Professor Wood of Australia talked about people coming to him to ask if they could make use of donor sperm or eggs to get pregnant because they were not happy with some aspect of their partner's appearance or personality. Corea writes that Wood's team did not comply with these requests and that they were the subject of discussions with an ethics committee. She then goes on to say:

Given the low opinion we women often have of ourselves, that internalized oppression that makes us feel a deep sense of inadequacy, one would expect that the use of donor eggs could, in time, become quite common. This possibility will be heightened should authority figures act as if it were perfectly reasonable for us not to want to use our imperfect genes to produce our imperfect children. It appears likely that they will. (p126)

Given that Wood refused, who are "they"? Suddenly, Corea wheels Dr Seed back in.

#### *Whose truth?*

Worse than her opinion of the medical profession is her opinion of women. In the chapter on surrogate motherhood, she criticises a Dr Parker, who has done a study on surrogate mothers. He believes there is a connection between some of the women's previous loss of a pregnancy through abortion and their wanting to become surrogate mothers, even if the women were not aware of it or denied it. "So Parker dismisses the women's own felt experience when it contradicts his theory", Corea says. (p239).

Unfortunately the exact same criticism can be levelled at Corea. She quotes a number of surrogate mothers as saying they have freely chosen to become surrogates and have wanted to give the children to help someone. Her response is that "Women may themselves suggest, even enthusiastically, that they help out the family by breeding for payment, but this does not mean that in a society that defines women by their reproductive function and consistently underpays them for their labor, that the women are acting of their own 'free will'." (p230). She too dismisses the women's own felt experience.

It would appear that no matter what the technology, Corea is against it. She went looking for abuses and of course she found them. What worries me is that she

found nothing else. It would seem that no woman has ever given informed consent to being experimented on, and that all experimentation is ruthless in its aims. The trial and error that characterises all medical research is for her inexcusable. Failure proves that the doctor never wanted to help women after all, while success increases the threat of control by doctors over women. Either way, we are being manipulated for reasons that have no connection with our own needs.

If so much evil is being and has been perpetrated by doctors and medical researchers, what is wrong with the rest of humankind that we have allowed it to continue? Her answer is that we have been silenced and confused, made to believe, accept and even welcome our own degradation. She exhorts us to speak the truth, in order to change the world. But whose truth?

Much of the documentation is fascinating in its own right, and there is a lot of useful information to be had from the book, including the extensive bibliography, but too often Corea uses her skill as a writer to manipulate the reader's feelings, by turning the information she has collected against its source to support her own point of view. Using images of breeding brothels, egg farms, war on the womb, hormonal bombardment of the ovaries, and subversive sperm, she takes the reader on a fascinating tour through her vision of woman as victim. It is sensationalist journalism at its best.

#### *The Reproductive Revolution*

*The Reproductive Revolution* deserves to be mentioned because it covers the same ground as the other three books but from a totally different perspective. It is a deceptively simple book, dealing with sophisticated arguments in a straightforward manner. It unashamedly supports the development of in vitro fertilisation and then looks at surrogacy, cloning, sex selection, genetic engineering and glass wombs. Each technique is explained in a non-mystifying way before the writers go into the ethics of whether to develop further those techniques still on the drawing board.

The book includes the texts of ethical and scientific evaluations of the technology by US, British and Australian medical bodies, which are amazingly sensible in many respects. Even more interesting, it contains the

results of a questionnaire answered by Australian IVF patients.

There are points in it that I think are naive (such as that if it becomes possible to flush an unwanted pregnancy from one woman and implant the embryo in an infertile woman who wants a baby, those on both sides of the abortion debate will have nothing left to disagree about). But overall, it is sane and more informative than Corea's et al, and an excellent counterpoint to them. It at least forces the reader to think about the issues from a different point of view.

#### *Feminist analysis*

Attempts by feminists at a more balanced view may seem less exciting than *The Mother Machine*, but I'll mention two that I think are worth emulating. One is Ruth Hubbard's piece in *Test-tube Women* about the hazards of childbearing and the implications of pre-birth technology for the childbearing experience. One of the most important points she makes is that we are never going to have a choice between technology and 'natural' practice (which Steinbacher and Holmes think we have) because all practice is socially constructed: the 'natural' does not exist.

The real issue for feminists is, she says, whether the forms of technology we now have to choose from help to empower us or not and in which circumstances, and whether they cater for our needs and interests as we ourselves define them. She looks historically at the very real pain and hazards that exist in childbearing, because they explain why women have been willing to accept much of the current technology. She accepts the ways in which the technology has succeeded in making childbearing less painful and safer, and points out the ways in which it has failed or been applied when it was not needed.

Then she looks at other consequences it has had, intended or not, some of them capable of altering the entire experience of childbearing. For example, women can forget that it is possible not to have prenatal screening tests and still have a healthy and good pregnancy. She is able to be critical of the technology without falling back on con-

spiracy theories to explain the dilemmas we currently face.

Madhu Kishwar's piece in *Man-made Women* deserves to be in a different book. She describes how in India in the past the low status of women and girls led to female infanticide and later to other forms of deprivation of girls which killed more of them than boys, and how this has kept the boy:girl ratio in favour of boys to this day. Amniocentesis is now being offered to women in those same areas as a sex determination test along with abortion if the foetus is female.

She makes it clear that the technology is not responsible for this anti-woman practice but was adapted to be used as yet another means of practising it. Kishwar is the only writer in *Man-made Women* who does not say or imply that a ban on technology is the way to solve what is essentially a social and economic problem. For her, the answer lies in changing women's status, for example so that women become economic assets instead of liabilities. She would campaign against women using amniocentesis for sex determination on health grounds because of its associated risks, especially in substandard clinics, and because it is not 100% accurate in determining foetal sex. But she does not locate the source or the solution of the problem in technology.

Neither Hubbard or Kishwar are apologists for technology in any sense, but neither do they see women as passive victims. It is from their perspective that I think we need to be assessing the technology, whether it is for infertility treatment, childbirth or birth control. We need to acknowledge that medical science responds to our demands and needs as well as creating them for us. Women are prepared to take a lot of risks with their bodies and their feelings both to have babies and to prevent and terminate pregnancies they don't want. It is not just doctors twisting our arms. If we accept as feminists that women have to define our own needs and interests, then even — or should I say particularly — other feminists should not presume to do it for us. □

Marge co-edits the newsletter for the Women's Global Network on Reproductive Rights, PO Box 4098, 1009 AB Amsterdam, The Netherlands. They are interested in articles on reproductive technology that would help to open up this debate and provide more information to women that is internationally relevant.



## International Conference on

*At the International Conference on Women's History, in Amsterdam, the vast majority of women were from the Netherlands, Britain, France and Germany – a case of not a very international conference. Lynn Alderson also asks – to what extent was it feminist?*

Over 500 women came to the conference, organised by a network of Dutch feminist historians. What's in a name, I thought, and went there expecting that it would be a feminist conference and that there would be speakers and papers from women all over the world. Perhaps I should have noticed that the poster advertising the event had what appeared to be a man unpacking a classical, curvaceous, white stone statue of a woman – perhaps it's meant to be a woman in manual trades, I thought hopefully. I should have made time to read the conference book (and I do mean book!) in advance, when I might have noticed the sentence in the introduction "The conference is open to men, except for one workshop. The organising group felt that the *time is past* for men to be excluded from this type of conference." (my emphasis). The Berlin women historians network did notice, and wrote to the organisers challenging this. They were firmly told that it was a conference about women's history, and had nothing to do with feminist politics.

*"Solidarity is not an inherent characteristic of women but is something that must be patiently constructed."*

The lack of an explicit feminist stance was evident in much of what happened at the conference. The confusion between 'women's history', 'feminist history', and what either might mean was a theme running throughout. But it was not often spoken about, which led to misunderstandings and a curious sense that it wasn't only the fact that all the women present were having to speak in English that was leading to language problems. The Berlin women set up work

shops to discuss the issue. In the one I went to some women were of the opinion that there was no difference, that it didn't matter, or that the word feminist was so offputting to women that they didn't use it. Others felt that it was important to make a commitment, that it was the purpose behind their work, and came up with the idea of asking why you were doing the work you were doing?, as an acid test, a quick way of getting down to essentials. As an example, I went to a paper about Mexican women, which was reporting a survey of what work women did and comparing a traditional area with one close to the border with the USA where many men worked, often away from home for many years of their lives. We were told that the absence of men made no difference to the tasks which were done by women and the hours involved. The white, Dutch woman who gave it apologised at the beginning for having forgotten about reproduction until she'd returned to Holland! I asked what the Mexican women saw as the reason for this. Were they, for example, resisting American imperialism and deliberately retaining their traditional roles, or did they mind if the men were absent if it made so little concrete difference to their lives? I was told that she didn't know because she hadn't asked the women anything. This was a woman, studying women, but her lack of feminist critique of both purpose and methodology led to something it was hard to see the point of for anyone, certainly for the women who were apparently studied as objects. I can only assume that this paper was included because it was about the 'Third

## WOMEN'S HISTORY

World' and there was so little on or by non-western women at the conference.

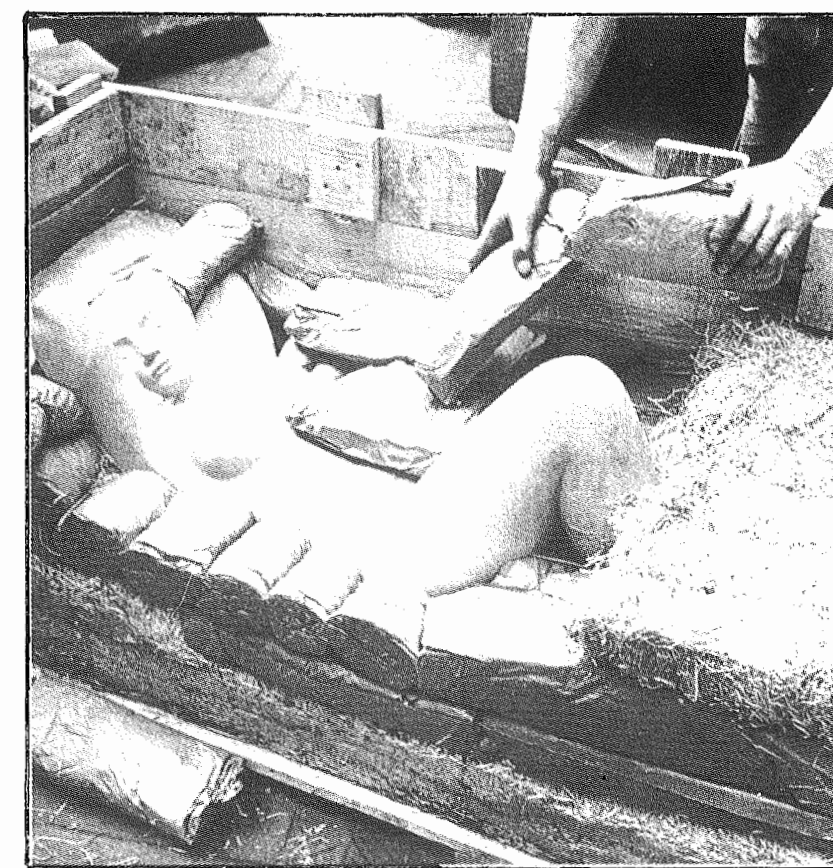
This brings me to the main area of debate at the conference. On the first day the few Black women present organised themselves into an active and vocal group and challenged the whole basis of the conference and its pretensions to be international. There were about 20 women in the group from Holland, Sri Lanka, South America, Zambia, Surinam, India, Thailand, Egypt, Morocco and Britain. In a statement read out to the whole conference at a special session called by their group, they made the following points:—

1. The organising group had no Black members and had failed to make contact with Black women's groups in Holland.
2. The publicity for the conference went out through elitist, white periodicals and groups. Only after the programme had been arranged were some Black individuals asked to give papers. The group had showed inflexibility by refusing some papers offered by Black women on the grounds that they were too late.
3. Only three out of 80 lecturers who were funded came from the Third World. "We question the whole conceptualisation of women's history. Haven't the organisers of this conference fallen into the trap of a sexist, racist, biased and elitist history? If we do not question the concept of history per se, we will keep on writing the white, male patriarchal history. We want as black feminist women our own her-story!!". The organisers reacted defensively, saying that they had tried but had had no response from Black women and that there hadn't been enough money to do all that they would have liked to.

A white women's group on racism was also formed, to support the Black women's protest and to emphasise the fact that white women must confront their own racism. The group decided to meet everyday and go into workshops and deliberately challenge

fundamental racist and heterosexist assumptions. This proved more difficult than I for one had imagined, especially since there was often a lack of any political perspective or vocabulary in the work presented which made it difficult to know where to begin. One Dutch woman said to me "But I am a white woman, living in a white country, why can I not do white history?"

Of course, there were a great many different papers and workshops given at this conference which went across a very wide range of subjects. I'm not even going to try to be 'fair' except that to say I know some women giving papers did do their best to take on board the fundamental criticisms





raised by these issues. However, the tone and mood of the conference as a whole became unmistakable at the plenary session on the last day.

The plenary was run by women from the Black women's group and the white women against racism group. A joint statement was made which made a number of suggestions to ensure that future conferences did not make the same mistakes. These were: — equal representation of Black women; funding for women from all continents to attend; papers to be given in a language of the women's choice and translation provided; all papers must examine and combat racism and explain the process by which they had done so; papers should be expressed in non-academic language; and a sliding scale of fees.

The criticisms of this statement were mostly of a practical nature, for example, the cost of translators. However, various other ideas were put forward by women to add to the list of ways in which our assumptions should be challenged. I asked for heterosexism to be explicitly included and, although no-one openly opposed this, there were mutterings of "bloody lesbians" as I came down from the podium. Anti-semitism was raised, particularly in the light of the current alarming rise of fascism in Europe, and the reception was unsympathetic, certainly, unenthusiastic. When disabilities were mentioned some women openly laughed and the response from the floor was "oh and what next". A French woman objected again to the presence of men and led a small walk out. There was a great

unwillingness to discuss any of these issues. But the silence did not seem to me to be coming from guilt and fear, as often found in situations like this, but from a pronounced hostility. Women were just not comprehending the relevance of these criticisms. Their reaction depressed and shocked me into rethinking the expectations of good will and serious intent with which I generally go to gatherings of women such as this one.

*Vibha, an Indian feminist living in Britain, talked to Lynn about the issues the conference raised for her.*

I wasn't surprised by the hostile reaction. Being Black and being used to having these reactions in your daily life, being patronised, white women not seeing Black women as an ally, as a strong, radical and very revolutionary ally. The criticism provokes very deep guilty feelings quite a lot of white women cannot handle. They throw it back, trying to protect themselves. Instead of working on the constructive ideas proposed for example, that we have to construct our sisterhood, it's not just a given thing — that's a big statement, a starting point. I've learned to make criticisms and you have to do it in a way that works on people's strengths and not paralyse them. If we'd begun by saying "It's good this conference exists," welcomed it, then they would have felt validated. But we were taking that for granted. It became really apparent at the end, after

the plenum that the ones who went away feeling "There's work to be done", were all Black women, and their work is not going to stop because there isn't a feminist history conference taking place. What was interesting was that they were more appreciative of the participation and the discussions.

I hadn't been expecting such confusion. I take it for granted that when women are organising a history conference, it's feminist history because it's been done from a critical position of the absence and invisibility of women in history, so then it becomes Black women's history. But I feel there is a lot of tokenism around, and unclarity — when women become historians just because they are women, and not because they have a critical standpoint.

Every feminist historian has to be open to questioning and assessing what she is doing. It can be positive, for me it's like unpeeling layers. But the conference wasn't like this — women were protective, defensive and therefore still working in the same parameters, using old concepts.

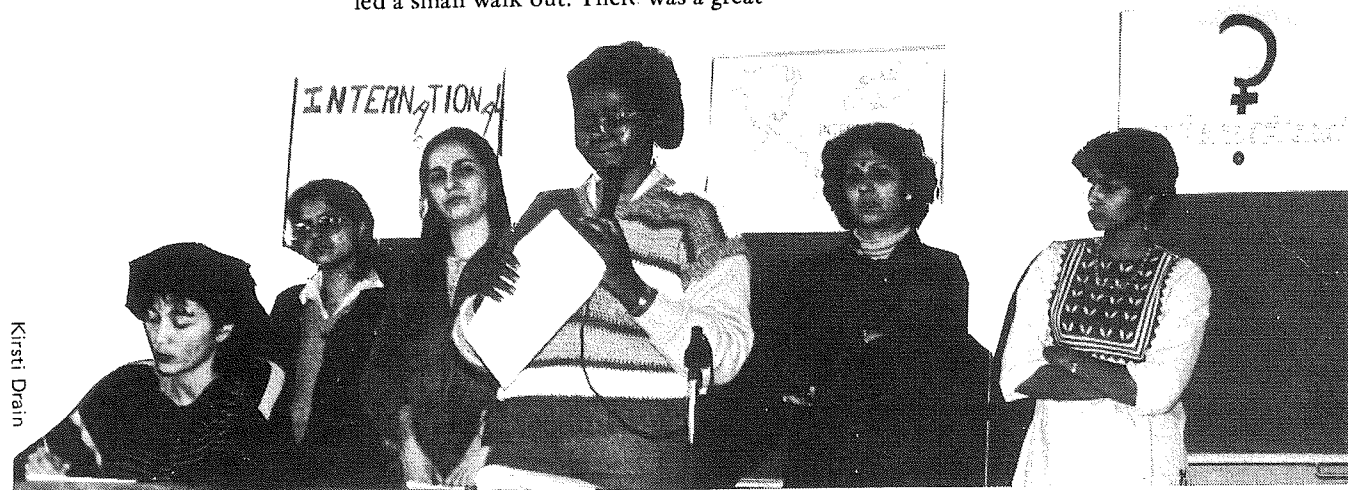
The absent category in all these discussions was the issue of power relations. Because these were not discussed, when Black women raised their questions, there were some really stupid questions asked of them — and nobody was able to confront the power relations taking place.

But raising issues makes alliances between Black and white women working together more problematic. It's difficult for white

women who are sympathetic and want to work with Black women; and difficult for Black women to continue to raise these issues — we are instantly branded as some kind of terrorist, troublemakers. Throughout all this confrontation, the Black women remained quite calm. I was quite surprised, pleased, because in my experience Black women just leave at some stage. You don't want to put yourself through it again and again — that type of hostility and opposition. You don't have to, Black women need autonomy of organisation.

On the other hand, Black women and white women need to work together and that is a point of strength, and I will put endless energy into that because I realise we can't move away from it. In terms of global divisions, some of the research that white women are doing, some is really necessary as a starting point. The participation of sensitive women shouldn't be ruled out at all. For me, I feel increasingly I want to work with the strengths of women. It's very destructive to just concentrate on differences, they will remain after we are dead! But to work on our strengths together is one of the only ways forward at the moment.

We are intimately linked, our histories can't be understood in isolation. If you want to make sense of it all you have to go beyond all these emotional reactions. The Black women were more open about working with white women and have a greater awareness of those links than white women. □



Kirsti Drain

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# STILL CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

*In 'Women and Madness' Phyllis Chesler showed how psychiatry has been used to control women. Dale Spender argues that her insights laid the groundwork for much radical feminist analysis that was to follow.*

In *Women and Madness* (1972), Phyllis Chesler insisted that the rot had gone too far for there to be any hope of reforming the theories and practices associated with mental health. What was necessary, she argued, was a completely new way of describing and explaining mental health which was free from male politics, for in the hands of men the method had become nothing other than a blatant instrument of oppression used against women.

*Women and Madness* was no appeal to men to reform, but a call to women to make men reform as a matter of the greatest urgency. Phyllis Chesler was angry and it shows. She makes other women angry, which was her intention. Hers is an energising statement, partly because it presumes women as the audience and men as the target for criticism. She is no clinician hoping to be read by the psychiatric establishment, and bent on achieving recognition or respectability, but an 'insider' who is prepared to come out and tell the full story. It is a shocking story in which the shock is intensified by the stark realism of Phyllis Chesler's style. Again and again the most horrific evidence is presented in the most matter-of-fact tone, which serves to reinforce her argument that it is not the occasional exception she is describing and explaining, but the everyday practices, the routine details of the treatment of women in a male-dominated society and under a male-dominated institution.

The most fundamental and dramatic issue that Phyllis Chesler raised in *Women*

and *Madness* was that, by definition, women are made, and this ensures their vulnerability as victims of the mental health weapon. She got straight to the crux of the belief-system which created a double-standard of mental health in the interest of men and male power. What society held to be a mentally sick man, she explained — someone who was dependent, passive, lacking in initiative and in need of support — was precisely the same as what society held to be a healthy woman, and vice versa. A sick woman was one who displayed some of the prized characteristics of the healthy male — self-reliance, confidence, independence. The superb convenience of this arrangement which allowed men to monopolise these human characteristics and to *punish* women who showed signs of possessing them was not lost on Phyllis Chesler who, in bald terms, exposed the blatant politics of mental health, and revealed how in a patriarchal society it is used to control and oppress women.

The values and belief-system of psychiatrists, she states, are very important, for 'Psychiatrists both medically and legally, decide *who* is insane and *why*; *what* should be done to or for such people; and *when* and if they should be released from treatment' (p59). This is an enormous power to have over other human beings: an unaccountable power. It is power concentrated in the hands of a white, male elite and is used for the purpose of preserving that power and defending and explaining that elitism. It leads, according to Phyllis Chesler, to the

edge of male reality in which male is the norm and woman is other, is deviant — is mad. Phyllis Chesler regards it as no coincidence that a patriarchal society has prided itself on *rationality* and claimed the realm of the rational as the prerogative of men. It is then 'rational' to allocate the irrational and the emotional to women, and with its basic definition of woman as mad, patriarchal society has one more means of placing women outside the cultural mainstream where the actions of women become inexplicable by rational, *male* standards.

There is another example of men creating the meanings and the knowledge which structure the inferiority of women and help to justify the different treatment that women receive when male is the norm. The whole edifice is a cultural construction which originates in a male supremacist value-system and which has awful consequences for women. For what Phyllis Chesler is making clear is that *madness applies to all women*. One of her most startling findings is how little difference there is between women who constitute 'the problem' and women who are used as the 'control group' in any study of women's mental disability. In the context of male meanings, all women are defined as mad, or beyond normal explanations — when normality equals male — and women are required to be different: the ones who are directly penalised are arbitrary victims. The *threat* of punishment applies to *all* women and serves as intimidation and is quite sufficient to keep many women in their place.

There are difficulties with the term *madness* for it is a general term and not sufficiently precise to distinguish between the range of behaviours it encompasses. There is the madness that men use against women, and the madness which is the other side of the coin — women's resistance to male power. That one of the most common indices of madness among women is to refuse to make themselves attractive or to do housework or other 'slave' tasks, certainly raises the question of whether women are on strike. This is a question which has also been raised in relation to the more recent epidemic of agoraphobia among women which effectively prevents them from fulfilling their service

functions outside the home. If this does represent a *strike* on women's behalf and a demand for a fairer deal, it is a desperately high price to pay. Phyllis Chesler makes it clear that, while she acknowledges some of the constructs that create and coerce women's madness, as a form of resistance madness does not constitute a revolutionary force.

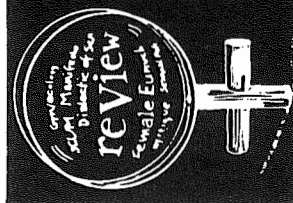
It has never been my intention to romanticize madness or to confuse it with political or cultural revolution . . . Most weeping, depressed women, most anxious and terrified women are neither about to seize the means of production and reproduction, nor are they more creatively involved with problems of cosmic powerlessness, evil and love than is the rest of the human race (p.xxi)

Psychiatry, however, is held up as one of the products of a civilised society, it is the latest in scientific achievement applied to human understanding and, ostensibly, it holds out hope for mental disturbance for which in previous times there has been no cure. But to Phyllis Chesler this rationale is 'window dressing', for in her terms this is the institution which ranks among the most damaging for women, and for her, there is no mystery why it works this way, or how it came to be this way. She assigns much of the responsibility to Freud who set up a paradigm for treating women's reality — particularly of sexual abuse — as fantasy, finding it much more expedient to blame women than to cast a critical eye on male dominance, violence and sexual exploitation.

It wasn't as if this 'new' treatment of women represented a radical departure from the traditions of a male-dominated society. As Phyllis Chesler points out, our history is replete with references to women who have been locked up (see Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, (1980): in 1861 Susan B Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had asked their own questions:

Could the dark secrets of those insane asylums be brought to light . . . we would be shocked to know the countless number of rebellious wives, sisters and daughters that are thus annually sacrificed to false customs and conventionalisms, and barbarous laws made by men for women (1881, Vol.1, p469).

Freud, and the clinicians who followed, simply refined the practices and developed





more sophisticated means of putting women in their place — literally and metaphorically.

Phyllis Chesler constructs a principle which makes it possible for women to reorganise the evidence, to see some of the past and present brutality, which men have been prepared to perpetrate to preserve their dominion over women. This is part of the rule of force that Kate Millett refers to, and without which patriarchy would be inoperable as a system.

Identifying this principle and its systematic nature, recognising the brutality that it facilitates and acknowledging the culpability of all men, Phyllis Chesler paved the way for future theses which adopted and extended this framework. Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* (1976) and Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) both make the distinction between the capacities of *all* men and *all* women, and both analyse male dominance and violence against women within the tradition that Phyllis Chesler helped to found.

This is not the only area where Phyllis Chesler lays some of the groundwork: *Women and Madness* also contains one of the first serious and non-pejorative assessments of women's sexuality and lesbianism. Explaining why male homosexuality has been far more visible than lesbianism she attributes this directly to the enhanced male image and states that a more 'glorious' tradition has been constructed for it: 'Historically . . . many male homosexuals have waged "heroic" wars together, have headed governments, churches and industries, and created artistic and intellectual masterpieces' (p174). Women, however, have a very different tradition:

Lesbians do not have a gloriously extensive ancestry. Their mothers and grandmothers, like those of heterosexual women, lived with men and did not control the means of production. Lesbians are women: as such, most are traditionally more domestic, conventional and sexually monogamous than male homosexuals are — traits to which women are condemned, but for which they are not really valued (p175).

If male homosexuality is more a part of society's reality, then this is simply a statement about which sex is valued, and it is a meaning which she turns back on male homosexuality:

I must suggest that male homosexuality, in

*patriarchal society*, is a basic and extreme expression of phallus worship, misogyny, and the colonization of certain female and/or 'feminine' functions. Male homosexuals, like male heterosexuals (and like heterosexual women), prefer men to women. It is as simple as that. (p177)

Things are very different for women:

In a sense, it is theoretically easier for women to love women than it is for men to love men. Our mothers were women and, Michelangelo aside, most object-models of sexual or aesthetic beauty in our culture are female. Also most women know how to be *tender* (not that they always are) with other people. Traditionally, most men, whether they are homosexual or heterosexual, know only seduction, rape and pillage — in bed and on the battlefield. (p176)

In these circumstances, lesbianism is an eminently sensible and understandable choice. And Phyllis Chesler links lesbianism with a passionate plea for a real sisterhood, with the revolutionary aim for women to love and care for each other. It is her belief that women from birth are channelled into being nurturers and are themselves deprived of nurturance: one remedy for this is for women to nurture each other — an aim that is not always realised, even among feminists.

But it is an aim that Phyllis Chesler would definitely like to see achieved, partly because of its revolutionary nature. When women's reference group is women (as is the case with *Women and Madness*), when women seek approval from each other and bypass the approval of men, much will have changed, for male centrality will have been undermined.

Despite her idealised version of sisterhood, Phyllis Chesler does not idealise women's oppression. She raises an issue which I have only encountered in specific form once before. During the nineteenth century it was not uncommon for feminists to insist on women's moral superiority and to imply that in their oppressed state women learnt a great deal that was valuable — compassion and nurturance, even spiritual values. To George Eliot this looked like dangerous ground indeed: if oppression produced noble souls, she argued, it was a good case for *more* oppression, not for ending it. Phyllis Chesler adopts a very similar line of reasoning: we have to be very careful of the claims we make for women in our oppressed state, she warns.

Obviously there is a fine line to tread. Phyllis Chesler makes it quite clear that men have power, but so too do women. It is not accurate, she states, to portray men as all-powerful and women as pathetic; even to move in this direction is to undermine the power that women do have, and to paralyse and pre-empt action among women. Nor is it accurate or helpful, she insists, to present a romanticised view of oppression which produces those warm and wonderful creatures — women. One example that she uses in this context is that of women's pacifism, a claim that is often made for women. If women are pacifists, she states, it is partly because violence is not a choice for them. If physical force was an option open to women but they elected not to use it, then we could hold up women's pacifism as a virtue. But while violence is not an option for women, 'Women are no more to be congratulated on their "pacifism" than men are to be congratulated for their "violence" (p259).

Phyllis Chesler's attitude to men is also elaborated in a later book — *About Men* (1978) — but the basic meanings are all there in uncompromising fashion in *Women and Madness*. She classifies *all* men together as a social category and does not take males and male norms as her reference point — they have no redeeming features in her analysis. Nor is she writing for men or male approval. That all men are *not* equal is patently clear to Phyllis Chesler, and she points out that less powerful men are required to perform male rites of violence — 'Old, wealthy, white American men have not been dying in Vietnam' (p271). Yet she is adamant that women do not exist for the purpose of looking after men: women have to begin to exist for themselves and to cease assuming responsibility for what men do to each other.

Her assessment of the way men will try to take over the topic of women's liberation and use it in their own interest is shrewd indeed, and she cites the way male clinicians can set out to discredit and destroy women's new-found (and to them threatening) reality, in order to preserve their own reality and, of course, their own dominance. Writing about how men take women's meanings out of sexual harassment, she states:



Clinicians seem to dislike and pity the paranoia and anger of the feminists . . . Slyly, confidently, they want to know why they are so 'nervous' about being found sexually attractive by 'poor' Tom, Dick or Harry. Why are they so angry at verbal abuse in the streets? . . . Don't these suddenly complaining women 'unconsciously' invite harassment or rape, and don't they 'unconsciously' enjoy it? (pp228-9)

After the 'softening up' comes the takeover bid: 'Furthermore, isn't the point of women's liberation the liberation of men too, and not, heaven forbid, female power? Isn't capitalism the *real* enemy and feminism divisive and/or the "pouting" of spoiled,



white, middle-class women?' (p229). This isn't new, of course, but these are the men who earn their living on the basis that they can solve women's problems; they are the men, Phyllis Chesler comments wryly, who are more concerned to talk about how sexism hurts men more than it hurts women. Even those who profess 'sympathy' frequently do so 'because they are sexually "attracted" to feminists, whom they see as more "interesting" and "sexually promiscuous" than their wives' (p228).

The absence of any systematic discussion of consciousness and consciousness-raising in *Women and Madness* is perhaps surprising given its psychological framework. This does not mean that Phyllis Chesler does not take talk into account: on the contrary, her observations and analysis of talk between the sexes were amazingly astute and helped provide the context for later interaction studies. But there is little discussion of what goes on in women's heads and the emphasis is on the practical and readily identifiable detail that serves to draw attention to the politics of the situation. Her categorical assertion that if women want to talk they had better talk to each other for they will get few if any opportunities to talk in the presence of men, provides a dramatic illustration of who has the power — and the right to talk.

Her commentary on the way men take over a topic and diminish and deny women's experience in the process, also reveals some of the political dimensions of day-to-day interaction between the sexes, and gives to women a helpful explanation of what is going on. Likewise, some of her descriptions of the exchanges between wives and husbands illuminate the dynamics of dealing with the oppressor, and release women from the conviction that somehow or other they are 'in the wrong'.

The institutions of middle-class psychotherapy and marriage both encourage women to talk — often endlessly — rather than to act. In marriage, the talking is usually of an indirect and rather inarticulate nature. Open expressions of rage are too dangerous and too ineffective for the isolated and economically dependent woman. Most often such "kitchen" declarations end in tears, self-blame, and in the husband graciously agreeing with his wife that she was "not herself" (p103).

It is virtually impossible for a woman to have a *real* conversation with a man — particularly if the man is her husband, a therapist or employer, who has *real* direct power over her. For 'how is it possible to have a "real" conversation with those who directly profit from her oppression? She would be laughed at, viewed as silly or crazy and, if she persisted, removed from her job — as secretary or wife, perhaps even as private patient' (p103).

Phyllis Chesler makes it clear that there is no point in turning to men. This is no solution but part of the problem. What women need to do is to turn to other women and to show some of the care and compassion for each other that for centuries women have lavished on men. (Thus echoing some of Robin Morgan's words in *Going Too Far* 1978.) Phyllis Chesler is distressed by our inability to live up to our own ideals of sisterhood and urges the greater effort and understanding necessary to a revolutionary goal. Woman power lies in woman support, she claims, and she baldly outlines the way women are deflected from achieving this goal, partly because of our own use of a double-standard. We too have one rule for men and one for women.

I think it is still very much the case that feminists are harder on each other than on anyone else, an attribute which is hardly useful and is indeed even difficult to discuss. But there can be no doubt that if feminists direct their criticisms at feminists it will be revolutionary suicide and remove any necessity for men to develop their strategies for divide and rule. And given the extent to which women are excluded from the control of meanings in a patriarchal society, there can be no doubt either that feminist criticisms of feminists and feminism are a ready, ruthless and reliable weapon in the hands of men. Yet paradoxically, the possibilities for criticism within feminism have grown at the same rate as the growth of a feminist body of knowledge: the more knowledge is available the greater is the chance of being 'unknowledgeable', of being wrong.

There has been a feminist response — the development of a feminist psychology and feminist therapy — but there has been

no essential change in the ethics of mental health, partly because it is so inextricably interwoven with the concept of male-as-norm, a concept which shows few signs of being dislodged. To accept Phyllis Chesler's thesis that a male-dominated society defines women as mad is to challenge the foundations of our society; it is to challenge male power and to identify men as unqualified oppressors who have evolved a sophisticated and savage means of punishing women who step out of their place. This realisation would be too much for society to accept without its

changing. I think it is highly significant that I have heard more criticisms of the Soviet Union's use of psychiatry for political purposes than I have ever heard of patriarchy's use of psychiatry for political purposes against women.

*Women and Madness* is too much: it is too bold, too bald, too bare. It strips patriarchy down to its essence and leaves little room for rationalisation. It paints a picture which is not at all pleasant: that is why I think many members of society prefer to look the other way. □



Susan Brownmiller *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Penguin, 1976).  
Phyllis Chesler *Women and Madness* (Allen Lane, 1972).  
Phyllis Chesler *About Men* (The Women's Press, 1978).  
Mary Daly *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (The Women's Press, 1978).  
Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the 19th Century Literary Imagination* (Yale University Press, 1979).  
Robin Morgan *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (Vintage Books, 1978).  
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage (eds) *History of Women's Suffrage, Vol. 1* (reprinted, Arno and the New York Times, 1969).

This is an edited version of a chapter from Dale Spender's *For The Record: The Making and Meaning of Feminist Knowledge* (The Women's Press, 1985).

Judy Simons with thanks to...

# Writing Our Own History 9

## Jam Everyday

*Jam Today, though not the very first, was probably the longest-lived and best-known feminist band in Britain. Original member Terry Hunt talks to Lynn Alderson about how her feminism grew with the music.*

Lynn: How did Jam Today come together?

Terry: From my perspective, I'd been involved in various attempts at women's bands after I'd become disillusioned with being the 'girl' associated with generally a male band. I'd been working with my then last boyfriend as a lyricist, because I really wasn't allowed to do anything else. Not that my playing - I played guitar - was any good, but there was no opportunity for it to get any better in that set-up. Then I went to America and when I came back I'd sort of discovered feminism and I wanted to meet women musicians to work with. Although at the same time I wanted to have a 'real band'.

There was an advert in the London Women's Liberation Newsletter, from Frankie Green, saying "Woman drummer wants to meet other women". We finally managed to get together in February 1976. I was there, Alison Rayner was there, Frankie Green and another couple of women, Sally Beautista and a woman called Jackie, who was with Sally. Sally and Jackie never came again. It was something that amazed me at the time, that there were a lot of women, women with no feminist leanings, who were wanting to work with other women. And it wasn't just because this was a good gimmick, it was because it was infinitely preferable to playing with men.

At that first meeting we sort of jammed, I suppose. I played many wa-wa versions of Doobey Brothers numbers and I think rather intimidated everybody! Frankie and I were the only ones who'd had previous

working band experience. Frankie had been in the Women's Liberation Rock Band and she'd also been in something called The Chickadees, in New Zealand.

Anyway, we decided to meet again. Frankie had some equipment that the Women's Liberation Rock Band had passed on to the Stepney Sisters when they broke up. They weren't using it then because they'd broken up and Frankie said we were wanting to get this band together and could we rehearse where they'd got the stuff stored? They said yes and Frankie, myself, Ali and Angele Veltmeyer, who used to be with the London Women's Rock Band, got together. We talked about getting a bass player, which was very difficult. Luckily part of the equipment was a Mustang bass and at that second meeting Ali said, "Well, why don't I try it." She and I were both playing guitar and she wasn't very advanced and, I think, felt redundant, so here was a chance for her to do something that was needed.

So we learnt 'Long Train Running' with Angele playing sax. She'd only just learnt to play the sax. She could already play the flute rather well, but could only play the sax in very few keys - B flat predominantly, I remember! We decided to meet again and just carried on meeting, the four of us.

L: I get the impression that though one or two of you were really quite confident about your playing, you were actually all learning, very much beginners as well. That was okay, was it? You weren't expecting everybody to be totally accomplished?

T: No, not at all. That wasn't relevant at that point, though it did become increasingly relevant and, in fact, eventually led to the break-up of that particular generation of the band. But at that stage no, it was fun. We weren't playing original numbers. Everybody chose a number they liked, that they and, hopefully, everybody else could play and we slowly developed a repertoire.

L: How was it different, working with other women musicians?

T: Well, it wasn't that conscious. When I met Frankie and that lot there was definitely an idea that something different was going to happen, but we didn't talk about it and we weren't sure what it would be.

L: It was a women's band you had in mind, rather than a feminist band?

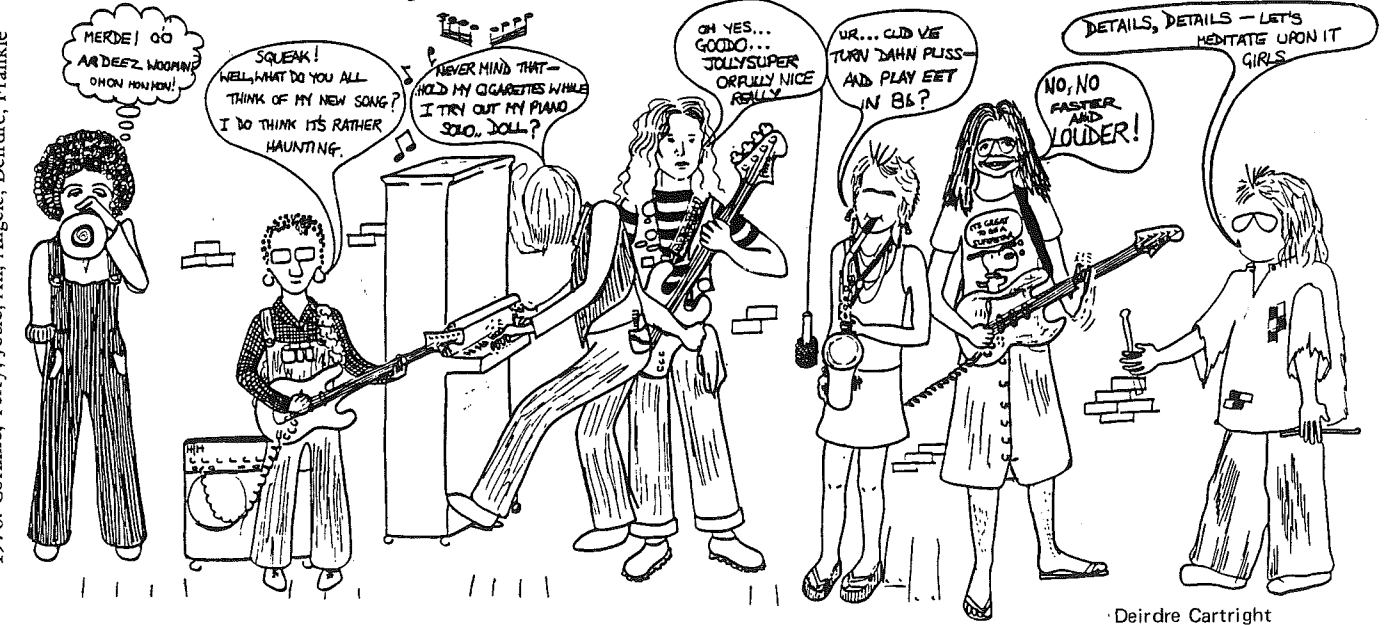
T: Yes, because I didn't know what feminism was. I know that Ali and Frankie were feminist but although I'd heard the word, it was something that I was very much still discovering. My feminism grew

T: Well, yes! It was terribly exciting. It wasn't that we thought we were all brilliantly musical - I don't know - it was just very exciting and we were becoming close. Once we four had got together it seemed like suddenly, every week, there was a new woman joining the band. Women had already heard about us and were saying, "There's a women's band getting together and isn't it exciting and soon they'll be able to do a gig!". These were feminists in the Women's Movement and it seemed very exciting to me, that there were other women interested and that it wasn't simply that we were rehearsing in isolation.

L: It was part of a whole community?

T: It seemed that way. Plus - I think this is relevant - it was a beautiful summer. I know it sounds corny but it was a really good summer and Frankie lived in Peckham and had this shed at the end of a really nice walled garden, very secluded. We would rehearse in the shed and then sit on the grass and talk and get to know each other.

1976: Corinne, Terry, Josie, Ali, Angele, Deirdre, Frankie



Deirdre Cartright

with the band. We knew very quickly we were all lesbians when we arrived at that first meeting but, although I called myself feminist I didn't really know what I meant. I felt the others were like me but I wasn't really sure in what way.

L: You got on as a group? You liked each other?

We were becoming a collective, if you like, a cohesive group. We would do things like decide to have a meal together and take collective responsibility for the fact that we were using up Frankie's resources, like her toilet paper! We started to contribute towards the cost of our being there. Those were, I think, new ideas for a lot of us.

L: *People tend to think of bands as this group of individuals, terrific players, and you just bring them together. What you're talking about is the evolution of a group, where you were all learning together and helping each other to learn.*

T: Yes, that's right. Though I think it went up and down. To begin with all we were interested in was just playing together. The pressure for us to become a band, to do a gig, seemed to come from outside.

L: *Who else was in the band at that time?*

T: Deirdre Cartright, another guitarist. I'd contacted her when we were still trying to find a bass player and I was trying to get in touch with her sister, Bernice, who played bass. Deirdre was 18 then and I said to the others, "Look there's this woman guitarist, she's very good, why don't we ask her along?". They were all a bit worried about it because she was good and it was rock and they weren't sure about rock.

After Deirdre we got Josie Mitten. At that time there was a place where feminist lesbians used to meet called 'The Upstairs Room' and a woman there said, "My lover is a piano player. I hear you're forming a band, can she come along?". And we said fine. We were saying "Great" to anybody at that stage. And there was a woman who'd also heard about the band, had played violin — this was Corinne Liensol — she started playing trumpet with us.

L: *So you were all at very different levels of experience and you were thinking of it mainly as fun. Were you still thinking that at some point you'd like to form a 'proper' band?*

T: A proper band as well, not either/or. I mean, for me, I knew it wasn't musically what I'd been used to playing with and Deirdre was already in another band, a mixed band, and she and I were still talking about how we were going to get this 'real' band together, with 'good' musicians, but we talked about it less and less and it became less and less important. Jam Today became very important to us. We were playing together nearly every day. It was a very intense period, not just playing but being with each other, talking to each other. The conversations often went on longer than the playing.

With the playing, I think sometimes we helped each other to learn and sometimes we held each other back. My problem with the band was that the songs I wrote, we couldn't play, with the level of musicality we collectively had. I was suppressing myself at that point as a writer because they couldn't play what I wrote and I played best what I wrote. These things got to be a source of conflict at a later stage.

L: *What were you all talking about? Were you talking politics?*

T: We were talking about everything. Everything. It was just such a discovery. Particularly for some of us who'd never come across feminism and lesbianism. At that stage most of us in the band were lesbian but that wasn't a conscious decision. It just happened that way. We talked about things we'd perhaps consider basic now; you know, what it's like to be a woman in the world and things like that.

L: *So you started to play gigs?*

T: That was what precipitated us into becoming a band. We were offered a gig at



the North London Poly. That was in the summer, 1976. So it then became something to work towards. It was a women-only gig. We didn't have a name either. They just called us 'The women's rock band'. It wasn't till our second gig, at the first National Women's Festival in Holland, that Frankie came up with Jam Today, from *Alice through the Looking Glass*, so we could give the organisers something to put on the posters.

L: *Had you discussed this, the politics of doing mixed gigs?*

T: Yes. Frankie and Alison didn't want to do mixed gigs. I'd never thought about it. We talked about it in the early days and we felt, on balance — all except Frankie at this point — that since the aim of the band was to reach women with the fact that we were women playing, that we were women with something to say that other women might want to hear, that we didn't just want to play to the converted and we would play to mixed audiences. Yes, we needed that women-only space to feel revived in, especially if playing to a mixed audience was going to be difficult. I think some of us felt it was more difficult playing in front of a mixed audience, less fun for us.

L: *What sort of audiences did you play to? How did they react?*

T: We weren't playing just to 'lefty' audiences. We played colleges, for example. They were some of the most hostile, the usual "Get your knickers off" things. At the beginning of the evening you'd get this row of hostile men standing with their arms folded, "Go on then, entertain us and we'll see how badly you can do", "Where are the bums and tits, that's what we've come to see." But mid-way through the gig they would have been replaced by a row of women, quite spontaneously. We had this extraordinary effect on the women in our audiences, women who weren't feminist! Funnily enough, we didn't get any adverse reaction to being a group of lesbians, even though we didn't keep it a secret.

But our songs were about women being strong and I think the men found that a lot more threatening. I hope we were making the women stronger in their own context, by saying, "You don't have to do this". We weren't saying, "You must all become les-

bians", which would have seemed more unlikely. We encouraged women to enjoy the music and to think "I can take some space for myself, I don't have to be in any pigeon-hole. I can stand up here and fill my



can see other women and they're not all giving to the men." That's what got to the men. We were giving nothing to them and they couldn't bear it. If they could have pigeon-holed us all as weird lesbians then that would have been less threatening. But the women linked with us in a way that the men found exclusive. In fact at one gig, a heterosexual couple, the man slapped his girlfriend because he felt so threatened by her enjoying our music. They'd never had that kind of thing in their relationship before. It was the first time he'd had to confront her separate needs.

L: *You got a reputation for taking direct action against men, didn't you? I remember a couple of incidents, something about Ali leaping off the back of a lorry.*

T: That was at a National Abortion Campaign demonstration. We were in the middle of doing a song, something fairly rousing, and this male photographer leapt on to the lorry and wanted us to stop playing and move so he could photograph us. He was from some top newspaper and he couldn't believe that we just weren't interested in him, that we weren't wanting publicity. We were all furious with him for having the audacity to get on the lorry. We were all going "Get off, get off!" and we essentially pushed him off. He was furious





Ali 1976, 1977

and lashed out and Ali retaliated. There was a policewoman walking by and she just sort of smiled and ignored the incident. Tacit approval for what we were doing because he was so ghostly.

And another time, at another mixed gig



at the North London Poly, the women and children in the audience had formed a semi-circle and were dancing to the music, kicking their legs in time to it, and some drunk men had formed a row behind them and were imitating them, mocking them and kicking them. The only person who saw it was Ali and she leapt off the stage and thrust her bass into the belly of one of the men who were doing it. After this incident we made a collective decision that if any one of us said "Stop" we would instantly stop playing, focus on the man or men causing the trouble and not start playing again until the trouble was over and the man or men responsible removed.

L: *Had you thought at all about how you wanted to relate to the audiences, different from the usual band/audience set-up?*

T: We knew that there wasn't any difference between us and other women in the Women's Movement. So when we did a

gig we didn't want to be elevated to a false status. Other women did other things; we just happened to play music and there shouldn't be some phoney discrepancy between us. We said we weren't going to have the room in darkness with the lights just on us. There was going to be blanket lighting so we could see them and they could see us. We weren't going to be on a stage. In retrospect I think these were rather silly decisions, but I know why we made them. I mean, I'm rather short and I found that when I was playing a gig and not on a stage I couldn't see a thing. But we wanted to, you know, really 'eyeball' the audience!

And even if the gig wasn't to the women's community, we used to say if any women wanted to talk to us about being musicians, they should come and talk to us. We stayed on in the room, had a drink. We didn't just zip off to a dressing room, get whizzed onto the stage and whizzed off. Even when we became marginally famous, or whatever; wherever we played it was like women felt they owned us in some way, we were "our band". We never alienated ourselves. It was a very conscious decision that none of us wanted that star status. We wanted women to say, "That was good, we enjoyed that, you did that well", but not because we did it. We didn't want to be famous for being us, but because we were doing something women appreciated.

L: *It must have helped you, getting that kind of positive response. It must have been very encouraging, made you feel good.*

T: Yes it did. Though I can truthfully say it never made us feel "We can do anything." It never made us feel that whatever we played would do. And we did get some adverse reaction from feminists, women in the Movement. In the early days when we were rehearsing there were some women who said it was patriarchal to own instruments and we should make our instruments available for other women to play. We all owned our own instruments, except for Josie who couldn't afford a piano. We were all very serious about what we were doing, we all wanted to be musicians and we'd saved to buy our instruments and put a lot of time and thought into it. It wasn't a question of just letting anybody play your instrument. You set the instrument up for

your own particular need and it's a bit like what they say about fountain pens, you shouldn't use other people's fountain pens.

Yes, there should be a pool of instruments for anybody to come and play as they please, I agree, but I certainly wasn't prepared to just leave my guitar somewhere for anyone who fancied a twang! And then we heard that women were saying that as a punishment we should have all our instruments stolen because we were being so insisterly! Another criticism was that we were oppressing other women because we were now too good. We had become threatening. A community can be so supportive and then so destructive.

As a consequence of all that, Angele and I rewrote the words of 'Heard it through the Grape Vine', because none of these women criticising us had ever talked to us about it. It was all gossip. So we sang in that song that if women wanted to know what we thought about something, they should come and talk to us about it. We'd already started to rewrite lyrics that were blatantly sexist, changing 'boy' to 'woman' and so on, but that was the first time we really put thought into changing the lyrics to give a political message.

Another thing we did was get rid of that business of support bands when we were playing gigs. There wouldn't be a feature band and a support band, we'd just play in rotation.

Then we did workshops. Ali did bass workshops, Deirdre did guitar workshops, I've done it; every woman who's been in Jam Today has been instrumental in getting other women to play. In fact, that was how Sisterhood of Spit came about. Angele was running a brass wind workshop, saxaphones, trumpets and trombones, and all these women came along and after a while she decided, to give them some encouragement and confidence, to arrange a gig for them. And the idea was, to give them more confidence, that the rhythm section, the drummer, bass player, piano player and guitarist, would be women who'd had quite a bit of experience. And then there was the London Women's Monthly Event.

L: *What was that, exactly?*

T: When we first had the discussions about whether to play to mixed audiences

or not, Frankie said "Okay, we've made the decision to play to mixed audiences because that's how we're going to reach women, but we have to make sure that there's a women-only gig at least once a month in London, at least, and hopefully it'll spread to other places. And I want us to be partly responsible for getting that going." So she put an advert in the London Women's Newsletter and got the Monthly Event collective going. The idea was for a women-only cultural event, not just a disco, but poetry readings, films, slides, theatre, anything, any kind of aspect of women's culture. It degenerated (in my opinion) into just a disco after a while because women weren't prepared to put energy into it and a younger group of women came along and all they were interested in was a kind of cruise event where they could all meet each other and get drunk. It was like the early days of the newsletter. There wasn't a collective, it was just women in the Women's Movement that kept it going and then a consumerist element crept into it, like it crept into the movement. "Provide this for us." I suppose it was a measure of our success, in a way.

L: *Going back to what you said about women criticising you for being too good, can we talk a bit about professionalism and standards?*

T: The first time we really had to discuss standards was when we were offered



1977: Josie, Terry, Frankie, Diana, Deirdre, Jo

that first gig and realised we didn't have a singer. We realised we wanted a good singer, someone who really could sing. And we had a lot of discussions because that was a criterion we hadn't applied to ourselves. And we realised they'd have to have a certain level of politics as well. We put in adverts and there was a long process of phone calls from women saying "I'm not a women's libber and I'm not going to burn my bra..." — literally, that sort of response to our advert when we said we were a feminist band. This was another set of criteria we hadn't applied to ourselves, but we'd got to a level where we felt we didn't want to go through ground we'd already been through together. We'd had a problem with the first singer we got, a woman called Joey. We were doing a gig for the National Abortion Campaign and Joey was a Catholic and that was something we'd just not discussed. Because we were getting on so well we assumed we all agreed about everything and that wasn't right. We didn't and that was first apparent with Joey, who left the band over that.

The thing about standards for me, personally, was that I was still writing songs to cater for the band's abilities and there were other songs I was writing that the band still couldn't play. I found that frustrating, though not enough to make me want to leave. I know Deidre wanted to play more rock, wanted to do more solos. We got to the stage where everybody who wanted to be a soloist wanted to do a solo so the songs, in my opinion, got rather boring because

we'd just have a guitar solo and then a piano solo and then a sax solo and a trumpet solo and it was very tedious. It was as if nobody was prepared to stop and let there be space.

L: *What about the band's standards of playing? I mean, I would rather have seen you then, playing songs I could identify with, women I felt I shared something with, than go to see a top male band. Whether or not you were as good musicians was neither here nor there really.*

T: I think there's a real danger in that, though; a danger of being 'the best women's band' and not being as good as you could be. For the woman musician herself, there's a danger of applying different standards to yourself. I mean, some women have, I think, got away with a lot in terms of music and standards. Things are tolerated in the Women's Movement that just wouldn't be put up with anywhere else. If you went to a woman carpenter, for example, and she made you a dreadful chair because she was still learning, practising, you wouldn't pay for it, you wouldn't accept it. I think women should have the space to learn but we shouldn't have to pay money to see them doing it. I think it is self-indulgent to feel that just because you want to make a noise on an instrument, people haven't a right to complain about how well you do it.

People think anybody can jam. Now, I don't think that's true. Jamming is basically improvising, but you have to be a really good musician to play with five people, or even

one other person you've never met before. That isn't to say people shouldn't jam, but if you're making a noise other people aren't going to enjoy, I don't think you should be doing it in front of them. You should be doing it on your own.

L: *I perfectly understand that. But one of the things about women's bands is that they encouraged a lot of other women to play because you weren't presenting them with brilliantly accomplished music. They could see the learning process and this made them feel maybe they could do it too. Don't you think that's important?*

T: I certainly think that's part of it, but I don't think it's just that. I've got a letter from a woman in Manchester, one of the letters we got from when we did a gig there, and she said she'd been very resistant about coming to see us because she didn't want to come a see a load of women making a dreadful row. And how thrilled she was that we were good, that she could feel proud of us. Both of these things are important.

L: *Did any of you want to make records?*

T: We all wanted to make a record. We had a lot of discussion about whether we wanted to try and get a label out; the business about whether to get a deal with a straight record company. In the end we came to the conclusion that it would conflict with our politics, that we would end up compromising ourselves, although it was a source of argument. Deidre particularly and probably Angele and certainly Diana wanted to do it and didn't see it as conflicting with their politics. But I never felt they wanted to make records because they wanted to be 'rich and famous'. It was because they genuinely felt that we would reach a wider audience that way.

L: *What was your relationship with the mainstream music scene?*

T: Well, we did have some offers, but we were never interested in Jam Today doing that.

L: *It would have meant you would have had to change?*

T: Yes. There's too much emphasis on the record these days and not on the musicians. The record is what makes money for the middle man and that's why the Musi-

cian's Union, and I agree with it, has this thing about "Keep Music Live". I think records are important, but they should be something you take home after a gig, because you've seen the band and you think you'd like to go home and listen to it some more.

L: *I'd like to know a bit more about what it was like being part of Jam Today. What were the good things and what were the bad things?*

T: The good things about it were the togetherness. When it was working it was wonderful. Like, for example, organising a tour together; the hardship shared, if you like — very corny stuff! We'd all pile into the van with our lunch boxes and we'd organise outings to the local sights. And think of the number of women! At the high spot of the band there were ten of us; Frankie, Ali, Angele, myself, Deidre, Josie, Corinne, Diana the singer, Ali's sister Fran, who joined the band when she was 17 or 18 as one of our technicians — she didn't know how to technish anything at the time and now she's a computer engineer and that's a direct result of being in the band, it awoke her interest and gave her opportunity — and Sarah Greaves, the sound engineer, who we met when we were doing the music for this film for the British Film Institute, 'Rapunzel, let down your hair'. For example, when we all went on tour to Holland together, sharing the driving, everything like that.

That's actually quite traumatic, being on tour, away from your home and spending an intense period of time with what was then quite a large number of women, all in one van. Often we'd all be staying in the same place, but in fact we preferred that because we found we needed to be together if we were in some strange town, in a stressful situation, perhaps we'd arrived late or the van had broken down.

I remember one incident, we were in two vehicles, Deidre's Morris Traveller and we'd borrowed her father's van — this was before we bought our own van — and we had a flat tyre and no jack. So — it was amazing — we bodily, all these women bodily lifted this car so one of us could change the tyre!

L: *It must have been difficult, travelling around and not having much money and*



#### STEREOTIPARE

*Lei è priva di facoltà mentali, è fragile e piccola  
Non ha assolutamente un cervello, è  
una stupida gallina  
Guida in maniera maldestra, è insipida e  
malvestita  
E' una cagna, è carne da macellare.*

*Stereotipare  
Sono ammalata fino a morire per tutto questo  
Stereotipare  
Essere una signora soddisfatta o una  
ragazza frustrata*

*Stereotipare  
Sarai colpita da ostracismo  
Devi essere come tua madre,  
ma lei cos'era veramente?*

*Lei è una vecchia megera, una pettegola,  
una strega  
Applaudirà tutto ciò che farai, sveglierà le tue  
voglie, è un buon acquisto*

*E' una moglie soddisfatta, una megera,  
una seccatura  
E' sgarbata, una maledetta puttana, tu dici...  
Ma io dico...*

(Teresa Hunt - Jam Today)

Photo from the sleeve of *Stereotyping*. Lyrics from an Italian magazine *Rockerilla*, when the record made no.7 in its chart.

## SATURDAY *What's On*

### CURRENT JAM...

JAM TODAY were formed in 1976 out of a group of women who 'just wanted to play together.' And although they have played in Manchester before, this is the first time with the current line-up, which came together in July 1980. Three original members — Alison Rayner (bass), Terry Hunt (guitar) and Fran Rayner (sound) — have now been joined by drummer Jackie Crew from Tour de Force, ex-Spoilsports' vocalist Barbara Stretch and

Julia Dawkins on saxophones and flutes.

Together, Jam Today have recorded a four-track EP, *Stereotyping*, on their own Stropsey Cow label, which is available at Grassroots and deceptively mixes soft jazz and latin-influenced rock with hard, perceptive lyrics. — *Stephen Hewitt*

• JAM TODAY at Rusholme's Birch Community Centre, tonight.



Jam Today's guitarist Terry Hunt





not being given very good accommodation.

T: It was very variable. It got better as we got more organised and we knew what to ask for. And also as our reputation grew we could ask for proper payment for our gigs. We got better at realising what our needs were, that we weren't prepared to sleep in a pile on the floor, and at making demands. I remember once in Holland we had an argument about being paid and the woman we were arguing with said, "I'm sitting here licking envelopes and I do it for nothing. Are you trying to say that what you do is more important than that?" And we said, "No, but you have another job and this is our job". And then they wanted us to play for nothing at a party in the evening. There's this idea that if you're a musician you roll up to a party with your instrument under one arm and you're all going to spontaneously jump up and play.

Pay was an important issue, in fact. Once there were quite a few women's bands going you'd get women ringing up and asking how much we charged for a gig and then ringing other bands and going for the cheapest one. So we insisted that we were paid per person and as close as possible to the Musicians' Union rate and we said we didn't want to be always doing benefits because this was our living and if we were always doing benefits we were always giving away our services for nothing. It really got up my nose, in fact; some people would come from their jobs — okay, not necessarily well-paid jobs but they had a living wage from them — and the women organising the gig would expect to pay us hardly anything and then whip out large amounts of money to pay for booze. Supporting male monopoly breweries rather than understand that we wanted to make a living too.

One of the worst moments in our time together was again in Holland — this is just a coincidence, we toured a lot in Holland! — at a gig in Rotterdam. We'd arrived late from another town; by now we had our own van, which had a governor on it, which is a thing which controls the engine speed so we could only go anywhere at 45 miles an hour, downhill with a good wind behind us, so it took us ages to get from anywhere to anywhere. So we were late arriving and we'd

had no chance to eat, which doesn't put you in the best of humour anyway, and we were playing the gig and really looking forward to eating, having the communal meal we always tried to have together either before or after a gig. So we asked the woman organiser if she could suggest somewhere where we could have a meal, a restaurant. It was as if it was a strange request. She kept saying, "You want to eat?" as if it was the most extraordinary thing in the world. And we said, "Yes, yes, we really want to eat." So we got in the van and we went through this lovely picturesque town and we were thinking, "Great, she's going to take us to a wonderful restaurant somewhere," and she stopped at a van, one of those greasy chip vans. That was the first depressing thing. So we all got some chips and got back into the van to be taken to our accommodation.

And we drove and drove through all these beautiful little streets and came across what must have been the only slum in Rotterdam. It was *the* street of squats then, mangy dogs roaming and broken glass and no street lights, the works. And the house we stayed in had no hot water, no facilities for making a hot drink, so we all had to go to bed. Bed was up in the attic, up an ordinary ladder and through a trap door. There was no bedding and there were five pieces of foam. So there were eight of us (Angele and Deirdre had gone off to see Angele's parents) and five pieces of foam to fight over. Fortunately we'd brought sleeping bags but even so it was bitterly cold and the place was full of kitty litter so it stank of cat shit, there was a broken skylight and poor old Sarah, the sound engineer, was pregnant and had had a show of blood and was completely freaked. We literally all cried ourselves to sleep that night.

L: *Perhaps we should go on to why the band broke up now. Why did women leave? Was it over conflicts or did they just want to go and do different things?*

T: It wasn't ever about wanting to be more professional. If women said they were going to leave the band to play with someone else, it was like they were being unfaithful to a lover. It really hurt!

Corinne and Josie were the first to leave and that was about standards. Not just the music, but other jobs associated with the

band; looking after the van, making sure the mikes got repaired, organising rehearsals. We had all the kind of arguments that women who've been in collectives know; who hasn't done what and who isn't taking their share of the dirty work. There were some of us, myself included, who perhaps felt more 'capable'. If other women didn't do things as fast or as well in *our* terms, this would cause arguments about our attitude. So there was this feeling on one side of, 'You're just lazy', which was partly true, and on the other side, 'You're over-bearing and don't give me a chance', which was also partly true. We'd had a good phase when we'd managed to get quite a lot done and good decisions, decisions that worked for everyone, got made. But there were differences, definitely, and after Josie and Corinne left we got very depressed. Also some of us had become rather good and felt frustrated at the inability — for whatever reason — of

some of the others to progress. It's hard to say these things about women for whom I still fundamentally care a lot, and it must be clear that these are my perceptions of the events.

It wasn't ever properly talked about and I think that's sad. If you know someone's

beating their head against a wall trying to be something they're not, you should be able to say something to them without destroying them. I mean, for years and years I thought I had to be a 'lead' guitarist because it was the male thing to do, and I was never trying to explore different ways of playing. I trapped myself into feeling that was the only 'good' sort of playing. And I used to find Deirdre incredibly threatening because she reminded me of a lot of the boyfriends I'd been involved with, with that kind of single-minded determination, playing scales, etc. I used to do it faithfully but it never made *me* any better at *improvising* because it just wasn't me. I was fundamentally a writer. I could play what I wrote, and I still can play what I write, better than I can play anything else. But then I was still having to tone down what I wrote so the band could play it.

Perhaps we didn't give each other enough

space. When we finally made the decision to break up it was a tremendous relief and we got on better again. We did our farewell gig in December '77 and it was wonderful. I don't think any of us felt remorse about the band splitting. It was a natural conclusion. In the end the only women who were



1980-82: Julia, Ali, Fran, Jackie, Terry, Barbara



left were myself, Ali and Fran, the technician, and we felt lost. I remember that. Even though it wasn't appropriate to continue, we wanted women to know that there would still be a Jam Today, that Jam Today wasn't dead and gone, it was going to evolve.

L: You stayed on with Jam Today through its second and third generation before you left and I know you're not playing with a band at the moment. How do you feel about music personally and about the women's music scene today?

T: When the third band ended it took me a long time to accept because it had been part of my life for so long and I felt like it should continue if it could and there should always be a Jam Today. For me it had become a symbol of something; whether or not I or any of the other original women were in it, I felt it should be something organic, that continued to grow.

But I don't miss the music scene at the moment and that's sad for me because I always used to play music. As soon as I could speak I used to say I wanted a guitar and I wanted to play. I'm half Greek and my mother has always sung in the home; we used to sing in harmony together, first, second and third voice with my aunts. So music was very much something we *did*, it wasn't something we were just consumers of.

When I did get a guitar it was like my form of diary. When I was upset I used to sit and write a song about it, to play for myself, and that was how my song-writing started. And I lost that and I was angry about that. I felt that every time I picked up a guitar I must practice to get better and I must write a good song for the band. I felt it took music away from *me* and I didn't play it for myself any more.

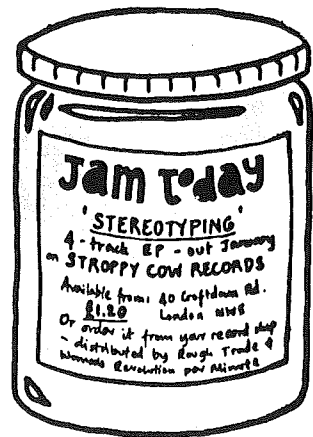
That was the first point. And secondly, since I had grown into feeling that, no matter what else I did, I was a feminist, I didn't feel I could separate it off from my music. I didn't feel that we were achieving what I wanted to achieve in terms of politics quickly enough. Though, in retrospect I do recognise that we did, in our own small way, achieve quite a lot.

We're all women, but we're all different kinds of women, different classes, ages, races,

we're not all going to like the same kind of music; did that mean we'd have to write a sort of mish-mash of music so we'd appeal to every possible combination of women? Where were we going to play our music and what were we saying, what were we offering women in the end? Say we wanted to play in a factory (and that was one of our aims in Jam Today - to take music to all kinds of places, factories, prisons, etc) what could we say to this woman who's going home to her husband who she loves even though he's ghastly, and if she leaves him, where would she go? Got no economics. All these things. I didn't want it to be just a wank, for me to come away feeling I'd done something when I hadn't.

And some of the bands these days - I find it almost embarrassing. They do their song about rape, their song about Ireland, their song about South Africa. But there's that conflict between entertainment and political statement. Actually I don't think Jam Today was all that guilty of this, but we were all doing it - being too diverse. It needs to be more specialised. And if you take too many issues and bombard the audience with them - it's got to be more subtle than that and you've also got to confront that issue, "Am I here for them to have a good time or am I here for them to hear something really painful?" I don't feel I can stand up and sing "This woman was raped when she was four," and have women clap and enjoy it.

I haven't resolved any of these issues, these things that really racked me, yet. It's important to be seen to be a woman playing music. It's important to be seen to be a woman knowing how instruments work, to be seen not to be sexist, to be seen not having male-approval desire. All those things are important, but I feel I've done them. They must continue to be done - we've not even scratched the tip of the iceberg - but I felt I needed some recharging for myself, time to find out for myself what I wanted to do with music. Am I going to express myself as a feminist - and by that I mean radically change the world - via this medium, or am I going to take my music back for me, as it was, and do something else that expresses my feminism? I don't know what the answer is, I really don't. □



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