

TROUBLE & STRIFE 11

SUMMER 1987 £1.95



Interview with Janice Raymond

Women Rising in Resistance

Is the Future socialist feminist?

*Against nationalism:
women's oppression in
Algeria*

Feminism and AIDS

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 is produced collectively by Lynn Alderson, Margot Farnham, Cath Jackson, Susanne Kappeler, Liz Kelly, Sophie Laws and Judy Stevens, with help from Harriet Wistrich (taping), Sara Scott and Alison (proof-reading), Hilary Allen (index), Kathy Page and Diana Leonard (paste-up). With many thanks to the Women's Reproductive Rights Information Centre and the Women's Health Information Centre for the use of their space and resources.

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 RISING IN RESISTANCE
A *Trouble and Strife* open meeting on Direct Action and Feminism.
Speaker: Mary Lee Sargent (founder of a US direct action network)
JULY 11th 2-6 pm
London Women's Centre, Wesley House,
Wild Court, off Kingsway, London WC2.
(Nearest tube, Holborn)
£1.50 waged/£1.00 unwaged
Disabled Access, Creche

Trouble and Strife needs new, energetic women to join our collective. We are currently a group of seven white women, of various class and cultural backgrounds. If you are interested in working with us on producing the magazine please write to us.

"off our backs is international in scope and focuses on diverse topics dealing with poor women, working class women, minority women, prison, custody, and abortion. It's never been simple minded. It's what I think of as feminism!"
--Marilyn Frye, author of *The Politics of Reality*

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Cover by Judy Stevens

Contents No.11

Letters	2
Rising in Resistance: direct action and feminism. A <i>Trouble and Strife</i> interview with <i>Mary Lee Sargent</i>	7
Sex and Danger: feminism and AIDS <i>Sara Scott</i>	13
Not Victims, not Superwomen: Black girls and education <i>Ruth Chigwada</i>	19
The New Defeatism: radical feminism bites back. <i>Liz Kelly</i> reviews <i>Is the Future Female?</i>	23
Against Nationalism: the betrayal of Algerian women <i>Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas</i>	29
The Politics of Passion: an interview with <i>Janice Raymond</i>	38
'With Women': <i>Laura Potts</i> reviews <i>Feminist Practice in Women's Health Care</i>	43
Writing Our Own History: Organising against the odds, 10 years of feminism in Northern Ireland <i>Christina Loughran</i>	48
The State of the Movement: reflections by <i>Sigrid Niilsen</i> and <i>Ella Bahaire</i>	55

Note our new address:
Trouble and Strife,
34 Exchange Street,
Norwich,
Norfolk,
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LETTERS

Antidotes to despair

If founder, and past, members of the *Trouble and Strife* collective were "saddened by the political tone" of the 9th issue, I was dismayed by the tone of their letter (Spring '87) which high-handedly dismissed cartoons as only useful for transmitting contempt, hatred and reactionary ideas and as being "a form of abuse reserved for the main enemy". To make such assumptions is to underestimate the radical potential of humour and to misunderstand the particular cartoon they attacked. †

Far from naming "Andrea Dworkin as the enemy [who] allows men to get off the hook for crimes against women", I read the cartoon as a wry comment on how men try to distort our arguments and use them against us.

While there is nothing funny about the things women have to contend with, being able to laugh can give us the space we need to be able to deal with them, and can help counter paralysing feelings of depression and despair.

Of course humour can be notoriously ambiguous and as a weapon (offensive or defensive?) it's often double-edged. But to repudiate it entirely is to deny ourselves its regenerative and enlightening power. The same difficulties are involved in the use of criticism, which has also been used as a reactionary form of abuse. A sense of humour is critical and can have at least as much to do with respect and love as with contempt and hatred, so why should we allow that to be "reserved for the main enemy"?

Good jokes are economical rather than cheap and I see no reason why they should be despised just because they have also been used to transmit reactionary ideas and fascist propaganda.

Humour has indeed been used as a powerful, if largely unacknowledged, form of social control and like other powers, has been much abused. But as something we have equal access to, we can and should use it constructively for our own purposes: not only to subvert oppressive power structures

but, as we are to a greater or lesser extent products of our conditioning and experiences within these structures, it can also serve to check 'the enemy within'. Without self-criticism we can, and often do, inadvertently perpetuate the same old evils and mistakes under other names.

One of the ways we can question and point out mistakes, omissions and contradictions, often obscured by tortuous and confusing arguments, is through jokes which can immediately high-light problem areas and cheerfully bring us back down to earth — which after all, is where we live. By that of course I don't mean flat on our backs — but with our feet on the ground!

Laughing together can help give us the courage to keep going and trying to establish better ways to relate to each other, so why shouldn't serious-minded feminists value the light which jokes and cartoons can provide?

Wendy Kerrison and Wendy Ward
Chandlers Ford
Hants

AIDS, Female Circumcision and African Women

The question of where the AIDS virus originated is a matter of intense international debate. Some say that AIDS may have appeared first among the green monkeys of Central Africa or perhaps in some backwater village in the interior of the continent. Two respected British Scientists have speculated that it could be borne from outer space on a comet and washed to earth in rainfall, but Dr Jonathan Mann, AIDS coordinator for the Geneva-based World Health Organisation (WHO) said, "We believe there is no good evidence yet on where the virus came from, for the epidemic of clinical AIDS in Africa coincided in time with its appearance in Haiti, the USA and other countries". Wherever the virus came from, one indisputable fact is that the terrifying scourge of AIDS is here and spreading everywhere. Seldom has

a single disease put so many people around the world at such great risk. The AIDS microbe comes in a variety of strains and has the ability to mutate rapidly, making the development of potential vaccines highly problematic. The AIDS virus breaks down the body's disease-fighting immune system, leaving victims susceptible to a variety of infections and cancers.

The overwhelming majority of western victims still comes from two specific groups: homosexuals and intravenous drug users, who often share dirty needles. But what is happening in Africa paints a very different and alarming picture. Some scientists estimate that as many as 5 million Central Africans carry the virus. According to Dr Jonathan Mann "Africa is the continent most severely affected by AIDS and has reached epidemic proportions throughout East, Central and Southern Africa and is spreading to other areas in Africa". Now what cultural factors were at work in the transmission of AIDS in Africa? Uli Linke, an anthropologist and researcher in the University of California, Berkely USA, had this for an answer, "I noticed a prevailing assumption that the same cultural factors were at work in the transmission of AIDS in Africa as those in Europe and the USA — namely sexual promiscuity, the use of unclean hypodermic needles, and homosexuality. None of these points explain the equal ratio of men and women contracting the disease in central Africa. The bottom line in the transmission of AIDS is the exchange of the body fluids particularly blood, which gave me the idea that it might be related to female circumcision.

The most extreme form of female circumcision in Africa, infibulation, is the complete removal of the vulval tissue including the clitoris and labia. After the tissue has been removed the sides of the wound are sewn together leaving a minuscule opening perhaps the size of a matchstick. No anaesthetic is used in the operation which lasts between 15 to 30 minutes and the instruments used are not sterilised. Essentially sexual intercourse is then impossible unless in some way or other the vagina is re-opened. This is usually accomplished through forcible entry by the hus-

band which often leads to haemorrhaging. For women, Linke says, "infibulation is associated not only with chronic pain, but with lesions in the vaginal tissue and bleeding leading to the presence of blood during intercourse. In some cases full penetration can take up to 9 months during which time anal intercourse is a common alternative". In a letter to the professional journal 'Science' in January 1986, Linke stressed that, "it is noteworthy that the recent outbreaks of AIDS in Africa correspond geographically to those regions in which female genital mutilation is still practiced".

We of this Women's Centre have authenticated the research revelation of Uli Linke, for of the 98,000 reported cases of AIDS in Africa since 1984 three quarters of this number are women and are from the areas where female genital mutilation is widely practiced. We have long experienced the dangers inherent in this practice and have strongly been condemning its continuity. We have persistently called upon various African governments to legislate against female genital mutilation but only Sudan has responded with legislation, though no attempt has been made to enforce the legislation by the government. Many western countries have stepped up efforts to stop the spread of AIDS. The USA and Italy had earmarked \$100 and \$35 million respectively to combat AIDS. Britain, Spain and Denmark have started to make clean syringes more available to drug addicts. Even Austria, where AIDS has yet to become a problem, have put a high premium on monitoring the spread of the disease. But here in Africa, authorities have taken the AIDS problem very lightly as if they do not know that prevention is better than cure. African governments have preferred to wait foolishly and pay an extravagant price for their inaction.

Given the fatal nature of AIDS and its association with female genital mutilation we cannot afford to take chances. We have therefore recently launched a massive education campaign by homevisiting, countryside enlightenment tours where women are addressed in public places like markets, etc, campaign by newspaper, radio



Wendy Kerrison

LETTERS

and television against female genital mutilation and the spread of AIDS; and the campaign is now in progress. We believe that the invention of AIDS vaccine will never prevent this deadly disease without improved public education.

But as a non-governmental self supporting voluntary organisation, without a solid financial base, our greatest problem is lack of funds to run the campaign. We therefore earnestly appeal through your magazine to all women, women's groups and bodies, other interested persons and organisations to come to our aid by donating to our campaign fund otherwise we may not be able to continue in our campaign and services. We shall accept donation by cash (currency notes), cheque, bankdraft or International Money Order in any currency. We shall also accept material aid such as projectors, films, loudspeakers, books and literatures. Please help us to stop female genital mutilation and the spread of AIDS among African women; for together, we shall succeed.

For sending of donation, aid or inquiring, write (in English) to:
Mrs Hannah Edemikpong
Women's Centre,
Box 185, Eket,
Cross River State,
Nigeria, West Africa.

In sisterhood
Hannah Edemikpong (Mrs)
(For The Women's Centre)

Counterpoint

Trouble and Strife made a decision to publish, in *T&S9*, an article attacking three feminist books on the new reproductive technologies (NRTs) and praising one by two men, Peter Singer and Deane Wells.

The article states that the Singer and Wells book, *The Reproductive Revolution: New Ways of Making Babies*, supports in

vitro fertilisation and then "looks at surrogacy, cloning, sex selection, genetic engineering and glass wombs." The book, it notes, has some "naive" points but "it is sane and more informative than Corea's et al, and an excellent counterpoint to them."

Actually, Singer and Wells don't just "look at" the listed technologies. They support and argue for surrogate motherhood, cloning ("limited to one replica per person"), sex predetermination for population control, genetic engineering and glass wombs ("The essential point is to work up to ectogenesis very gradually.") To write that the men "look at" these technologies does not adequately convey what they do in their book.

The article faults Robyn Rowland, co-author of *Man-Made Women*, for suggesting that in order to exercise control over human experimentation, women may have to consider some sort of state intervention in research funding, research application and reproductive rights. It says of Rowland, "She is aware of the dangers to women in increased state control of reproductive services. However, the technology frightens her more than the state."

Yet the Singer and Wells book praised by *Trouble and Strife* advocates a much greater role for the state. It advocates a state-run surrogate mother "service" through the formation of a State Surrogacy Board. Private surrogacy agreements would be illegal. The board would encourage volunteers to gestate babies for free. Failing that, it would set a fee for the women. The Board would screen surrogates, ensuring that "the prospects of avoiding alcoholics and drug addicts would be high."

Singer and Wells also suggest the formation of a state board to which parents could apply for a license to genetically engineer their children. "It [this state board] would license proposals to increase intelligence (but cautiously, by small steps) and refuse to license proposals, if there were any, to diminish it. Presumably it would favour proposals which promoted the health of the future member of society . . . If it happened that scientists found genes associated with altruism or malice, it might

license proposals to determine for the former, but not the latter," Singer and Wells write (p.189).

This article criticises Rowland for her support of a state role in reproductive technology (a role Rowland advocates for the purpose of curtailng male medical control over and risky experimentation on women's bodies). But the article does not criticise Singer and Wells when they advocate the formation of boards enlarging state control over women's bodies. Why? In a radical feminist journal, why?

Singer and Wells write: "We believe that the state can be justified in interfering with decisions to reproduce, either in order to control population growth or to prevent practices which might disadvantage the children born." They support (not just "look at") the use of sex-predetermination technology for the purpose of controlling population and, in this connection, they quote Paul Ehrlich, author of *The Population Bomb* . . . "if a simple method could be found to guarantee that first-born children were males, then population control measures in many areas would be somewhat eased. In our country and elsewhere, couples with only female children 'keep trying' in hope of a son."

Singer and Wells write: "Since the population explosion is arguably the greatest problem facing the world today, any method that offers a hope of containing it should not be rejected except on the clearest and most serious grounds."

The seriousness of the problem of an imbalance of the sexes caused by this technology, they write "is difficult to estimate; whereas the seriousness of continued population growth is undeniable. Countries facing famine as a result of over-population might choose unfettered [sex] selection as a means of stopping population growth. In this way the good achieved by a convenient method of sex selection is likely to be more significant than any harm it would cause."

In reference to the above quotes from the book your article lauds: Does *Trouble and Strife* agree with all this? Or are these some of Singer and Wells' "naive" views? Or could it be that they are examples of

the ways in which the men's book provides "an excellent counterpoint to Corea's et al"?

The article criticises *Test-Tube Women* contributor Jane Murphy for a discussion of David Rovik's "totally discredited" book on cloning, *In His Image*. It does not mention that Singer and Wells also discuss the Rovik book. Nor does it criticise the men for having done so. This kind of treatment of women is not exactly the sort of thing one expects from a radical feminist journal.

Your article does not mention or criticise the picture of cruel, greedy women painted by Singer and Wells when describing the potential for exploitation in surrogate motherhood. The two men fly so quickly over the possibility that women might be exploited that the reader hardly notices it. Then, discussing those circumstances in which no women can be found to serve as unpaid volunteer gestators for people who want babies, they write: "In these circumstances, the adoptive couple will be inadequately protected. They will put their money down, but find themselves with a worthless contract which the courts will refuse to enforce. Some surrogates will take the money and run first to an abortionist. Others will gradually turn the screw on the adoptive couple as their longed for baby comes closer to its time of delivery." The men describe one advantage of the State Surrogacy Board: ". . . since the Board would act as a buffer between the couple and the surrogate, it would make it much more difficult for the surrogate to extort additional money from the couple."

Oh those greedy, evil heartless women!
Oh those poor abused men who, in all good faith, hired the women's bodies!

This is the book your article considers "an excellent counterpoint" to feminist books on the NRTs.

I'm not going to defend my own work (*The Mother Machine* and chapters in *Test-Tube Women* and *Man-Made Women*) from the *Trouble and Strife* attack. I will let the work stand on its own, trusting that when women read it, they can form their own opinions. In those cases where the article simply misreported what *The Mother*

Finance is
a women's health
problem



LETTERS

Machine says, this will be readily apparent to readers.

In general, the *Trouble and Strife* article has portrayed feminist critics of the NRTs as crazy, paranoid and hysterical. The Singer and Wells' book is "sane and more informative than Corea's et al." We are accustomed to portrayals of feminists as crazy and male defenders of patriarchal interests as "sane." Historically these techniques for silencing feminists and helping them to disappear from public view have not been used by people identifying themselves as feminists. Nor have they appeared in journals labelling themselves "radical feminist." Maybe things are getting trickier now.

I must say I was stunned by the ethnocentricity of the article's list of women who are allegedly the guiding force behind FINRRAGE (Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering). It only counted English-speaking women. It only mentioned women living in Australia, England and, primarily, North America. It totally rendered invisible the leading roles played in FINRRAGE by women from many different countries. West German women, in particular, have been in the forefront of the feminist resistance movement, organising the first large-scale feminist congress against reproductive and genetic engineering anywhere in the world.

I would also like to call attention to the fact that the *Trouble and Strife* article attempts to associate feminist critics of NRTs with the right-wing. This is what Jan Raymond, in a paper delineating the differences in feminist and 'fatalist' critiques of the NRTs, calls a deliberate politics of discrediting by association.

In referring to Jan's work, I risk upsetting stomachs on your editorial board. One of the criticisms, in the article, of feminists writing about the NRTs is that we quote each other's work "ad nauseum". We quote each other because we learn from, build on and respect each other's work. In

a radical feminist journal, is that really something we need to defend?

Sincerely
Gena Corea

Editorial note: The article was written by Marge Berer and published by *T&S*. We state on our masthead "we do not necessarily agree with everything we publish"

JEWISH FEMINIST ANTHOLOGY

Next year, the first ever anthology of writing by Jewish feminists living in Britain will be published by The Women's Press. You still have a chance to contribute to it!

We are a diverse group of women who define ourselves both as feminist and as Jewish. Some of us were brought up religious, some with a stronger sense of our Jewishness than others, and some were brought up without a Jewish background. To each of us, our Jewish identity is important, not least because it makes us vulnerable to the anti-semitism of others.

This book is important — it is the first collection of its kind to be published in this country.

We would like to hear from anyone with a story to tell that will be of interest to other Jewish feminists and to a wider audience.

Because we have a number of articles from Ashkenazi women living in London, we would particularly welcome contributions from you if you live outside of that area, if you are Sephardic, or black and Jewish and if you are lesbian or disabled.

We're looking for fiction, prose, poetry, photos, line drawings and any other ideas that you may have. Please contact us by writing to:

JFP,
42 Inderwick Road,
London N8 9LD

Rising in Resistance

Was ERA lost because US feminists failed to use direct action as a campaigning strategy? Mary Lee Sargent, founder member of a US feminist direct action network Women Rising in Resistance, urges us to see direct action as a necessary and vital part of radical feminist politics.

T&S: What is Women Rising in Resistance?

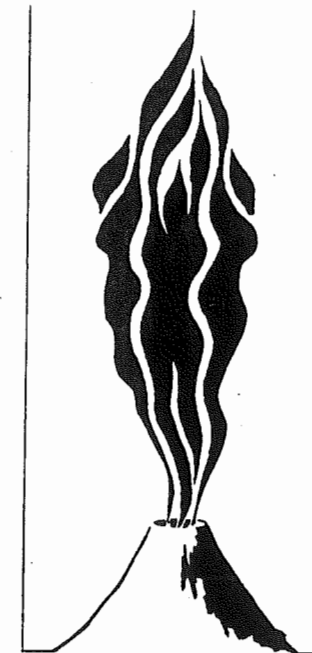
MLS: It is a connecting web or network of affinity groups and individual activists who create direct action demonstrations for lesbian/feminist/womanist/pacifist/radical causes and issues. By direct action we mean a dramatic, face-to-face, non-violent confrontation with those who abuse power or obstruct change; any highly visible political act including sit-ins, sit-downs, strikes, occupations, street theatre, spray painting disruptions, fasts, traffic obstructions, ritual encirclements, boycotts, vigils, mass demonstrations. A secondary goal of our network is educating women about the need for such tactics in our movements and encouraging participating in direct actions. The commitment which links us is that we prioritise women, girls, women's children and their well-being in our political work. In both setting goals and planning strategy women's issues, needs and concerns come first for us.

Because we do prioritise women, most of the sister resisters in Women Rising are lesbians (maybe as many as 80 or 90%). A significant minority do not identify as lesbian but have made feminist and lesbian issues the focus of their political activity. Although we are committed to fighting racism and every other form of dominance, we are mostly white, US lesbians/radical

feminists. Many of us come from working class backgrounds, many from middle class. Most of us are self supporting women working to put bread on the table and a roof overhead; few if any of us are the comfortable yuppie females that the US mass media claim make up the ranks of the feminist movement.

T&S: How did you come together?

MLS: In December of 1981, a group of lesbian/feminists in Champaign County, Illinois formed an affinity group, a Grassroots Group of Second Class Citizens, to plan a series of direct actions in support of the Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution. We were friends and co-workers involved in various feminist and lesbian organisations locally. For several years prior to coming together we had lamented the lack of a radical, direct action wing of the US feminist movement comparable to the militant branch of the US and UK suffrage movements of the early twentieth century or, more recently, of the US civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. All of us agreed that the absence of an organised campaign of direct action and civil disobedience were in part responsible for the failure to get the ERA ratified. Each of us had waited in vain for a wave of direct action protests to galvanise us into action. When the June 30, 1982 ratification deadline loomed only six months away, we



women rising
in resistance

decided that we must organise something immediately. Otherwise the ERA would go down "not with a bang but a whimper", giving a dangerous signal to the right-wing, anti-feminist forces then gaining power in the US.

Once we began to recruit participants for our action from outside of Illinois, we learned about an affinity group on the East Coast, the Congressional Union (later known as A Group of Women). It had been carrying out direct actions for ERA since 1980. Unfortunately our local media had not covered their efforts. An awareness that we were doing too little too late, and that we had not heard about actions done by other radical feminists, convinced us that our ERA protests must be a springboard for future activity and organisation.

Our direct action campaign in June of 1982, included a four-day occupation of the State Capitol, door chainings, disruption of legislative sessions, sit-ins and writing the names of our political opponents in animal blood on the Capitol floors. Throughout the month our public statements and press releases emphasised that we had two major purposes in our actions: pressuring the



legislature to ratify the ERA and initiating a new wave of militancy in US feminism. After the defeat of ERA our affinity group made the task of mobilising and connecting activists committed to direct action a major priority. It was at A Woman Gathering (a meeting of lesbians/feminists who combine a commitment to political activism with an interest in women's spirituality) in August 1983, that the idea was taken from Champaign to a national group. Several Gathering participants brainstormed together and chose the name Women Rising in Resistance (WRR) and produced a statement of goals and purposes.

T&S: Why did you feel there was a need for a direct action network?

MLS: Our study of the history of social movements, our combined experience in those movements and the dismal disappointment of losing the ERA made it crystal clear to us that direct action is a necessary strategy for achieving social and political change. Absolutely every political movement that we knew anything about had utilised direct action. Without it, feminism in the US had just sustained a

serious defeat. We chose to form a network of activists instead of a centralised organisation in order to channel our energies and resources into doing actions. We began by producing a brochure inviting women activists to: use our name and logo in connection with their own when carrying out direct actions; do simultaneous actions on special days of focus; help plan coordinated regional and national events; educate others about the need for direct action in our movements; and communicate with the WRR clearing house about their work so that we could share the information/techniques with other resisters in the network.

In January 1984 we sent the brochure to approximately 500 women and affinity groups, placed ads in the lesbian/feminist press; we also wrote letters to the editors of feminist, lesbian and progressive publications announcing our existence and outlining our goals. Over the past three years WRR sisters have attended dozens of conferences, meetings and workshops to present sessions about our network and its activities and to distribute our literature. Like our fore sisters in the US movement, Susan B Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "we accepted every invitation to speak on any and every subject" in order to have an opportunity to promote the concept of direct action and WRR.

As women hear about us through one of these means and contact us, they are answered with a personal letter, sent printed material about WRR actions, especially those in their area, and placed on the mailing list to receive our newsletter. In 1985 and 1986 the network organised our first national event — Women Take Liberty in '86. On the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty, WRR claimed the colossal female image for women and women's causes and protested the corporate and governmental abuse of the symbol. We publicised the action in much the same way we had previously promoted the network, except that we also purchased paid display ads in the largest circulation lesbian/feminist publications. Making contact with direct action activists was a major goal of the Liberty action, and this aspect of the project was a smashing success. As a result of all of these efforts, we are now a network

of approximately 1500 individuals and affinity groups. Of these, about 200 have met and carried out one or more actions together.

T&S: What kinds of things do Women Rising do? Are there different types of actions?

MLS: During the past three years women have carried out dozens of direct actions under the WRR banner. For example, in Champaign, Illinois, we disrupted the lavish open house of a local newspaper which refused to publish advertising for lesbian/gay events. Sister Resisters in New York City barred the doors of the New York and American Stock Exchanges on Lesbian/Women's Equality Day in August of 1985 to protest the corporate abuse of women and women's image. The National Rampage Against Penthouse used the WRR name and logo in its campaign of civil disobedience (destroying, vomiting on, ripping up *Penthouse* and *Hustler* magazines) in pornography outlets in more than 50 cities resulting in over 100 arrests.

Sisters of justice in Columbus, Ohio, use the WRR logo in all of their actions aimed at ending violence against women. And the WRR logo was displayed by the courageous activists who wrecked a pornography store in Columbus, Ohio, in May of 1986. In South Hadley and Amherst, Massachusetts, an affinity group called Women of Faith are also Women Rising in Resistance when they block the doors and gates of nuclear weapons industries and nuclear submarine launching sites. February 5, 1987, the day scheduled for the first US nuclear test of the year, they blocked traffic in Springfield, Massachusetts for a mock Nuclear Test. On Halloween of 1984, 85 and 86, WRR in several US cities held witch trials to try men and corporations guilty of crimes against women, children and the poor. Sit-ins and door blockings by resisters plagued Reagan-Bush campaign headquarters during the 1984 US presidential elections. Spray painting at pornographic book stores, the headquarters of corporations involved in the nuclear weapons industry and military bases is done regularly by WRR women.

Most recently, the St Louis resisters have launched one of the most dramatic and

Some Sparks from the Flame of Women's Resistance

Rosa Parks refuses to give up her bus seat to a white man, an act of defiance that inspires Montgomery Bus Boycott and sets civil rights movement in motion. Dec. 1, 1955.

343 women sign manifesto acknowledging their illegal abortions and demanding legalization of contraceptives and abortions in France. April 1971.

Native American women lead the "Longest Walk" from California to D.C. to protest forced sterilizations. June 1980.

Preying Mantis Women's Brigade destroys over '00 magazines in its Rampage against *Penthouse* and *Hustler* in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin to protest violent and racist pornography. resulting in over 50 arrests. Oct. 1984-Jan. 1985.

Tens of thousands of women defy passlaws in South Africa. 1913-present.

Merle Woo, Asian-American, trade-unionist, lesbian activist, wins suit against UC Berkeley for firing her. Spring 1984.

Iloises, women from the island of Diego Garcia who were dumped in the slums of Port Louis in Mauritius when the British leased their island to the U.S. for a military base in 1965. go on a 21-day hunger strike to protest their conditions and to fight for demilitarization of their island. March 1981.

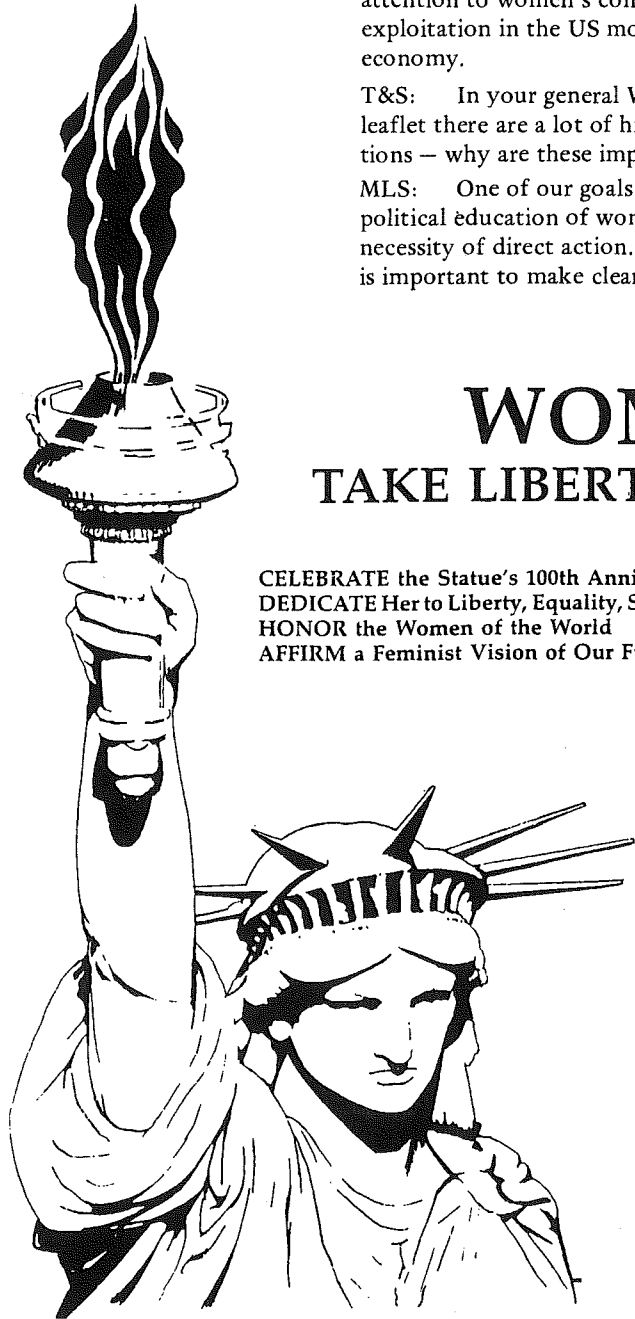
sustained series of actions carried out by an affinity group in the network. On three successive Sunday nights, 50-120 chanting protestors encircled the home of a trial court judge who had recently sentenced to only two years probation a man found guilty of repeatedly raping an eight-year old girl. In the process of being organised is a nationwide Women's Strike for Survival to call attention to women's continued economic exploitation in the US monopoly capitalist economy.

T&S: In your general Women Rising leaflet there are a lot of historical connections - why are these important?

MLS: One of our goals in WRR is the political education of women about the necessity of direct action. Consequently, it is important to make clear that these tactics

WOMEN! TAKE LIBERTY IN '86

CELEBRATE the Statue's 100th Anniversary
DEDICATE Her to Liberty, Equality, Sisterhood, and Peace
HONOR the Women of the World
AFFIRM a Feminist Vision of Our Future



have been a vital part of both the past and present movements for radical social change. Especially in the ultra-conservative 80s, even supporters of feminist lesbian causes are often unaware that the rights and choices we now enjoy were won by a combination of tactics, including direct action. As a recruiter of activists, I have found that historical examples of women's resistance are powerful motivators. Knowing that our foresters in the feminist/lesbian/peace/civil rights/labour movements have had to stand up and take risks again and again inspires women to act in the present. Almost every resister I know or have read about mentions the lessons of herstory, the example of courageous foremothers, as crucial determinants of her decision to act.

From a practical point of view, historical examples give us ideas for current actions. In 1982 we borrowed the idea of chaining ourselves to the doors of the Illinois Senate from UK suffragists who chained themselves to railings in the House of Commons visitor's gallery. Women Take Liberty was inspired, in part, by a New York Suffrage Association protest at the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty in 1886. And a protest we are planning for the Bicentennial of the US Constitution is modelled on a feminist demonstration at the US Centennial in 1876. The tactic of sit-ins was borrowed from the US labour and civil rights movements. One of our favourite tactics is to re-enact earlier examples of women resisting. In St Louis in 1984 we acted out the Aba Market Riots (the uprising of Igbo women in Nigeria in 1929 against local government authorities) in front of Reagan headquarters. Like the Igbo women, we demanded the return of governmental authority to women. The US mass media seem to be especially interested in actions which make historical connections and parallels.

T&S: Are there issues about security that have to be dealt with - how do you do this?

MLS: Every affinity group has its own unique set of circumstances and concerns. Since our Champaign group is made up of trusted sisters and long-time friends we have almost no concern about it. Perhaps because US feminists are so reticent to do confrontational protests of any kind, much less

high risk ones, security is not a crucial issue for us at the moment. It is more important for us to give realistic information about how little real risk is usually involved in standing up and defying authority - to convince women of how unlikely it is they will be hurt or arrested or sentenced to jail. We have found in the US that many women fear that doing anything will lead to arrest and jailing. Here, 99% of the time, demonstrators get repeated warnings to leave or stop before they are removed or arrested. Even if they are removed or arrested they are often not charged. The situation will vary in every country and community. Because of limitations of time and money and because many of us can't or do not want to go to jail, we often defy law enforcement officers until the point of warnings and then stop or leave. I am convinced that many times it is just as effective to do an action until the point of arrest and then to simply turn and leave the scene as it is to be arrested. When times change and more women are doing dramatic acts and the state reacts more punitively to them, security will be a more important concern than it is now. At the moment, law enforcement agencies are not in the state of mind that they are during periods of social unrest. They don't perceive us as a threat and are not angry. If anything, we are a joke. There are exceptions to this where women have carried on sustained protest such as of the Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice at Seneca Falls, NY. There, law enforcement officials are worn down and impatient.

T&S: What issues do you/have you prioritised and why?

MLS: Each WRR affinity group has its own priorities. In Champaign, we are the only lesbian/feminist direct action group and so have maintained a broad focus, including labour and economic issues, lesbian rights, violence against women, abortion rights, anti-pornography, anti-racism and others.

You ask why we have prioritised them. Lesbian issues because 90% of us are lesbians; violence against women because 100% of us are survivors of violence; pornography because 100% of us are survivors of violence and pornography promotes violence against women. Economic issues because women

and their children are 80-100% of the poor. Labour issues because we all labour at jobs which exploit and underpay us as women.

T&S: Do Women Rising have a theory about direct action, its role in feminism, how it works, what it does for those taking part?

MLS: Our theory about direct action has been described by one of our members, Berenice Carroll:

Direct action must be understood as a process, requiring time to gather impact. It is a process of both action and reaction, a process of exposing and dramatising repressed levels of conflict, with the ultimate objective of changing the balance of forces. The process does not end with the dramatic actions themselves, nor even with the immediate reactions of authorities, press, and public. It continues with debate and dialogue on these actions, with analysis and evaluation, with similar action repeated elsewhere, elsewhere. If the process fails to gain momentum, it will be limited in impact but may resurface, even decades later with other *persona*. Direct action seizes the imagination and consciousness of participants and observers.¹

Crystal Eastman wrote of this process as it operated in the suffrage movement. She focused on the effects of direct action on the movement itself, effects of rallying followers and challenging critics within the movement. The process of direct action also has effects upon a wider public and upon those in positions of authority. To both these groups it makes highly visible and urgent a conflict or demand that has been obscured by silence, indifference, timidity, conformity, apathy, or despair, and impresses on them the depth of commitment to the cause on the part of its adherents. At the same time, it imposes certain costs upon those authorities whose actions or policies are directly confronted by the demonstrators. It exposes them to public scrutiny, and requires them to confront, on a face-to-face basis, those who are seeking to hold them accountable by a public, bodily witness. In addition, it imposes upon them tangible costs in money, time, energy, personnel, resources, reputation and psychological stress. These costs may have the initial effect of engendering anger and hostile responses, but in the long run, such costs must be weighed in the balance by lawmakers when they determine their priorities.

Some Sparks from the Flame of Women's Resistance

Twenty NOW women disrupt U.S. Senate committee to press for ERA which leads to ERA hearings within 3 months. Feb. 17, 1970.

New Bedford feminists organize candlelight vigil to protest gang rape in a local bar. March 13, 1983.

Over 100 women denouncing Citibank's South African investments, G.E.'s weapons production, Upjohn's sale of Dep-Provera to Third World women, and other corporate acts, block entrances to the N.Y. Stock Exchange as part of a "Not in Our Name" campaign to protest corporate crimes against women all over the world. Nov. 19, 1984.

Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires each Thursday since 1976 put on white kerchiefs embroidered with names of their missing children and march to Government House protesting "disappearance" of 6,000-15,000 persons.

Differently abled women demonstrate for bus accessibility, Berkeley, Ca.

Reproductive rights activists rally nationwide to commemorate death of Rosie Jimenez, first woman known to have died from an illegal abortion since Medicaid funding was cut off. Oct. 3, 1983.

Delores Huerta leads United Farm Workers' boycotts, 1966-present.

Women's Resistance Days

January 22	Abortion Rights Day
February 15	Susan B. Anthony's Birthday
March 8	International Women's Day
April 1	April Fool's Day
May 1	May Day
May 24	International Women's Disarmament Day
June 30	ERA Unratification Day
August 26	Women's Equality Day
September	Take Back the Night Month
October 31	Hallowmas
November 11	Anti-imperialism Day
December 1	Rosa Parks Day

Send suggestions or requests for information on radical actions or flyers or t-shirts with logo to:

Grassroots Group of Second Class Citizens
Box 2096, Station A
Champaign, IL 61820
217-352-6110

Let me add that direct action and civil disobedience get results. Using these tactics, Ghandi, the suffragists, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks won. The ERA movement, which failed to adopt direct action strategies, lost.

T&S: Do you think the fact that Women Rising has originated in the US makes the vision of a global network of women using the same name and logo problematic — for example the days you've selected for actions reflect US calendar/culture? Aren't there potential dangers in becoming too connected — it may make it difficult for women wanting to leave their countries (immigration hassles and the like)?

MLS: Spreading the name and logo of WRR could be seen as a womanifestation of US imperialism or, at least, maternalism. Since WRR is a completely voluntary association and network founded on anarcho-feminist principles, it is meant to be used and adapted to fit the purposes of those activists who feel they can benefit from it. It is for those who like the idea or the name or the logo or the sense of connection with direct actors in other societies and cultures. Many radical activists are understandably critical and suspicious of any idea which originates in the US and may not want to be connected with us.

Perhaps what is of most value in WRR for women outside the US is the idea of linking together with a common name and logo activists within their own country. Women who like the idea of belonging to an international sisterhood of activists may want to use the WRR name or logo. Others will want to choose a name and image of their own creating or which has special power and meaning in their country/culture. It depends entirely on the ideas and feelings of the network organisers. For some the idea of having international connections is more appealing than for others.

T&S: Some views of direct action suggest it works on the principle of punishment — provoking the state to show its true colours — others view it more as a form of theatre — how to either of these views fit with Women Rising?

MLS: I see it as theatre dramatising issues and raising awareness about them; as punish-

ing oppressors by exacting costs of energy, time, anxiety, reputation; as exposing oppressors to public scrutiny; as free publicity for the causes involved; as a means of energising and emboldening supporters; as an organising tool; as a means to draw out opponents to show their true colours.

T&S: What are the obstacles in trying to organise women to engage in direct action and to participate in something like the WRR network?

MLS: The most obvious obstacle is the absence of an existing and active direct action movement for women to join or attach to. It is easier to join than to organise such a movement from scratch. When nothing is happening one is not inspired to act but rather depressed into inaction. We have no role models to imitate. Nor do we hear the topic of direct action debated, defended, discussed, denounced or analysed publically as it was during the suffrage, labour, civil rights or anti-war movements of the past. One could say that the spirit of the times is working against us. Perhaps in architecture or graphic design "less is more"; in direct action politics, less is less and more is more.

The absence of a militant wing in modern US feminism means that few women have had experience doing direct action. This inexperience leads women to make unrealistic assessments of the risks involved. Some women simply overestimate the costs of participation, the likelihood of real harm or danger.

Another problem is that women are overworked and over-committed. Commitments to waged work, children, domestic chores and ageing parents leave women little time for political activity, especially activity involving risk of detention or arrest which would interfere with these commitments.

Finally, we have been socialised to fear physical danger, discouraged from taking risks and engaging in deeds of daring-do. Our sense of adventure has been squelched and squeezed into oblivion. Also, some women see resistance as negative, as nay saying and want to do only what is *positive*. Women are supposed to smile and say yes. They do not understand that saying no to oppression, standing up to abuse, is a positive act. □

Sex and Danger : Feminism and AIDS

Many of the issues in the AIDS debate are those feminists have been tackling for two centuries. Sara Scott challenges feminist silence in the biggest public debate on sexuality, sexual practice and sexual morality since the 1960s.

AIDS is a feminist issue. It is no longer, if it ever was, simply the name of a medically recognised syndrome; it is a social disease. AIDS brings with it an enormous range of politically loaded questions; for the Right it has become a metaphor of corruption, retribution and moral decay. For the media, the government and the medical profession, the questions it raises are divided into the moral and the political, with the former frequently disguised as the latter. Organising media-linked AIDS advice lines during the last few months has provided me with plenty of food for feminist thought, but little space for discussing the sexual politics of AIDS. At the very least, such a politics would deny the division between practical and moral questions and could argue for changes in sexual practice which would be in the interests of women.

It strikes me as bizarre that through all the sound and fury of the AIDS debate, feminists have remained so quiet. AIDS has created the biggest public debate on sexuality, sexual practice and sexual morality since the media recovered from the shock of the 'sixties; yet it is one to which femi-

nists have yet to make a particular contribution. Our silence seems bizarre because the issues raised by AIDS are very much on our political patch. I believe we ought to be thinking fast about the implications of AIDS as a health issue for women and the implications for feminism of all the things other people are saying. I'll return later to why I think feminists have failed to get involved in the AIDS debate to date and I'll examine what the few who have written on the subject have had to say. But first I want to look at the meanings for women of non-feminist public thought on the AIDS crisis.

Condom-bound solutions

The idea that there might be other reasons for criticising male heterosexual practice, apart from catching or spreading disease has not entered public debates. Instead, the liberal establishments are seeing the past (their own male youth perhaps) through rose-tinted spectacles, building a myth of a pre-AIDS golden age of sexual liberation. At the same time as bemoaning the loss of wilder days, they appear to be uncritically accepting a monogamous, condom-bound

Then the Lord God caused a Great Shower of Used Condoms to fall on every pavement in the Land...



Notes

1. Berenice Carroll, "Direct action and constitutional rights: the case of the ERA" in *Rights of Passage: The Past and Future of the ERA*, ed. Joan Heff-Wilson 1986.

... "The cost to the nation of recruiting more 18-year olds into nursing is too great; there would be no female airline pilots, no air stewardesses and, most importantly in this era of AIDS, no wives to accompany their husbands on business trips abroad."



Dr. Brendan Devlin
Nursing Times
6.5.87

solution to the present crisis. Meanwhile, the Right are regarding the whole affair if not as the wrath of god, then certainly as a gift of the gods in providing an argument 'from nature' in support of their views on 'promiscuity', the sanctity of the family and the evils of homosexuality. The Left has had very little to say about AIDS except to criticise the government campaign. It certainly cannot be assumed that they have listened to feminist insistence that sexuality is socially constructed any harder than other men.

The ways of curtailing the AIDS crisis pushed by the government, media and medical profession are by no means the ones that feminists would promote, but they still raise interesting contradictions. For example, a government opposed to sex education in schools is now obliged to promote the most explicit sexual information for young people. It is being advocated that women carry condoms — previously the prerogative of prostitutes and men alone. This suggestion is itself full of ambiguities. In accepting uncritically that women are more responsible than men, it fails to challenge male behaviour and puts the burden of changing their acts and attitudes on to individual women within personal relationships. It takes as 'natural' men's resistance to self control, and falls far short of promoting what an earlier generation of feminists referred to as 'male continence'. At the same time, public permission for women to carry condoms urges us to declare an interest in and preparedness for heterosexual penetrative sex, which women have always been supposed to deny. Most women on the pill, for example, have chosen this form of contraception in part for its invisibility. Young women's only approved role in relation to sex has been to be 'overwhelmed' — an attitude which fits uncomfortably with having a packet of Featherlight in their handbags.

There is a major contradiction for those who use AIDS to advocate a return to 'old fashioned' values, which is that the act which is most acceptable to them is, in AIDS terms, the most dangerous. Women's health campaigners have recognised this for generations — hence the campaigns for male continence in relation to venereal disease in the

early part of the century.¹ Feminists have understood that penetrative sex has never been free of fear for women: the fear of pregnancy, in or out of marriage; fear of contraceptive failure or side-effects, many of which are life threatening; as well as fear of disease. Our solution has been to promote changes in men's sexual practices. We should advocate non-penetrative sex, with all its positive implications for women's sexual pleasure, as the best way of combating the spread of AIDS. It's too contradictory for men in general and the Right in particular to advocate 'non-normal' sex because of a health crisis — which is why they're trying to get away with condoms as the solution. We shouldn't be letting them.

The male gay line

The thing I find most frustrating is that because AIDS is such a new problem it is possible to get radical ideas through to places they would never normally reach, but there is no-one pushing feminist ideas through these channels. Gay men active around AIDS have had unprecedented success in encouraging the media and others to talk about high risk practices in relation to AIDS, rather than high risk groups. This has been argued on the basis that not all men who engage in homosexual sex identify as homosexual and they will not therefore 'hear' advice aimed at high risk groups. When some people are identified as 'high risk', it is possible for others to disassociate themselves from the problem as they do from the group. At the same time, this argument is an attempt to use a philosophical idea about the historical construction of sexuality, (Michel Foucault, Jeffrey Weeks) in a political present tense. Jeffrey Weeks has argued that the concept of a homosexual person is an extremely recent one and that until fairly late in the 19th century, homosexuality was identified solely in terms of acts not identities. The law encoded only a series of non-procreative sexual acts, in which buggery appeared alongside bestiality.²

What are the implications if gay men are successful in using this argument as a health education tack, an argument which also aims to reduce the homophobia which AIDS has been used to stir up?

For example, is this kind of intervention part of a continued retreat from identity amongst gay men, with the demise of a gender conscious gay liberation movement? In the context of a 'queer bashing' media, the interventions of gay men are a step forward, but we need to be talking about the wider sexual politics.

I come across some wonderfully contradictory things in the course of my work. I hear gay men counselling straight men about non-penetrative sex. I hear women telling women they have the right not just to insist that men wear condoms, but to sex they like. And I come across terrible things like the woman co-ordinator of a local AIDS line giving her support to the re-licensing of a sex shop on the grounds that fantasy equals 'safe sex'. I want to be part of a feminist discussion of these contradictions.

Women's monogamy

Some parts of the media AIDS campaign have been targetted at women. An AIDS week programme from Thames Television had Viv Taylor-Gee informing women of a commissioned survey which showed that women are more monogamous than men.

The solution proposed for men's non-monogamy and their unwillingness to use condoms was for women to put pressure on them. No attention was paid to the respective difference between men's and

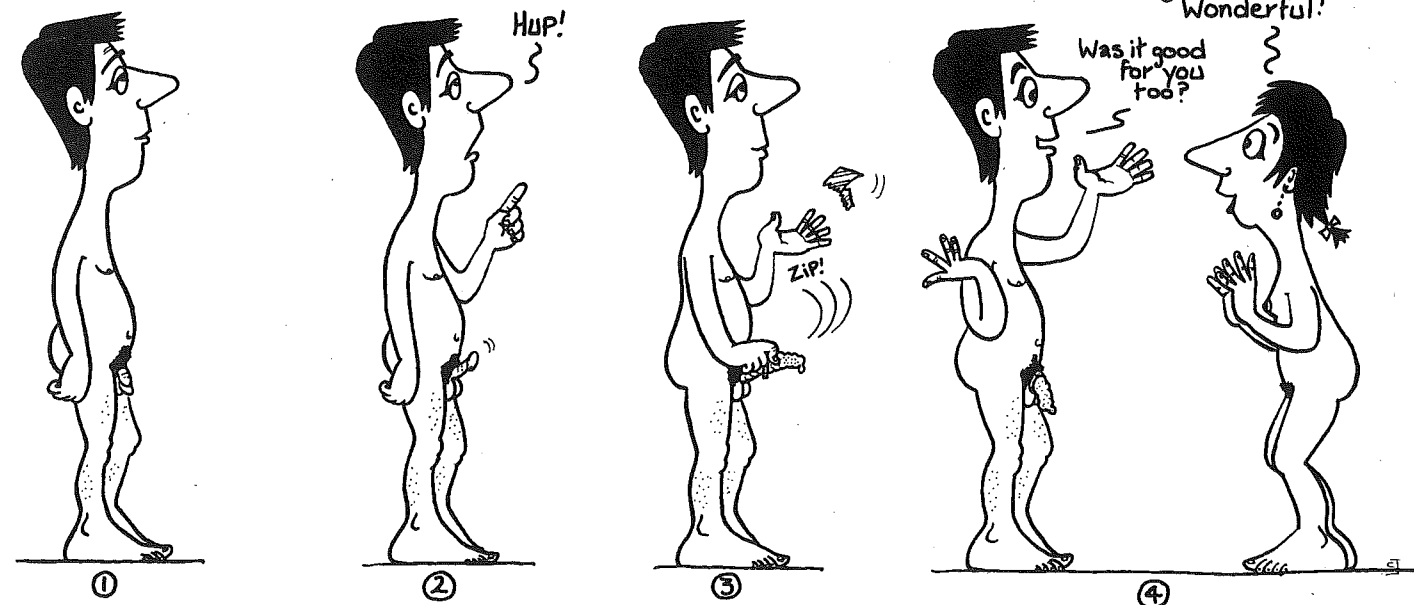
women's commitment to monogamy, or to how women are meant to persuade their long-term and supposedly monogamous partners to use condoms as a precaution against AIDS. How many women could admit, even to themselves that their husbands might visit prostitutes or have affairs? The media made it quite plain during AIDS week on TV that they were not prepared to advocate monogamy for men outright. Instead they landed responsibility on women, saying that women are 'good girls' naturally and can look after the other half of the population.

Just as the 'naturalness' of women's monogamy is assumed, so is the necessity of heterosexual intercourse. I found the nearest to a feminist media statement in the following from a Channel 4 update to its *Well Being* booklet on sexually transmitted diseases:

Many people have found that sexual pleasure does not have to depend on penetration; mutual masturbation, for instance, is completely without risk and can give great satisfaction to couples who are worried about the risks of infecting each other.

No comment.

Most of the women's magazines have now carried articles on AIDS and their approach is best summed up by the *Good Housekeeping* headline: "AIDS: is all the hysteria a blessing in disguise?". Emanating from article to article is a sense of relief, a current of 'we told you so' satisfaction



presented as the view of middle-aged, middle-class married women. Celebrating the death of the permissive society, they suggest smugly:

If you tend to 'sleep around', be sensible and aim to settle down with one partner over the next few years.

It's sad that so many women felt conned, exploited or threatened by sexual 'liberation' but never developed a feminist critique of it. The line taken by these magazines is not anti-women, but it takes for granted that women prefer monogamy — by nature rather than because of the social options available to them, and it takes a cheerfully moral view of the joys of less sex.

On the implications of AIDS for relationships between the sexes, Philip Hodson in *She* magazine wrote:

Men who don't look bisexual (even though they may be) will stand in greatest demand. Women will dress to attract the masculine male, paradoxically appearing more seductive, alluring and sexy . . . while others will become practically celibate, with all the sex appeal of boiler suits and bags . . .

In this scenario a return to 'old fashioned' moral standards and earlier marriage is to be accompanied by a return to old fashioned sex roles and stereotypes.

Why our silence?

The more I hear about AIDS and the new morality, the more puzzled I become about feminist silence on the subject.

I don't think that as feminists we are immune to the attitudes of the population at large. A recent Gallup poll showed that 80% of people interviewed see themselves at no risk from AIDS, and that 48% agreed that "most people with AIDS have only themselves to blame". The idea of AIDS as a gay men's problem has been a slow one to die. This, coupled with the immunity many of us have felt so far as lesbians plus our political criticism of many gay male lifestyles means we have been slow to regard AIDS as having much personal meaning for us. Certainly Vada Hart's article in *Gossip*³ was an extreme example of burying one's head in the sand. Her argument that lesbians and gay men have nothing in common, only the media insists on lumping us together is fair enough. But the directive that we therefore reject anything to do with AIDS seems

-HONESTLY, I WOULDN'T SHARE A DOUGHNUT THESE DAYS WITHOUT MY LATEX GUM SHIELD.



Cath Jackson

positively callous in the face of the biggest surge in 'queer bashing' that the streets or the press have ever seen. It is also incredibly shortsighted.

As lesbians we are associated with male homosexuality, like it or not. We may not regard homosexuality as a unitary concept — believing that in a society where men have power over women, loving your own sex has completely different meanings depending on which sex you are — but attacks on gay men do not leave us untouched. Attitudes towards homosexuality and the position of women are often closely linked. What distresses me most about the article is that it regards lesbians as unconcerned and unaffected by something of major importance in the lives of non-lesbian/celibate women. I find this hermetically sealed concept of the lesbian community deeply shocking.

Another explanation for feminist silence is that WLM debates about heterosexual practice have been few and far between in recent years. Few public feminist agendas include responsibility for contraception, non-penetrative sex, non-monogamy or even marriage. In *Marxism Today*, Melissa Benn observes that heterosexual socialist feminists do not talk about sexuality any more:

If the debate about sexuality has taken place anywhere in the 1980s it has taken place within lesbian feminism. It is almost as if the subject of sexuality has returned to a pre-1970 situation for women on the Left: the unspeakable clothed as the irrelevant, the disruptive dismissed as the merely embarrassing.⁴

For these reasons we were ill-equipped to raise feminist issues in the context of AIDS. If we don't rebuild our critique of heterosexuality and the nitty-gritty of heterosexual practice our position will be defined for us *within* the parameters of the present debate. This is what I feel Lynne Segal in last month's *New Socialist* is already doing. She claims that feminists have failed to distance themselves from the mainstream anti-sex response to AIDS and, even suggests that the anti-sex scare tactics of the popular press, equating casual sex and death, are following the lead set by some feminist positions on sex:

they convey a message women have been hearing for some years from a small, but

vocal, feminist minority. Sex with men is always and inevitably dangerous. 'A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bisexual' they might say today.⁵

If only it were so easy to persuade the popular press to promote feminist messages. Actually, the sex and danger line is a lot older than us and has done very nicely without our help.

Lynne Segal is trying to associate feminist critiques of heterosexuality with right-wing morality, obviously believing that we have a secret attachment to the nuclear family, will do anything to reduce heterosexual sex in the world or we are simply too stupid to see where our criticisms lead. Feminists, she feels, are liable "to join the chorus condemning the 'permissive' sixties and heralding a new confining morality". In her fear that political lesbians are going to forge alliances with John Selwyn Gummer, Segal omits to recognise that if the formation of the WLM owes anything to the sexual liberation movement, it is as much to feminist criticisms of its philosophies as to the opening up of sexual mores it created. This acceptance that the 'sixties did represent the freeing of sexuality from 'policing and punishment', rather than the construction of new codes for social control, suggests a dangerous forgetfulness of the lessons of the early 1970s in the face of the quite different problems of the mid 1980s.

We have to find a fuller way of discussing sexual liberation and sexual morality. In Melissa Benn's recent article on feminism in the 'eighties, she dances on the grave of political lesbianism (a little disconcertingly for those of us yet unburied) and the possibility of a feminist sexual 'morality':

There has been a growth in the refusal of feminism to accept any idea of a 'correct' or 'incorrect' kind of sexual practice.⁷

She claims the lesbian S/M debate was about, "a rejection by some lesbian feminists of a prescriptive public morality about sex". I do not believe that our views on sex have become so liberal, nor do I believe we are about to fall into the lap of the Right, but I fear we will be allocated to one side or another unless we get our act together.

Getting our act together

Some of Lynne Segal's points are important — for example, that the media campaign has

consistently reduced sex to the 'activity of the penis' and that the government campaign has fostered anxiety and guilt about sex in men and women (witness thousands of help-line calls from people frantic about oral sex — a comparatively low risk practice, but one that is not seen as 'normal'). She argues that given the power imbalance between the sexes, AIDS can only be countered by 'honesty', 'openness' and more 'imaginative' (women-centred?) sexual habits, which necessitates more equal relationships between men and women, ie women's liberation. What concerns me is her lack of anger at men's sexual exploitation of women in 'normal' heterosexual sex; her association of feminists who are critical on this score with the anti-sex lobby and her nostalgia for a 'joint sexual politics with men', which she sees as having been part of the WLM of the early 1970s.

In contrast to Lynne Segal's, Ros Coward's contribution is a well-argued case for feminist engagement in discussions about AIDS.⁶ She states that AIDS is going to create a 'sexual revolution' of one sort or another, so we may as well use the opportunity to push our vision of what that revolution should look like. It's an optimistic article which suggests that women may have something to gain from the AIDS tragedy:

men and women have different interests at stake in any possible sexual revolution and the crisis produced by AIDS may well have different implications for men and women . . . women have been bearing the brunt of making sex safe for men in the past . . . But now, suddenly, it's a matter of life and death to men that they abandon their historical privilege of spontaneous sex and assume personal responsibility for their actions . . . sexuality could be redefined as something other than male discharge into any kind of receptacle. In this new context where penetration might literally spell death, there is a chance for a massive relearning about sexuality.

It's a long shot, and condoms are far more likely to catch on, but given the personal terrors and dilemmas many heterosexual women are facing at the moment, we really must be saying something. The explicit discussions of sexual practice which AIDS has caused have got to be regarded positively, and the necessity for a new kind of sex education for young people is pressing. Youth workers and feminist teachers around



Notes

1. Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her Enemies*, Pandora Press, 1986.
2. Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, Quartet Books, 1977.
3. Vada Hart, "Lesbians and AIDS" *Gossip* 2, pp.90-96.
4. Melissa Benn, "Sisters and Shoguns", *Marxism Today*, April 1987.
5. Lynne Segal, "AIDS is a feminist issue", *New Socialist*, April 1987.
6. Ros Coward, "Sex after AIDS", *The New Internationalist*, March 1987.

Thank you for ideas to: Al Dickens, Sue Scott, Harriet Wistrich and the National Advisory Service of AIDS.

"Girl About Boy" regretfully informs its readers that today's New Man died yesterday in hospital from AIDS...



the country are using the AIDS crisis as a way into discussing responsibility and the rights of women to redefine their own sexuality. As a movement we should be making as much public noise as possible in support of them.

Cruel ironies, exploitable contradictions

Friends have bemoaned the fact that no-one has listened to feminists when we've tackled the very issues which AIDS is getting everyone in a spin about. As Ros Coward puts it: There are some especially cruel ironies for feminism in the current situation. We have to watch general pressure mounting to transform sexual innuendo in advertising yet feminist campaigns against sexism in advertising have largely failed. Especially cruel is the conclusion of the British Government AIDS leaflet: 'Ultimately defence against the disease depends on all of us taking responsibility for our own actions'. The feminist call for men to do just that has been something of a voice in the wilderness in the past.

Feminists could be exploiting the numerous contradictions in the Right and Left positions. Like how the Right's 'sex is dangerous' position rests incongruously with their advocacy of 'normal' heterosexual practice. Or the Left's espousal of an outdated liberation politics which substituted one form of women's sexual oppression for another. Perhaps the most satisfying exploitable contradiction is that of a government who, within the space of weeks, moved from attempting to ban sex education in schools, to having to promote frank and detailed information about sexual practice for the entire population!

Ironically, AIDS has promoted the open discussion of sexual practice on an unprecedented scale. We should seize the opportunity to get into the debate, proposing alternatives to a penetrative heterosexual morality and place a radical, feminist analysis of sexuality firmly on the agenda. □

not victims ~ not superwomen

In the debate on black under-achievement in British schools, several research projects have suggested that Black girls do better than Black boys. Ruth Chigwada takes a critical look at these studies and at white feminists' research on Black girls and education.

My interest in girls' education and option choice stems from my undergraduate studies and a developing interest in feminism. Why do girls choose 'female' subjects which lead to jobs with low status and low pay? I used to believe that it was because boys had more brains and could do the more 'difficult' subjects. When I read feminist literature I became more aware of the social factors involved.

There is now an extensive literature on the education of girls. However valuable it may be, it continues to reflect a major weakness, as do the studies of boys: the absence of an analysis of race and racism. For my MSc dissertation I chose to look at three linked aspects of Black (of African origin) girls' experience of education: option choice, racism within-schools, and the findings in a number of studies that Black girls do better than Black boys in the education system. This article focuses mainly on this last issue.

It is seldom stressed that studies done in the 1960s found that girls of West Indian origin tended to perform better than boys in educational ability tests and achieve

better results. This higher achievement extends to higher education where the numbers of Black women studying for degrees are higher than those of Black men, although the total number of Black students is still extremely small. This 'relative success' of Black girls has begun to promote interest and discussion and two explanations have been put forward: that Black girls perceive and use education differently, and that schools perceive and educate Black girls differently.

The Driver Reports

The studies by the anthropologist Driver of Black children in West Midlands schools, published in the late 1970s, have attracted considerable attention. In January 1980 he published an article in *New Society* with a title guaranteed to interest anyone concerned with the education of Black children, *How West Indians do better at school (especially the girls)*. Amongst his findings he maintains that 74% of Black girls, compared to 13% of Black boys, achieved CSE passes. He attributes this to Black girls' "greater persistence" and commitment to education. Unfortunately his data is not



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Writing our own history: the price we pay for local authority funding

issue 9

Racism, rape and riots
Disability and lesbian sexuality
Dale Spender reviews *Women and Madness*
The women in America's "backyard"
Writing our own history: Jam Today and women's music

issue 10

Ethnic minority lesbians in Britain
Growing old disgracefully: women and aging
The rise and fall of the schoolgirl story
Tribute to Bessie Head
Writing our own history: London Rape Crisis

the radical feminist magazine



systematic across the schools he studied and closer examination reveals the well-documented trend for Black pupils to do less well than their Asian and white peers. His title is, therefore, extremely misleading as it suggests that all Black students do better. They do not; but within the Black group girls do better than boys.

How are we to assess Driver's explanation of Black girls' 'superior' achievement? An examination of his views on the Black family is enlightening. He uses dubious studies of West Indian families to assert that they are 'matriarchal'. Girls' results therefore:

appeared to be due in part to the strongly held viewpoint of West Indian mothers, in particular, that their daughters must be seen as the social and economic mainstay of their family's future. (2)

It should be pointed out that not all Black families are matriarchal; historically they have, in fact, been patriarchal. I support the view that slavery and the forced breeding of slaves resulted in a particular matriarchal family structure in the West Indies and America, which has been a legacy ever for some families.

Feminist Alternatives?

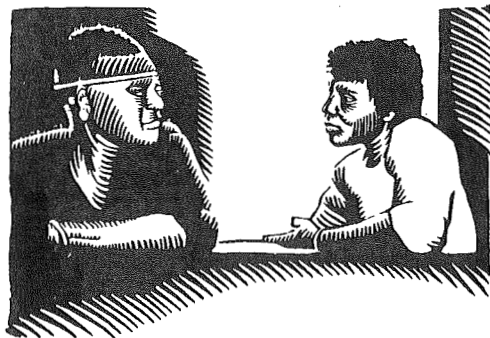
Sue Sharpe studied a cross-section of 249 working class girls in the London borough of Ealing, of whom 51 were of West Indian parentage and 49 of Asian. The Black girls commented on the "boredom" and "irrelevance" of school but, unlike their white peers, they firmly believed that education and qualifications were important. She offers three explanations for this difference: parental support, positive attitudes to being female and an apprehension about leaving school. Sharpe misreads this last factor as a question of school or work, rather than apprehension which in the girls' eyes directly linked to racism. She does not explore racism either in the girls' accounts or in terms of the limitations it places on their lives.

... experiences of prejudice can only be meaningfully described and understood by those concerned, and I purposely did not make it a focus of my inquiry. (3)

Are we to infer from this that she does not see herself as one of those concerned? The Black girls focused on experiences of racism, so why does Sharpe exclude it from

her analysis? She too presents a stereotypical view of the Black family household system, but within a Caribbean rather than a British context. Perhaps unwittingly, what emerges are commonsense notions of racism that pathologise the Black family. She fails to analyse the situation of West Indian women and their family life in Britain; in particular she chooses to disregard the most important force that circumscribes and influences Black people's lives, the cancer that is racism.

In describing Black girls' responses to sexism and racism as an attempt to work within the system, Sue Sharpe misunderstands the girls' own analysis of their situation. They were struggling against oppression within the family household, in education and in the labour market. They demanded equality with boys and envisaged a changing role for their future. Rather than trying to work within the system that oppresses women, the Ealing girls' experiences show how they were trying to challenge it. Their apparent accommodation within the school was balanced with resistance; contestation to the oppression of their class, race and gender.



Mary Fuller's study of eight Black girls in the academic band of a Brent school was part of a larger study (4). The Brent girls had a positive attitude to their race and gender. But, like the Ealing girls, they envied boys' greater freedom and resented inequality in the division of household tasks. All were committed to education as a possible route to a 'good' job and a high wage. They obtained a mean of 7.6 'O' level/CSE passes compared to 5.6 for Black boys. Only Asian boys achieved better results. All stayed on to the sixth form and were inten-

ding to go on to further education. Academic success was a channel for expressing self-worth.

The Brent girls did not conform to the (white) stereotype of 'high achievers'. They were often in conflict with teachers over rules they considered "trivial", arrived late for lessons, read magazines in class, openly contested the teachers' authority. Such behaviour was calculated to irritate teachers and present an image of not caring; yet they all completed set work on time. Fuller suggests that these Black girls did not want to be identified with the 'good pupils' whom they regarded with considerable disdain. This was also reflected in their friendships which spanned the ability range, most of whom were Black and female.

There were some suggestions by the girls that the Black boys did not want them to take school seriously, as they were pessimistic about the future and saw no point in education. The Black girls were as aware of the discrimination and limitations they faced within education and employment. They, however, chose to take up the challenge and actively engage in efforts to 'outwit' the system. Education, employment and economic security would provide the girls with a lever to wage war on a social system that relegates the existence of Black people, and Black women in particular, to positions of marginality.

Fuller's study points to important differences in the ways in which Black girls and boys contest aspects of schooling that are hierarchical and racist.

Black Girls, Option Choice and Persistence

I interviewed ten Black British girls aged between 16 and 19, all studying for 'A' levels at two colleges of higher education. Eight of them were of West Indian parentage, one Nigerian and one Asian/Kenyan. Two of the fathers had white collar jobs; two of the mothers were part-time secretaries. The other eight mothers worked full-time in low paid and insecure jobs and the fathers did skilled or unskilled manual work.

Like the Ealing and Brent girls they expressed irritation at parental restrictions. Whilst they appreciated that their parents'

concern was based on a fear of danger on the street, this was not accepted as a valid reason for controlling their social life. Whilst most had reasonably good relationships with both parents (there was no father in two cases) all resented the unequal burden of housework that fell on their mothers and themselves. They particularly resented the fact that their brothers were not expected to contribute to domestic tasks, whereas these absorbed considerable amounts of the girls' time outside college hours.

Whilst the ideals of wifehood and motherhood are upheld as ideals to which girls/women should aspire, Black girls have a different perception. Most Black women have to work, either to supplement the family wage or as breadwinners due to the high unemployment amongst Black men. Black girls therefore grow up in an environment where they can be more independent and positive about their future. This partly accounts for the (self-motivated) success of Black girls.

Whilst these young women seemed happy with the subjects they had chosen to study (sociology, psychology and economics) most felt they had received little guidance; they felt their parents had been more influential in their choice than teachers. Most felt that many of the teachers had low expectations of them, and had discouraged their ambitions.

Instead of encouraging you to do something she would put you off. That was why many girls did not go for her advice about subject choice. I wanted to be a doctor and have now realised without biology I can't do it. After my 'A' levels I'm going to study 'O' level chemistry and biology.

I wanted to do nursing and was told to consider auxillary nursing. He said I would not pass any of my exams, but I passed all seven.

This particular teacher seemed like she wanted us to end up in Tesco's, packing beans.

They kept telling me I would be good at typing. I just kept saying no I wasn't doing it.

It was clear from the context in which these remarks were made that the girls felt they had been treated like this because they



Judy Stevens

Judy Stevens

were Black. In each instance they felt their treatment had been racially and sexually discriminatory. Their careers advice not only failed to encourage them but also failed to give them vital information. As Black girls they were channelled into particular options and sets. Only certain girls were encouraged to do science.

They were very fussy about which girls do sciences . . . they didn't push all students hard enough, certain girls were encouraged, not us.

It is interesting to note that, apart from the female headed families, all the girls mentioned their fathers' encouraging them to go on to higher education.

My father encouraged me to go for 'A' levels. He equated education with success. He says being Black you won't get anything without education. He also encouraged my brothers.

My father has always been very ambitious for us. He wants us to work hard at college so that we can get a good job.

This would seem to undermine arguments which suggest that it is the matrilineal focus of the West Indian household which accounts for the educational success of Black girls.

The ten young women were all strong believers in the value of education and saw qualifications as necessary for the 'good' jobs they hoped to obtain. They were also confident in their ability to achieve them. Unlike the girls in Fuller's study, all seemed to have good relationships with their college tutors and it was important to them to be viewed as good students. They were similar to the girls in Fuller's study though in terms of their friendships, which were with other Black girls, not white girls with "high aspirations". In the colleges where I did my interviews, however, 75% of students were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The girls showed little interest in discussing marriage. Independence was something they took for granted. Most expressed a determination to get on with their own lives, and whilst sexual relationships were important, the girls did not see them as determining the course of their lives. Education was a way to achieve this independence; it was a commodity, possession of which allowed them to enter rela-

tionships with men on equal terms. In explaining this the girls consistently referred to their mothers. They viewed themselves as strong, economically independent individuals, willing to engage in emotional relationships with men, but on their terms.

Talking to the girls about feminism and what women's liberation is about, it became clear that most of them had a distorted view of the movement's aims and what organising within it means. Two girls thought that feminist movements were dominated by ugly women who were anti-men. The only contact the girls seem to have had with the ideas of women's liberation had been through the television or what men had said about it. Most saw it as dominated by white middle class women, who failed to recognise the specific and complex nature of Black women's oppression, and so they felt they had nothing in common with it.

The young Black women I talked to were aware of their subordinated position as women and as Blacks — but they did not see themselves as either victims or super-women. They did not feel helpless or powerless to change their position and emerged as strong assertive young Black women who had struggled against the odds in getting to college. They were determined to continue to succeed occupationally and economically. Ironically their careers might well be furthered by the 'token woman syndrome' — employers pursuing equal opportunities might well be delighted to take on a token 'two in one' — Black and female. □



Notes

1. G Driver, "How West Indians do better at school (especially the girls)", *New Society*, 13 January, 1980.
2. G Driver, "Cultural competence, social power and school achievement of West Indian secondary school pupils in the West Midlands", *New Community*, 5:4, 1977.
3. Sue Sharpe, *Just Like a Girl*, Penguin, 1976.
4. Mary Fuller, "Black girls in London comprehensive schools", in Rosemary Deem (ed) *Schooling for Women's Work*, RKP, 1980.

The New Defeatism

Liz Kelly criticises Lynne Segal's tunnel vision of feminism and the future.

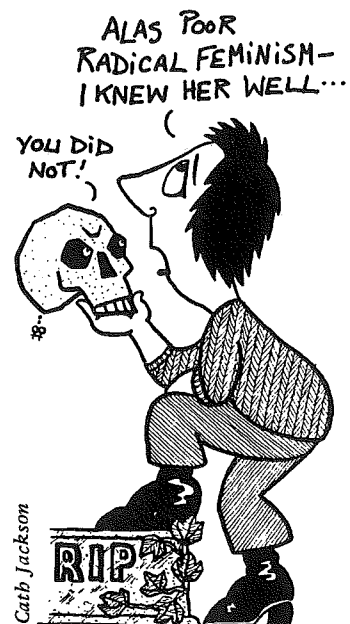
There is an important book to be written documenting the recent history of British socialist feminism, exploring past and current debates and honestly addressing the political differences with radical feminism. However, Lynne Segal's purpose in *Is The Future Female* is revealed in the preface when she states her hope that "we will soon be part of a confident resurgence of socialist feminism". This resurgence is not to be built on new ideas, action, campaigns or dialogues within feminism but through a frontal attack on radical feminists and radical feminism.

The kernel of the book that needs to be written exists within the pages of *Is The Future Female*, in some of the historical passages and in Lynne Segal's willingness to question some of the current 'in' theorists of the Left (see chapters 2 and 4). But the majority of the book is devoted to attacking what she feels is now the dominant feminist tradition in Britain — a version of radical feminism; despite her protest on the very last page (sic) that she is "not trying to rekindle confrontation". Her suggestion in the final chapter that feminists should not be enemies sits uneasily with the polemical dissection of radical feminism in the rest of

the book. In fact, by the time we get to the end of the book the socialist feminist resurgence has already happened as the way forward for "feminism" is through alliances with the Left (read men). Alliances within feminism were off the agenda from the very beginning.

Division is celebrated

Coalitions are built on finding what unites rather than what divides, they involve no longer having total control of the agenda. Yet in *Is The Future Female* division is recreated and even celebrated. Lynne Segal places the reasons for the fragmentation of the Women's Liberation Movement firmly upon how: "opposing attitudes to heterosexuality and to the significance of violence against women blew apart the women's movement of the 70s" (p.65). What she means is that socialist feminists no longer controlled the agenda. She undoubtedly feels that by allying with the left they can have it back again and she will be no longer troubled by the spectre of Ken Livingstone accepting a radical feminist analysis of the causes and extent of male violence (p.211). Quite how the catalogue of recent



betrayals by the Labour Party would fit into her vision I'm not sure.

London focus

Is *The Future Female* is yet another of the 'history' books that could only be written by a feminist based in London. Lynne Segal's explicit apology for the London focus is just not good enough. A book which purports to be, in part, a historical account of aspects of British feminism, whose author sees no problem in stating her ignorance about the majority of her own country, makes me question whose history this is. In fact, I wonder what country she thinks she is living in when she states that there is now public funding for rape counselling in all major cities in Britain. We have two 24 hour lines (London and Birmingham); most of the rest have minimal funding and are only able to offer between two and four sessions a week.

For those of us in the provinces, political differences have seldom had the same hostility and divisiveness. Our communities are not large enough, our resources too limited for us not find ways of working together. Feminist activism, outside London, has always involved coalitions, yet this is



seldom recorded within the so-called histories of our movement. In my 15 years of feminist activism I have worked with a range of women on a range of projects. We haven't always agreed politically, but without our separate and common efforts the history and achievements of feminism in my city would have been far less impressive. What brought us together were particular issues or campaigns and a commitment to women's liberation. The unbridgeable gulf between socialist and radical feminists exists mainly in (or at the least has been amplified by) the written words of feminist academics.

I have to admit to having scribbled all over my copy of the book and to a temptation to pick at almost every page. The historical inaccuracies, the stereotyping of radical feminism and the refusal to begin to debate the real differences between us or to explore the points of connection infuriated me. The picture painted of why women might be attracted to radical feminist politics is insulting, to say the least. According to Lynne Segal it's the easy option, offering simplistic explanations and strategies. After all, it is so much more difficult to work with men, with money, resources and status than in voluntary collectives struggling to survive! If, as she claims, a version of radical feminism is now the dominant feminist viewpoint, it is certainly not because socialist feminists have been silent or silenced. The possibility that radical feminism makes sense, that it might explain women's experience, that it offers us theory, practice and a vision, seems to be beyond her comprehension. Radical feminism is, for me, a theoretical position which argues that men, collectively and as individuals, have an interest in maintaining women's oppression. It contains within it a call to action to change the world. It is also premised on the pro-woman line — that our feminist energies are for ourselves and other women. Beyond these basic premises there are considerable differences within radical feminist theory and practice, none of which are reflected in the generalised stereotypes Lynne Segal constructs, nor in her selection of three theorists for critique. **Dworkin, Daly and Spender**

Radical feminism is represented through a detailed critique of some of the writings of



Andrea Dworkin, Mary Daly and Dale Spender, of whom the rest of us are "followers". Socialist feminism, by contrast, is represented as a grass roots movement, with activists. It is they, and they alone apparently, who have created municipal feminism. She makes minimal reference to the activism that attracted me to radical feminism, and which still sustains me. Moreover, her critique of radical feminism is insulting both to the three women themselves and to their readers. There is an implicit assumption that radical feminists are not critical readers; that we passively absorb and follow whatever the more public figures have to say. Whilst my, and other women's, politics have been influenced by classic texts, they are not determined by them. Other women's writing affects us when it speaks to and articulates knowledge and understanding we already hold, or when it challenges us — either to work out where we

disagree or to question taken for granted assumptions based on privilege or ignorance.

There is still a difference for me though between reading and discussing critically, and what US feminists call "trashing". What does it mean to describe Andrea Dworkin's analysis of pornography "as lurid as the pornography itself", "terrorising rhetoric", "satanic images of male domination" (p.16, 17, 36)? Many of the recent socialist feminist attacks on Andrea Dworkin, and Lynne Segal is no exception, refer to the need to understand conservative women. They, again without exception, choose to ignore the existence of Dworkin's pioneering book *Right-Wing Women* which is incidentally out of print.

It is nothing more than a snide (also inaccurate) comment to say that feminism has been:

turned into a new political project by some influential and commercially successful feminists in ways which dismiss as unimportant most of the activities of women's liberation in the 70s; activities which I believe were and are crucial to the future of feminism. (p.17)

The new issues that these women are accused of bringing into feminism are sexuality and sexual violence. This is indeed a rewriting of history! No-one in the CR groups I was in in the early 70s had read these authors; indeed we couldn't have read the works Lynne refers to as they had not yet been written. But we did discuss our experiences of sexual violence and our dissatisfactions with heterosexuality. Many of us, and other women like us, fundamentally changed how we thought about and practiced sexuality. Some of us went on to be part of groups setting up refuges for battered women and rape crisis lines.

The significance of male violence

I am becoming increasingly furious at the repeated moralising socialist feminist comments on how radical feminists focus on "women's common and inescapable victimisation" (p.36). It is we, not men, who are accused of terrorising women, by our documentation of reality. By doing this, they argue, we are guilty of undermining the possibilities for change. We offer, according to them, an image of women as passive, inevitable victims. The purpose of our work, in the short term to encourage and enable women to escape and avoid male violence,

to recognise and build on their own strength and in the long term to end sexual violence, is totally ignored. In this kind of rhetoric, the real terrorism of men's violence and the disabling silence that surrounds it disappears.

What angers me most is that I have yet to see a socialist feminist analysis of men's violence that offers either a new and different understanding or any concrete suggestions for how we deal with the reality of systematic victimisation. I still don't understand what they mean when they say they see "the significance" of male violence differently. All Lynne Segal offers is a return to the pre-feminist (read male) theories about sexual violence that I thought no feminists accepted anymore. For example, rapists have "vengeful, fearful, inadequate and disturbed motives" and for them rape is "a demanding and risky business whatever its ghastly prevalence" (p.104). Pornography is "the last bark of a stag at bay" and a "source of despair, frustration, guilt, anxiety, rage rather than pleasure/fulfillment" (p.109).

I am not interested in social change which does not take as one of its first priorities my right to "life and liberty". I, and most women I know, long for the possibility of living free from the threat of violence; from its reality in our lives and those

OH YOU POOR THING
ARE YOU VERY
LINHAPPY?



Cath Jackson

of other women. Lynne Segal's bland statement that, "social attitudes have begun to shift, hopefully forever, on rape, domestic violence and the treatment of its victims" (p.41) doesn't reassure me. The limited changes that have occurred have come about simply because some of us have refused to stop insisting that sexual violence is a central feminist issue. Lynne Segal obviously doesn't agree.

Nice men

One of the corner stones of Segal's critique is an implicit defence of heterosexuality which only becomes explicit in chapter 3 when she tells us that "we must construct a new male sexuality". Again radical feminists are accused of undermining optimism for change by describing the "nastiness" of men's behaviour. I wish it was only on the level of description — the plain fact is that over the last 15 years we have uncovered and understood the depth and yes, all too often, horror of male domination. Disillusion is one response to this, realisation of the enormity of what ending male dominance involves is another. It is not that we don't know that women aren't all nice (a point Lynne Segal makes ad nauseam) but that many of us have discovered, when we attempted to leave 'nice' men, just how nasty they could be. It is not an abstract point of political theory that made many of us both question heterosexuality and be suspicious of working with men politically but our real experience of men's responses when challenged.

The suggestions that we acted in 'bad faith' by "giving up" on the men just when they were beginning to change must leave a bitter taste in the mouths of many women. The extent of this change turned out to be extremely superficial and it is just not possible to 'forgive and forget' harassment, coercive sex, systematic psychological undermining, betrayals of trust and 'comrades' refusing to support women in lesbian custody cases. There are too many lesbians who lost both their children and their friendship networks when it came to the crunch with 'changed' men for us to return to the naive optimism of the early 70s that Lynne Segal eulogises.

A number of contradictions run through Lynne Segal's writing, which reflect



what I see as contradictions in socialist feminist thought more generally. Any concept or idea which has its origins in radical feminism is, for them, wrong by definition, yet we frequently see these ideas and concepts turning up within their own texts. This is particularly obvious in Lynne Segal's discussion of Greenham Common. First she notes the radical feminist criticism, then she moves to the defence of the peace women. But she passes lightly over one of the most basic radical feminist criticisms of the Greenham women's political analysis; their biological determinism. It is this very issue which aroused her anger earlier in the book where, whilst stressing the importance of asserting women's power and strength, she attacks all essentialist ideas which attribute to women a different and more positive nature.

Desire and pleasure

Theoretical analyses which are based on the assertion that gender is biologically determined are as unacceptable to most radical feminists as they are to most socialist feminists. This is precisely one of the things we have in common, a fact which British socialist feminists seem determined to ignore. We agree that men and women are socialised to have different psychologies. Indeed, many

socialist feminist theorists have offered accounts of how this process takes place and what its consequences are. Some of these accounts are far more essentialist than their radical feminist counterparts. By drawing on revised Freudian categories they offer a much more determined and limited view of change. Trapped by our repressed infantile desires we are apparently doomed to play these out in our sexual relationships.

They (sexual fantasies) draw upon all manner of infantile sexual wishes, active and passive, loving and hating, all the way back to our very earliest feelings of desire and pleasure in childhood. (p.101)



It's that magic word desire again! I find this type of analysis a deterministic view of sexuality which is both extremely pessimistic and ethnocentric. I can't imagine an international solidarity workshop on "women's psychic structuring through infantile desires"; yet international feminist networks do exist to work on the issues of sexual violence, lesbian oppression and many other concrete issues.

Patriarchy

Lately there have been increasing attacks by socialist feminists on the use of the radical feminist identified concept of patriarchy, and again Lynne Segal is no exception. However, on two pages I noticed she uses it herself! Not only that, on these same pages when referring to radical feminist use patriarchy appears in inverted commas (p.34 and 49)! This inconsistency (hypocrisy?) has

been repeated by Michele Barrett, who at two recent mixed conferences on sociological theory argued that patriarchy as a concept is dead and should no longer be used. Yet in her introduction to a new book on Canadian feminist theory that she co-edited *The Politics of Diversity* on the first page we find this statement:

Thus some of the exchanges in this book notably the detailed criticisms of Marxist concepts from what in Britain at least would be identified as a 'radical feminist' position, reopen questions that have elsewhere been abandoned unresolved.

So it is ok for Canadian socialist feminists to openly debate and discuss diversity, to use the concept of patriarchy and to positively engage with radical feminist perspectives, but it is not ok for British socialist feminists. What reads well in a book introduction is not for open discussion. They might then have to acknowledge that radical feminists here in Britain have important and interesting things to say — even put out books on women's studies reading lists!

Separatism is also seen as part of the pessimistic vision of radical feminism. According to Lynne Segal it involves giving

up on social change. She and those who agree with her could do well to read Marilyn Frye's essay *Some reflections on separatism and power* in which the range of separations involved in feminist action, and more generally in women's lives, is explored in the context of taking power. In asserting the absolute necessity of autonomous women-only groups, Lynne Segal is accepting, indeed demanding, one form of separation. That some women opt for drawing the line at a different point is a matter of personal choice and/or political strategy. For someone committed to diversity in all things and to the absence of moralistic judgements, how she finds it possible to define other women's personal and political choices as "wrong" escapes me.

This book made me both angry at its failure to engage in honest debate and pessimistic about the future — the future of feminism. Is it really so impossible for feminists with different analyses and priorities to even talk to one another, let alone work together on particular issues and campaigns? What we need in my view is grass roots activism and coalitions and networks doing national campaigning. We do not need yet another book telling us how impossible this all is. More than anything I was glad I don't live in London — at least I still occasionally take part in debates across political differences and I continue to work with women who have a range of political perspectives. None of them would question my choosing to focus on violence against women, nor would I challenge their working around the issues of health, welfare benefits, manual trades or international solidarity. We are all too aware that there is a vast amount of work that needs doing, that we need one another to do it because no one else will, and that women's liberation is a huge and long-term project. □



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Marilyn Frye *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, Crossing Press, 1983.

A Alderson, Lynn: 'The Amsterdam International Conference on Women's History', 9,36; interviewing Terry Hunt of 'Jam Today', 'Jam Everyday', 9,47

Amnesty International, 'Not so political prisoners', (letter from Fiver, Greenham Women's Peace Camp, and response by Amnesty International), 9,4

B Barker, Pat - 'Blow Your House Down': Jane Vellacott, 'Raising a Roar', (letter), 9,4

Beauvoir, Simone de: 1908-1986, (extracts from autobiography and interviews), 9,3

Berer, Marge: 'Breeding Conspiracies: FINNAGE reviewed', 9,29

Blake, Catriona: 'Class, Control and Cocoa', (review of Martha Vicinus, 'Independent Women'), 8,46

Body politics - fatness: Jackson, Cath, 'Fast Food Feminism', 7,39

Breeze, Jean 'Binta': (interviewed by Dorothy Francis), 'A Family of Women', 7,11

Brown, Heather: 'A day in the city - women, policing and violence', 8,11

C Calvert, Jane: 'Protecting men from women - kerbcrawling, prostitution and the law', 8,24

Caribbean: 'A Family of Women', (Interview with Jean 'Binta' Breeze), 7,11; Enloe, Cynthia, 'The Women in "America's Backyard"', 9,15

Central America: Enloe, Cynthia, 'The Women in "America's Backyard"', 9,15

Chesler, Phyllis - *Women & Madness*: reviewed by Dale Spender, 'Still Crazy After All These Years', 9,41

Child benefit: Land, Hilary, 'Fair Means or Fowler', 7,34

Childcare: Wallsgrove, Ruth, 'Thicker than water', 7,26

Class and paternal power: Farnham, Margot, 'In the name of the father', 8,5; Pickard, Linda, 'We all stood up together', 8,36

Classism in the Women's Movement: Blake, Catriona, 'Class Control and Cocoa', 8,46

Coleman, Gwen, suffragist: Sebestyen, Amanda, 7,45

Communist Party and feminism: 'Open letter from the Trouble and Strife Collective', 8,2; Park, Angela Stewart, and Wilson, Elizabeth, 'Rewriting History', (letter) 9,6; 'Women Alive Reply', (letter) 9,7

Contraception - Ireland: Jennings, Mary, 'Irishwomen United', 7,47

Contraceptive technology: Berer, Marge, 'Breeding Conspiracies', 9,29

D Dickens, Alison: (Interviewing Sujata Gothoskat), 8,15

Disability: Hearne, Kirsten, 'A Woman's Right to Cruise' 9,24; 'Our Absence is Required', 9,27

Dowling, IP: 'Refreshing Honesty in Print', (letter), 9,8

E Employment and women's earnings: Land, Hilary, 'Fair Means or Fowler' 7,34; Pickard, Linda, 'We all stood up together' 8,32; Enloe, Cynthia, 'Women in "America's Backyard"', 9,15

Employment equality - Japan: Hayman, Amanda: 'Feminism in Japan', 7,32

Enloe, Cynthia: 'The Women in "America's Backyard" - imperialism and gender in Central America and the Caribbean', 9,15

F Farnham, Margot: 'In the name of the father - fathers and class', 8,5

Fathers: Farnham, Margot, 'In the name of the father', 8,5

Female Communities - Victorian England: Blake, Catriona, 'Class Control and Cocoa', 8,46

Feminism - international: see listings under name of country.

Feminist History - women's music: 'Jam Everyday', (Terry Hunt of Jam today, interviewed by Lynn Alderson), 9,47

Feminist History - writing of: Hasted, Rachel: 'Mothers of Invention', 7,17; Alderson, Lynn, 'The Amsterdam International Conference on Women's History', 9,36; Purkiss DM & Dowling IP, 'Refreshing Honesty in Print', (letter), 9,8

Feminist History - Ireland: Jennings, Mary, 'Irishwomen United', 7,47

Feminist History - Municipal Feminism: Frances Carter, 'Spend, Spend, Spent?', 8,51

Feminist History - New York Strike, 1909: Pickard, Linda, 'We all stood up together', 8,32

Feminist History - Suffragists: Sebestyen, Amanda, 'Gwen Coleman, Suffragist', 7,45

Feminist History - women's communities in Victorian England: Catriona Blake, 'Class Control and Cocoa', 8,46

Feminist theory: Greenway, Judy, 'Not any old theory', (letter), 7,2

Foster, Bridget: 'Racist Language', (letter), 7,2

France - feminism and socialism: Viennot, Elaine, 'Au Revoir to all that', 8,39

Francis, Dorothy: 'A Family of Women', (Interviewing Jean 'Binta' Breeze), 7,11

Freer, Jean: 'Clearing the Mist', (letter), 8,4

GLC Women's Committee - demise of: Frances Carter, 'Spend, Spend, Spent?', 8,51

Gothoskat, Sujata: (Interview), 'India: action against violence', 8,15

Grahn, Judy - 'The Work of a Common Woman': reviewed by Loewenstein, Andrea, 8,29

Greenway, Judy, 'Not any old theory', (letter), 7,2

H Hasted, Rachel: 'Mothers of Invention - using history to our own ends?', 7,17

Hawkes, Vinty: 'Mothering is mothering, not power', (letter), 8,3

Hayman, Amanda: 'Feminism in Japan', 7,29

Hearne, Anna J: 'Racism, Rape and Riots', 9,9

Hearne, Kirsten: 'A Woman's Right to Cruise - disability and lesbian sexuality', 9,24

Historians and racism: Alderson, Lynn, 'The Amsterdam International Conference on Women's History', 9,36

Hunt, Terry: interviewed by Lynne Alderson, 'Jam Everyday', 9,47

I Imperialism: Enloe, Cynthia, 'The Women in "America's Backyard"', 9,15

'India: action against violence', (Interview with Sujata Gothoskat), 8,15

Ireland: Jennings, Mary, 'Irishwomen United', 7,47

J Jackson, Cath: 'Fast Food Feminism', (review of Susie Orbach, 'Fat is a Feminist Issue'), 7,39

Jamaica: 'A Family of Women', (Interview with Jean 'Binta' Breeze, dub poet), 7,11

Jam Today: Terry Hunt interviewed by Lynne Alderson, 'Jam Everyday', 9,47

Japan: Hayman, Amanda: 'Feminism in Japan', 7,29

Jennings, Mary: 'Irishwomen United', 7,47

Jewish women workers: Pickard, Linda, 'We all stood up together', 8,36

K Kelly, Liz: 'Feminists v. Feminists - legislating against porn in the USA', 7,4

L Land, Hilary: 'Fair Means or Fowler: the proposals to impoverish women', 7,34

Law - Prostitution: Calvert, Jane, 'Protecting men from women: kerbcrawling, prostitution and the law', 8,24

Lee, Carol: 'Clearing the Mist', (letter), 8,4

Lesbianism - and disability: Hearne, Kirsten, 'A Woman's Right to Cruise' 9,24; Statement by Lesbians with Disability, 'Our absence is required', 9,27

Lesbianism - India: 'India - Action against violence', (Interview with Sujata Gothoskat), 8,21

Lesbianism - poetry: Loewenstein, Andrea, (Review of Judy Grahn, 'The Work of a Common Woman'), 8,29

Lesbianism - and political imprisonment, 'Not so political prisoners', (letter from Fiver, Greenham Women's Peace Camp, and response by Amnesty International), 9,4

Loewenstein, Andrea: 'The Work of an Uncommon Woman' (review of Judy Grahn, the 'Work of a Common Woman'), 8,29

M Male violence - fathers: Farnham, Margaret, 'In the name of the father', 8,5

Male violence - India: 'India - Action against violence', (Interview with Sujata Gothoskat), 8,15

Male violence - in fiction: Jane Vellacott, 'Raising a Roar', (letter), 9,4

Male violence - police response: Brown, Heather, 'A day in the city', 8,11; Calvert, Jane, 'Protecting men from women', 8,24; Hearne, Anna J, 'Racism, Rape and Riots', 9,9

Male violence and race: Hearne, Anna J, 'Racism, Rape and Riots', 9,9

Mental Health: Spender, Dale, 'Still Crazy After All These Years', (review of Phyllis Chesler, 'Women and Madness'), 9,41

Motherhood: Wallsgrove, Ruth: 'Thicker than water?', 7,26; Hawkes, Vinty, 'Mothering is mothering, not power', (letter), 8,3; Berer, Marge, 'Breeding Conspiracies', 9,29

Music - women's bands: Terry Hunt interviewed by Lynne Alderson, 'Jam Everyday', 9,47

O Orbach, Susie - 'Fat is a Feminist Issue': reviewed by Jackson, Cath, 7,39

P Parenting: Wallsgrove, Ruth: 'Thicker than water?', 7,26; Hawkes, Vinty, 'Mothering is mothering, not power', (letter), 8,3

Park, Angela Stewart: 'Rewriting History', (letter) 9,6

Pickard, Linda: 'We all stood up together - women's autonomous organization', 8,32

Poetry: Loewenstein, Andrea, Review of Judy Grahn, 'The Work of a Common Woman', 8,29

Police violence - India: 'India: action against violence', (Interview with Sujata Gothoskat), 8,15

Police violence - inner city riots: Hearne, Anna J, 'Racism, Rape and Riots', 9,9

Policing: Brown, Heather, 'A day in the city', 8,11

Policing - Prostitutes: Calvert, Jane, 'Protecting men from women', 8,24

Pornography: Liz Kelly, 'Feminists v. Feminists', 4,23

Pornography - India: 'Action against violence', (Interview with Sujata Gothoskat), 8,21

Prisoners of conscience: 'Not so political prisoners', (letter from Fiver, Greenham Women's Peace Camp, and response from Amnesty International), 9,4

Prostitution: Calvert, Jane, 'Protecting men from women', 8,24; Vellacott, Jane, 'Raising a roar', (letter), 9,4

Psychiatry: Spender, Dale, 'Still Crazy After All These Years', (review of Phyllis Chesler, 'Women and Madness') 9,41

Purkiss, DM: 'Refreshing Honesty in Print', (Letter), 9,8

R Racism and feminism: Frances Carter, 'Spend, Spend, Spent?', 8,53

Racism in English language: Foster, Bridget, 'Racist Language', (Letter), 7,2

Racism - police response to racist violence: Brown, Heather, 'A day in the city - women, policing and violence', 8,11; Hearne, Anna J, 'Racism, Rape and Riots', 9,9

'Racism, Rape and Riots': Hearne, Anna J, 9,9

Rape Crisis Centre, Tokyo: Hayman, Amanda: 'Feminism in Japan - 3 Tokyo Groups', 7,30

Rape - India: 'Action against violence', (Sara Scott and Alison Dickens interviewing Sujata Gothoskat), 8,15

Rape - police response: Brown, Heather, 'A day in the city - women policing and violence', 8,11; Hearne, Anna J, 'Racism, Rape and Riots', 9,9

Reproductive technologies: Berer, Marge, 'Breeding Conspiracies: FINNRAGE reviewed', 9,29

S Scott, Sara: 'India: action against violence', (Interviewing Sujata Gothoskat) 8,15

Sebestyen, Amanda: 'Gwen Coleman, suffragist', 7,45

Separatism and the women's movement: Alderson, Lynn, 'The Amsterdam International Conference on Women's History', 9,36

Social Security benefits: Land, Hilary, 'Fair Means or Fowler - the proposals to impoverish women', 7,34

Socialist parties and feminism: Viennot, Elaine, 'Au Revoir to all that', 8,39; Frances Carter, 'Municipal Feminism: Spend, Spend, Spent?', 8,51

Spender, Dale: 'Still Crazy After All These Years', (review of Phyllis Chesler, 'Women and Madness'), 9,41

State funded feminism: Frances Carter, 'Municipal Feminism: Spend, Spend, Spent?', 8,51

Suffrage Movement: Sebestyen, Amanda, 'Gwen Coleman, Suffragist', 7,45

T Tickle, Sylvia: 'India: action against violence', (Interviewing Sujata Gothoskat), 8,15

Trades Unions - male support for feminism?: 'India: action against violence', (Sara Scott and Alison Dickens interviewing Sujata Gothoskat), 8,18; Viennot, Elaine, 'Au Revoir to all that', 8,39

Trades Unions - women's autonomous organisation: Pickard, Linda, 'We all stood up together', 8,32

V Vellacot, Jane: 'Raising a roar', (letter, responding to article by Patricia Duncker, T&S 6), 9,4

Vicinus, Martha - 'Independent Women': reviewed by Catriona Blake, 'Class Control & Cocoa', 8,46

Viennot, Elaine: 'Au Revoir to all that - feminist involvement in political parties', 8,39

Violence and political protest: 'Not so political prisoners', (letter from Fiver, Greenham Women's Peace Camp, and response by Amnesty International), 9,4

W Wallsgrave, Ruth: 'Thicker than water: mothering and childcare', 7,26

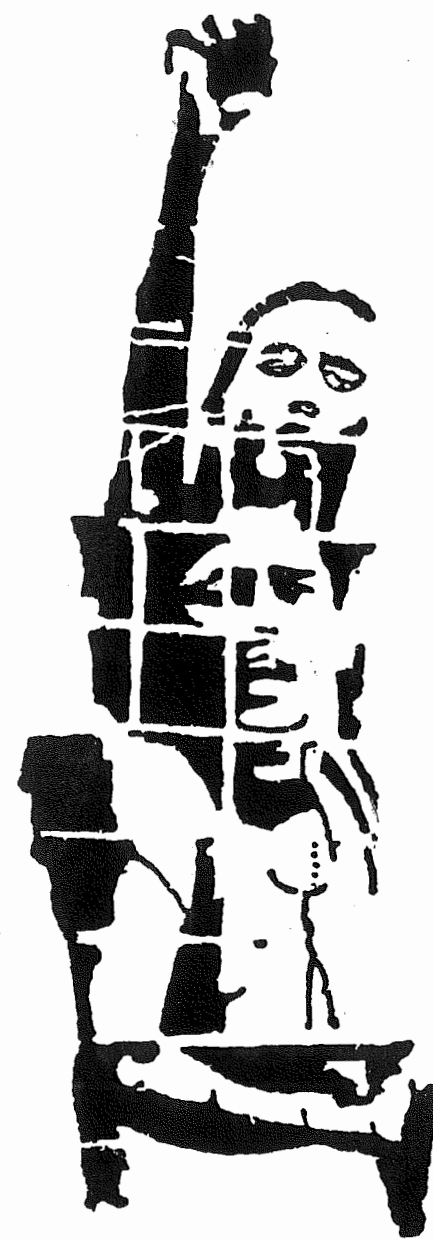
Wilson, Elizabeth: 'Rewriting History', (letter) 9,6

Witches: Hasted, Rachel: 'Mothers of Invention', 7,17; Lee, Carol & Freer, Jean, 'Clearing the Mist', (letter), 8,4

'Women Alive' (Conference): 'Open letter from the Trouble and Strife collective', 8,2; Park, Angela Stewart, and Wilson, Elizabeth, 'Rewriting History', (letter) 9,6; 'Women Alive Reply', (letter) 9,7

AGAINST NATIONALISM:

the betrayal of Algerian women



Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas writes here about how national liberation struggles can reinforce women's oppression rather than challenge it. In her own country, Algeria, women were in fact kept very much in their place within the struggle, despite subsequent myth-making on the subject. She also discusses, from bitter experience, how nationalist ideas have since been used to justify extreme denial of women's rights.

This is about our ignorance and fundamental distrust of peace movements; how it has been built into our consciousness; how we have been locked into nationalism.

This is about how long and difficult a process it is to become a dissident without betraying one's loyalties, without losing one's own identity.

1. *The role of women during the Algerian liberation struggle*

The image that the outside world formed of women in the Algerian liberation struggle is shaped by Frantz Fanon's books, a very widely distributed film called *The Battle of Algiers*, and the true story of a few national heroines. The Algerian woman appears as a

This article was written as a paper for an International Symposium on Women and the Military System, held at Sinto Baths, Finland, 22-25 January 1987.

Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas was interviewed for Trouble and Strife no. 5, Spring 1985, "Bound and Gagged by the Family Code", under the name Nadine Claire

freedom fighter who carried arms against French colonialism and its army, a terrorist who put bombs in the city during the battle of Algiers, an equal to men in the struggle, a person in her full right who shared decision making both at the political and at the military level.

These myths hardly match with personal experience; they are now also contradicted by Djamila Amrane's work. She herself was a freedom fighter from 1957 to 1962. She has been registered as a veteran in the archives of the Ministry of Veterans, and this allowed her access to these archives when she started the first and only study on women in the struggle ever attempted in the 25 years since independence.¹

Djamila Amrane's work is based on the statistics of the Ministry of Veterans, and in her introduction she points out that there are problems with this data. We must ask:

Who was registered as a veteran by the Ministry? The request for registration had to be backed by a documented file, requiring lots of testimonies, requiring stamps in various offices, a whole bureaucratic procedure which made it difficult for any peasant or working class man or illiterate people to register, and it was certainly very difficult for women, because *they* were illiterate, from peasant background, veiled and often partly secluded. Furthermore, registration gave some advantages, mainly for workers: specific jobs, promotion, retirement payments etc... It did not benefit women, since only 2.1% were employed. This explains why few women bothered to get registered and that they represent in official statistics of veterans only 3.25% of all veterans.

On the official side, there was no desire that women register as veterans, and a strong move to push women back in their place (sic) took place immediately after independence. Therefore statistical data drawn from the archives of the Ministry of Veterans is not representative of the number of women who could have registered as veterans.

The second problem is the concept of fighter (or veteran) itself. Numerically speaking, most of the struggle took place in the countryside. Numerous tasks performed by the population in the countryside

allowed the armed freedom fighters to survive: guiding, hiding, feeding, carrying messages, buying arms, watching French army moves, and taking arms when the armed ones were killed. The definition of a 'fighter' cannot exclude all those, men and women, who performed all these intricate tasks.

But if a man, at the risk of his life, carried food to the armed fighters over long distances in the mountains, it is acknowledged that he was a fighter — while if a woman did so, she was only 'helping' the men in her traditional and natural way of nurturing. If a man, at the risk of his life, hid armed fighters or 'wanted' political leaders, he was certainly called a fighter — while if a woman did so, she was simply performing her normal woman's nurturing task.

Although she could have died in the process, as well as her fellow men, she was not seen as a fighter. Nor was she when she collected fuel for the fighters, nor was she when she collected food for the fighters, nor was she when she carried guns for the fighters, nor was she when she guided the fighters through the mountains... she was 'helping' men.

Only the French army acknowledged her action by jailing her, putting her into concentration camps, torturing her, killing her. Just as they did men.

Reality is, in these types of guerilla liberation struggles, that the whole population is involved, if not by will, by force, and we can consider rightly that nearly all women were actively involved in the struggle in the countryside.

Keeping in mind all these comments on the representativeness of the data, it is far from uninteresting, and it still says a lot about Algerian women in the liberation struggle.

Out of 10,949 registered women, 9,194 are considered to be 'civilians' and 1,755 to be 'military', which means that 81% worked for the Civil Organisation of the National Liberation Front (OCFLN), supporting the guerilla and urban terrorism, while 19% were part of the army and worked in the bush. 78% of them worked in the countryside, and 20% in the cities, which corresponds to the national population distribution.

1 out of 5 of them were jailed, tortured or killed. They were from all age groups from under 20 to over 50 years old, but it is interesting to note that 41.7% were between 31 and 50 years old: they were all married and mothers; if we consider only the civilian branch (OCFLN) 47.3% were between 31 and 50 years old. These few figures show the overall participation of women, the heavy repression which fell on them, and the involvement of mature women and mothers.

The forms of activities both of civilian and military women were labelled as follows:

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY WOMEN

	Civilian	Military
Organising hiding places and food collection	63%	2.9%
Liaisons and guides	22.1%	0
Collection of funds, medicines, ammunition	9.3%	
Nurses	1.8%	49.3%
Cooks and clothes washers	0	44.4%
Terrorists	2.1%	0
Clothes makers and repairers	0.6%	0.5% (one woman)
Secretaries	0.7%	0.4%
Political commissaires	0	1%
Armed fighters	0	0.5% (one woman)
	100%	100%
Total number	9,194	1,755

Details of the work the women did show that even in the hardest times of the struggle women were kept in their place and confined to a kind of task which would not disturb social order in future. Although the fulfilment of these tasks was absolutely necessary, they should not have absorbed the totality of female energy.

Nurturing and maintenance were the tasks of women Algerian freedom fighters, plus an occasional medical service. We had only one woman in arms, we had only two women in a position to make decisions in military matters, and none in political ones!

This deals a blow to Fanon's mytho-

logy (and followers) of the liberated Algerian woman — liberated through the process of global liberation of the country.

We now know for sure where the liberated women were: in the kitchen, sewing clothes (or flags?), carrying parcels, typing... nevertheless since 'there is no humble task in revolution', we did not dispute the roles we had.

What makes me angry, in retrospect, is not the mere fact of confining women to their place, but the brainwashing which did not allow us, young women, to even think of questioning women's place. And what makes me even more angry is to witness the replication of this situation in places in the world where national liberation struggles are still taking place — to witness women engaged in liberation fronts covering the misbehaviors of their fellow men, hiding, in the name of national solidarity and identity, crimes which will be perpetuated after the official liberation.

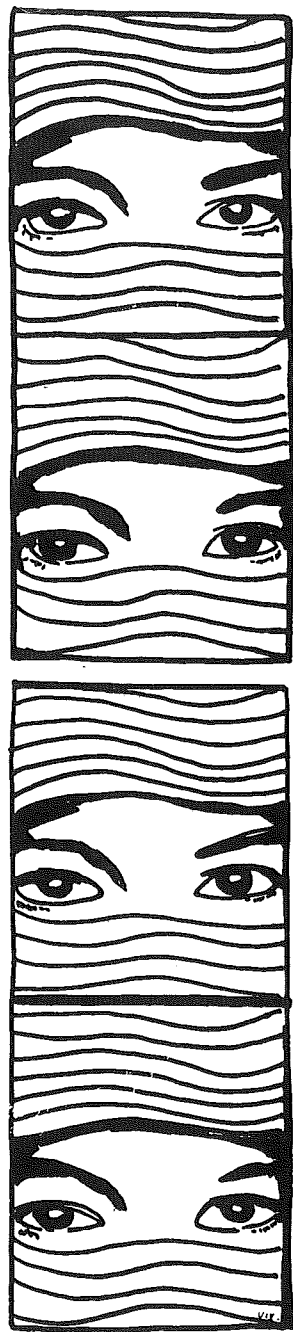
This is the real harm which comes with liberation struggles: people mobilise against such a strong, powerful, and destructive enemy that there is no room for the practical action of mobilising women at the same time; but worse, it erases from our mind the very idea of doing so, which is seen as anti-revolutionary, anti-nation: This vision remains after independence and alienates generations of young women.

The overall task of women during the liberation struggle is symbolic: faced with colonisation, the people had to build a national identity, based on values of one's own traditions, religion, language, culture. Women bore the heavy role of being the keepers of this threatened identity, and they paid the heaviest price for accepting — but were there choices? — to play this role.

Obedience, morality and conformity

Probably most of the women present at this Symposium take for granted that they belong to a country, a nation which does not have to prove its existence: it allows for transcending the concept of nation, and criticising it. It has not been so for us; it has not been so for many people in ex-colonised countries; it is not so for many people in still-colonised countries, or countries facing imperialism at war. Therefore it has been, or





is much more difficult to criticise the nation, and even the State which pretends it represents the Nation.

One of the early slogans of nationalism in Algeria was promoted by the Ulemas, the Doctors of the Faith, the religious leaders:

Arabic is our language, Islam is our religion, Algeria is our country.

Women, especially, were in charge of raising their sons within the religious faith, reviving traditions, keeping up moral standards, teaching the language of the forefathers.²

Women had to behave according to 'tradition', while men could have some access to 'modernity'. These of course are the concepts which were in use — not mine: modernity, in Algeria as well as in many other parts of the world, inevitably draws from the wealthy West — whatever they think it means. I'll give two examples of traditions as symbols of national identity during the struggle.

The veil

Although there is no doubt that veiling women, and women only, is part of the control and the oppression of women, the veil became a symbol of national resistance during the years of struggle for national independence. The French officials insisted that Algerian women should be freed from the oppression of the veil; with the help of the French army, they even went to the point of bringing women from villages in army trucks and forcing them to publicly unveil themselves, thereby renouncing their backward traditions. Needless to say, Algerian males — and women too — resented it as a symbolic public rape (unfortunately mass rapes also took place in reality throughout the war for liberation).

At the same time Fanon praised the revolutionary virtue of the veil which allowed urban women freedom fighters to escape from the control of the French army; they could hide guns under their veil, and travel incognito for underground purposes.

In this context, how was one to take up the issue of the veil as oppressive to women? How could we do it without betraying both the nation and the revolution (in capital letters). Not surprisingly, many young women, even those brought up in families where they were not forced to wear the veil, chose to wear it as a visible symbol of their belonging to the oppressed

Algerian people, oppressed twice: in their lives, but also in their symbolic existence.

Needless to say, the FLN encouraged such attitudes wrapped into the most appealing packaging: fighting for the Cause. Closer to us in history is the example of Iranian women in their 'revolution'.

Tobacco and alcohol

It is important to see this anti-women programme as part of a wider one which denied the people any private choice in private matters: around the time the battle of Algiers took place, the FLN engaged in a campaign against tobacco and alcohol; their consumption became the sign of anti-national and anti-revolutionary feelings which led to the death sentence and the execution of the culprit.

The FLN actually killed people who were smoking in public, or cut their noses out, in mild cases.

In the same line, the practice of Ramadan — fast became compulsory, as an identification with the struggling nation; even non-religious people started fasting in solidarity. To be Algerian became synonymous with being a Muslim.

Slowly but surely, the entwining of concepts as heterogeneous as nation, religion and ethnicity shaped the future of independent Algeria.

And again I feel the need to say that we women, we non-religious beings, we internationalists, did not raise our voices (it would have been difficult and risky) but moreover did not raise our minds, did not see all the implications of this ideological confusion. We too believed that somehow this would be a betrayal of the people, of the revolution and of the nation.

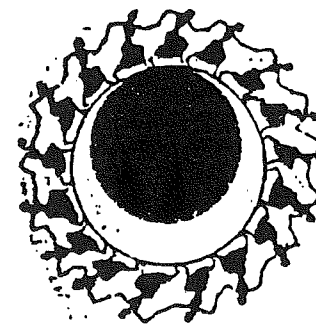
At no point did we see that a power structure was built on our mental confusion, which used control of private life and control of women as means to get access to power and maintain itself in this position.

Obedience, morality and conformity were necessary conditions to be part of the revolution. In a form of struggle where secrecy is the basis for action, one cannot question the decisions of the comrades in charge of organising the struggle, it therefore leads to blind obedience. In a form of struggle in which one has to be as anonymous as possible, militants are asked to behave in the most conformist way, wear

traditional clothes (including a veil, eventually), behave themselves; very soon a control of morality is exerted on militants, and not surprisingly it is directed more especially at their sexual behaviour; needless to say that women are first concerned. But how to speak about what (even to our blind minds) sometimes appeared as excessive? To whom could we speak about what may be needed by the nature of the struggle: clandestinity? How not to fear to be marginalised?

It is in this context that I would like us to examine the forms of activities to which women were confined within the liberation movement. During this crucial period, women were assigned a place in society which could not be challenged without questioning both the past (tradition as our history and the sole founding legitimacy to be an independent nation), and the future (Revolution which was reincarnated in the Algerian struggle for national independence).

The roots for a tightly controlled society were set; nationalism would be the leading thread of interpretation of any side of our reality.



2. *After independence (1962): 25 years of oppression for women*

Immediately after independence, the Algerian leaders started evolving a discourse which grew more and more distant from the living experiences of Algerian people. The mental rigidity acquired during the historical events of struggle for independence, the habit of not questioning, the fear of losing one's roots and identity, all these elements led to actual political schizophrenia: we used to elaborate on the discourse, and the discourse on the discourse became our reality. For instance we endlessly talked of Algerian socialism, where

there was no socialism,³ not even an attempted one; we were in state capitalism as a transition to plain capitalism, for the simple reason that there was no private national capital available to be invested at the time of independence.⁴

We also endlessly talked about self-management-Algerian-model, when self management in industry was converted into state-owned industries less than one year after independence, and self-managed farms into state-owned farms soon after.

We also discussed democratic institutions when the police State was getting stronger and stronger, and the power of the army grew by the day.

We ignored the political use of religion and the growth of Islamic groups, later to become powerful Fundamentalists, since proclaimed socialism protected us from such evils. And of course we congratulated ourselves on the freedom that women gained during the liberation. We were in the myth, talking about the myth.

In fact, what had started during the liberation war was developing. Indeed by law, women were equal to men in the Constitution, but as long as it was in conformity with Islamic religion. Later developments made us learn what it meant.

Indeed, by law, the age of marriage for girls was fixed at 18. But it was not enforced. Indeed, by law, girls should go to school, but there were not enough schools, so boys went first. Indeed, by law, women could and should have work, but there were no jobs, so men had to have them, as heads of families.

Indeed women could walk freely in the streets, but men harassed them and the police sided with the men: "What is an honest woman doing outside her home?" Even when men started beating women in the streets when they dared say a word of protest, men gathered and watched. Even liberal men did not intervene for fear of questioning by the police: "You sided with her; did you know her? What were you doing there?"

The very summer of independence, the FLN army patrolled the streets of the capital, arresting young people where males and females were walking together in groups: "Who is married to whom here? This one, is she someone's sister, wife?"

One had better produce a good marriage certificate . . . People retreated inside their homes, fearing the authorities, and fearing to be eventually denounced by their neighbours. More women wore a veil: we were now free so we could really be ourselves; beware of foreign ideologies . . .

More people submitted to Ramadan-fast: police locked up those who did not. Hypocrisy grew; hiding from neighbours, colleagues, 'friends', and even family; ("my mother must not know that I am not fasting").

More people officially did not drink alcohol, or smoke in the presence of their father; a law was passed which forbids Algerian citizens to buy alcohol. It is applied or not, depending on the political seasons. But one never knows when it will be enforced again. Forced marriages took place and numerous suicides of young girls occurred, numerous women were ill treated by their male relatives, beaten and secluded. There was no organisation to report to.⁵

Those who denounced the state of affairs were prosecuted as traitors: to the authorities, to the State, therefore to the Nation, therefore to the Revolution.

One developed a split personality. What was seen did not exist; reality was the nationalist interpretation of it.

In this context of increasing lack of political liberties, of morality, of emphasis on religion, where women were losing openly what in fact they never gained, it is important to stress the role of what was officially labelled 'specific socialism' in Algeria. Why specific? To differentiate itself from 'scientific socialism' which stands for atheism; our socialism was supposed to combine with Islamic religion.

Looking back, it was just another trick from the people in power to quieten those who had given so much for national independence. As I have tried to describe, we were already silenced by all the fears of being accused of betrayal, and by the nationalist myth; but the best way to silence us has been the socialist label.

Because it was a socialist State, one could not oppose the politics of the State without opposing socialism; because 'the people' was in power, one could not criticise the regime without being anti-people.

This rhetoric, as stupid as it appears when one has stepped out of it, has proven to work successfully in silencing the Left in most of the East European communist countries.

It takes years to dare become a dissident and to speak out, knowing that our unveiling the truth will not only serve our purposes, but also be used by rightist elements, both inside and outside the country, to devalue and destroy the aspirations to justice and equality which we believe should be the basis for socialism. As long as we do not link, inside and abroad, with people from the Left at large, with other dissident socialists, the guilt feeling is immense, and the accusation of betrayal a painful wound.

Oppressing women: socialism and religion

I'll now give two concrete examples of the policy of the State against women, and how nationalism, socialism, and religion were entwined and successfully worked against women.

The first example is the birth policy of Algeria. At independence, Algeria was still under the old natalist French law of 1920 which forbade not only the use of but also any knowledge of contraception.

This law, like many others could not be replaced immediately, so it was temporarily continued. Obviously we women hoped that, after independence we would have access to some means of contraception. But many men died during the liberation struggle and the policy of the State was clearly to replace them. Having children was encouraged as a main accomplishment for women and a duty to the nation. Nevertheless it would have been difficult to have us accept, without a protest, such a blunt policy.

But — fortunately, if I may say so — the United States was, at that very time, trying to enforce a brutal policy of birth control in the 'Third World', which culminated with their attempt to put pressure on governments to make them adopt their world plan, called 'fertility target', at the World Conference on Population in Bucharest.

As the champion of the liberation of Africa, as the champion of socialism, Algeria was not to allow such a policy. As

we all know, population policies are not THE way to development. Could we, women, disapprove of that? Could we, as socialists, not support the international policy of our government? Indeed, we did not protest when the natalist law was not changed.

Although we managed to get statements from the highest Islamic authorities stating that contraception practices were not forbidden by religion, nothing was to change for a whole decade. This is proof that people in power use religion only when it suits them. At that time, they needed both that women produce children and to strengthen their control on the people by controlling their private lives in all possible respects.

The anti-imperialist stand that they took on birth policy also perfectly suited the needs of their internal policies: women had to pay a high price for it. In about ten years, the average number of children per woman was 7.9; pregnancies ranged from 14 to natural fecundity; we do not know about illegal abortions, nor about maternal death. The population growth reached 3.5%, one of the highest at that time in the world.

To make a long story short, 10 years were enough to turn a socialist bureaucracy into a more conventional bourgeoisie, owning means of production. The Algerian ruling class felt threatened by the growth of lumpen masses, and suddenly reversed its policies: birth control was legalised, contraception clinics were opened and their number increased rapidly, therapeutic abortion was legalised. Population growth came down to 3.2% within a few years. In January 1981, taxation suddenly penalised large families. In both cases women had no say. They are the producers of goods which the State controls.

The second example is the use of religion. Although the Constitution guarantees equality to all citizens, it was stated shortly after independence that we should have a Family Code more in accordance with Islamic values.

Three projects were drafted, one under Ben Bella, the first President of Algeria, two under Boumediene, the second President. All were circulated in small circles: all legalised the inferiority of women, submitting them to the authority of a man who was her legal tutor (father, brother, husband, or . . . elder

son . . .). In May 1984, a Family Code was finally passed, without warning and discussion, which reproduces the Fourth Project that women had challenged in 1981, but for the clause on permission to work.⁶ This law was highly unfavourable to women; women had no right to marry, they had to be given in marriage, no right to divorce, no right to work without permission of the male tutor, restricted rights to inheritance, etc. All this was said to be Koranic, therefore, no argument should be made against it.

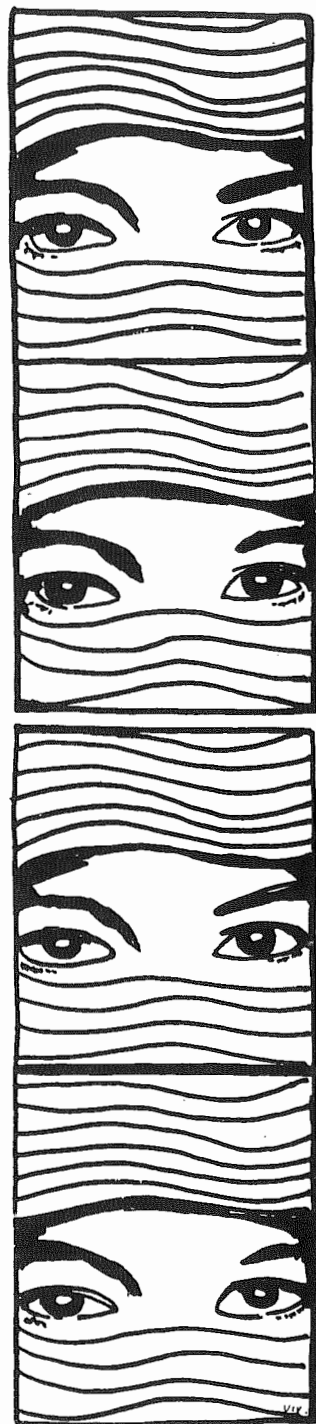
Is it because the paragraph on work appeared to be too far from the officially proclaimed socialism, or because they did not dare state that the Prophet also mentioned wage earning?

It is now a legal fact that women have lost many rights which were guaranteed by the Constitution, on the grounds that these rights were anti-Islamic. All supporters of religion will tell you that religion stands for equality between all human beings; Muslims also have this language, and see no contradiction with the inequalities that Muslim Law enforce on women. With little sense of humour, they also claim that Islam asks from each believer to be fair to his women (polygamy and repudiation are now legal in socialist Algeria); if each man were a true believer, women would be well treated and would not need to seek formal equality.

This evolution goes with the taking over of the male population by rightist Muslims, known in Algeria as Muslim Brothers, and in other countries as Fundamentalists. The rise of religious elements challenging the State in Algeria and channelling the discontent of the population is not an isolated phenomenon; it occurs in most Muslim countries at present. One of the most striking elements of their philosophy is nationalism, entangled with a 'going back to traditions', a search for roots and identity, a rejection of all the evils of Western imperialism. One of the commonalities of these fundamentalist tendencies in Muslim countries is the growing oppression of women.

In many countries or communities, new enforcement of Muslim laws has toughened the situation for women: not only in Algeria, but in Egypt, in Pakistan, in India, in Sudan. Not to speak of the





unspeakable situation of Iranian women.

In Algeria the number of mosques have increased in such a way that each block has a huge room for prayer, each school or university has at least one . . . These improvised mosques gather huge numbers of young men and teenagers, who rule their female folks' according to the prescriptions of their leaders; we have recently discovered that fundamentalists train young leaders in several countries and that huge amounts of money are involved in such trainings. For instance, Pakistani young men might be trained in Iran with Saudi Arabian money, Sudanese might be trained in Pakistan with Egyptian money . . . We hope to encourage research on such matters.

We also found out that both in the Arab world and in South Asia Ministers of Justice meet and attempt to unify Family Codes in a way which is even more restrictive to women. There is no doubt about the international dimension of this attempt to use religion as a unification device in the present world situation.

Never the right moment: women in liberation struggles

We have been made to feel that protesting in the name of women's interests and rights is not to be done NOW. It is never, has never been the right moment: not during the liberation struggle against colonialism, because all forces had to be mobilised against the principal enemy; not after independence, because all forces had to be mobilised to build up the devastated country; not now that racist, imperialist western governments are attacking Islam and the Third World.

Defending women's rights NOW — this 'now' being ANY historical moment — is always a betrayal: of the people, of the nation, of the revolution, of Islam, of national identity, of cultural roots.

This narrow approach of nationalism is very effective: the women's movement in my country is still weak — numerically, ideologically, theoretically — too weak to challenge an interpretation which suits so well the dominant males, including those on the Left, who are the first ones to accuse us of betrayal, of 'imported ideologies', of 'westernism' — using the same terminology which our governments use against the

Left at large.

Women are caught in between two legitimacies: belonging to their people and/or identifying with oppressed women.

It is very hard to persist in total isolation in denouncing the stepping back of so many once 'revolutionary' countries on the women's question, and to go on organising the struggle. My deepest admiration and regard goes to those of us who stubbornly trace their way through this ideological jungle, to promote the cause of women.

Not only are we prevented from speaking for women but also from thinking and even from dreaming about a different fate. We are deprived of our dreams, because we are made to believe that leading the life we lead is the only way to be a good Algerian, a good Pakistani, or a good Sudanese — and a good Muslim. We are not even aware of the differences which exist from one Muslim country to another, of situations which may be more favourable to women than others, of the meshing of culture, traditions, and religion. Let women from Muslim countries step out of their national ghettos; let them see that female circumcision practised in Africa is unthinkable in Asia, that the veil worn in Arab countries is not there in Africa; that none of these practices rely on religious principles, but that religion everywhere backs such practices whenever they allow more control on women.

Moreover, let us dream of secular states, let us dream of the separation of religion and the State; let us dream of an end to nationalism justifying all the crimes against oppressed groups — including women. One of the most ugly crimes is the brain washing we undergo.

Although, in so many cases, we cannot organise inside our own countries — and not even speak without facing heavy repression — we are made to feel that we should not speak outside either; that we should hide, in the name of national loyalty, the crimes committed against women and against other oppressed factions of the people. We are thus made to identify with 'the nation', 'the people', conceptualised as an atomised and undifferentiated mass, without conflicting interests, without classes and without history. In fact we are made to identify with

the State and the ruling class as legitimate representatives of 'the people'.

Unfortunately one can find many recent examples of such attitudes in women's groups in our countries.

I recently heard in Pakistan, comments about exiled Iranian women: their detractors said that they should not describe, in the West, details of the crimes committed against Iranian women, for this will be used against Islam and Muslim countries by racist and rightist westerners, — and against the Iranian people. This leaves open the whole question: are the Iranian people in power or oppressed?

Were the Germans who denounced Hitler during the Second World War anti-Germans or anti-nazis? Whom did silence benefit?

In Algeria, many of us, including myself, kept silent for a whole decade after independence, in order not to give ground to the enemies of the glorious Algerian revolution. By so doing, we only have given time to those in power to strengthen and organise, allowing them, amongst many other things, to prepare and enforce discriminatory laws on women. Even now in Algeria, feminists try to analyse their oppression from within the Algerian context only, refusing to see the international side of it, for fear of being accused of betrayal.

Right now in India, in the name of the riots and massacres led by Hindu Fundamentalists against the Muslim community, Muslim Fundamentalists have succeeded in persuading Muslim women activists to stop their campaigns against Muslim Personal Law — campaigns which may be used 'against the community'; women should therefore suffer discrimination both from the dominant Hindus, and from their Muslim 'community'.

It is certainly true that some rightist forces will exploit our protests especially if we remain isolated — but it is as true to say that other rightist forces exploit our silence.

I believe that is not the question. We have everything to gain in being truly internationalist — in exchanging information, solidarity and support. We can create such a solidarity that it will become more and more difficult to exploit our protests in a way which does not suit our purposes. We have recently set up a network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws. Women and

women's groups from 17 countries or communities now communicate with each other through the network, ask for documentation, compare so-called Muslim laws in different countries, send appeals for solidarity, inform others about their strategies in very practical terms such as writing marriage contracts which give maximum space to women, etc.

Through the network we discovered the planned unification of Family Codes, both in Arab countries, and in South Asia, and about how young Fundamentalists are trained. We hope to know where the training takes place and who is funding it.

We have been informed about progressive interpretations of Islam, from the times of the Prophet till now, and about what happened to the courageous pioneers, men and women, who spoke in favour of an egalitarian interpretation of religion.

We have realised in concrete terms that most of our regimes leave no room for agnosticism or atheism, that religion is forced down our throats because of the constant ideological confusion between religion, culture and nationality — and that we should work towards a clear cut identification of these concepts.

Now that we have started supporting each other 'from within' it becomes more and more difficult to limit our action to a mere imitation of the West. Speaking against discriminatory situations in Algeria or crimes against women in Iran can less and less be used by reactionary forces both inside and outside our countries, because support comes from both inside and outside.

We leave less and less ground to nationalist justification for silence. It is in our interests that internationalism should prevail upon nationalism, and that we should link such struggles from one country to the other.

We are indebted to the early western internationalist feminists who, 20 years ago, started inviting women from the 'Third World' to international feminist gatherings, granting some of us the privilege to not only be in contact with the feminist movement at large, but also meet other 'Third World' women. It is through international feminist gatherings that we came to know each other and later founded associations at regional, continental and international level. □

Notes

1. Djamilia Aïrane: *La femme algérienne et la guerre de libération nationale (1954-62)*, Actes du Colloque d'Oran, 1980.
 2. We will not discuss here the legitimacy of the Arab language in a country where the dominant ethnicities are Berber and speak Berber languages.
 3. Tahar Beahourya: *Economie de l'Algérie*, Maspero, Paris, 1980.
 4. Damien Hellie: *L'autogestion industrielle*, Paris, 1967: "Le socialisme était simplement une bonne recette pour l'accumulation primitive du capital".
 5. Fadila Mrabet: *Les Algériennes, La femme Algérienne*, ed. Maspero, Paris, 1965 and 1967.
 6. Mahfoud Boucebc: *Psychiatrie et Société*, SNED, Alger, 1980.
6. See T&S no.5, "Bound and Gagged by the Family Code".

THE POLITICS OF PASSION

Janice Raymond talks with Susanne Kappeler, Liz Kelly and Kathy Parker about friends, lovers and radical feminism.

KP: Given the different responses to *A Passion for Friends*, I'm interested in what your intentions were in writing it.

JR: My main motive was to write a book that would take a positive view of female friendship because I think it's necessary for feminist theory and action to go beyond women's victimisation. On the other hand I also wanted to be realistic about what the reality of women's friendship is, has been historically, and to talk about the obstacles, not necessarily in a 'how-to' way. I do not pretend that the book is a kind of mechanics of how to win friends. I tried to steer a course between the obstacles and the more empowering dimensions of the history, and I also tried to steer a course between theory and history. Those were the reasons for chapters on nuns and the beguines and marriage registers. I deliberately focused on groups of women rather than two-somes, because I wanted to make the point that friendship was a political as well as a personal reality. I felt that the best way to look at this was to look at groups of women who had very personal friendships, but who did something with the friendship beyond the friendship itself, and to look at how that in turn affected their relations with each other. I consciously tried to focus on the broader picture.

SK: I think the chapter on obstacles is very strong, the critique of relationism and therapy, and linking that to feminism.

JR: I don't know about Britain, but the

prevalence of therapy certainly is a problem in America, particularly in the area I live in. Every 'feminist business' is going out of business, except for feminist therapists. The contention has always been that women don't have money to support a restaurant or bookstore or whatever, but yet there is always money to support therapists. And these therapists are charging enormous fees — not just five dollars a shot! My point was not to question that therapy can be useful for individual women, but to question the way in which it has, at least in the US, become the first thing that women turn to. It actually functions as an institution within feminism at this point. And it does depoliticise a lot of issues that need to be repoliticised.

LK: I noticed that when I went to two US National Coalition conferences, one against Domestic Violence and the other against Sexual Assault. I was shocked at the presence of what I would call 'therapy-speak'. One of the demands from the ex-battered women's caucus, at one of the conferences, was to end mandatory therapy within refuges. One woman gave a workshop questioning the notion of empowerment which she linked to what she called the 'therapeutic state'. She insisted that we needed to get back to talking about women's liberation. She was the only voice saying that.

JR: Yes, she is a lone voice, and you might be interested to know that she just got 'fired' from the shelter she was working

with, specifically because of her views on therapy. The rhetoric that covered her dismissal was that she was unable to work with women within the administration and that her questioning of therapy became an obstacle to continued dialogue among staff

SK: The implication seems to me that it is not only an obstruction to female friendship, but also a key obstacle to a political approach to feelings.

JR: Well, the therapists themselves would claim that within the therapeutic context they raise the political issues and that feminist therapy attempts to bring both together, the personal and the political. But I think within that context it's really hard to claim that. My use of the word 'therapism' is not just meant to imply a critique of the institution of therapy as we know it, but that therapy has so entered the complex way we relate to others, that we use a language — we relate in a very 'feeling' way. Which is not wrong in one sense, but it has come to be overevaluated.

We focus all the time on how we feel towards something rather than focusing on what generates those feelings to begin with. If you don't even critique your feelings, where they come from, and the context that influences your experience, then you don't do a radical critique. If a woman's experience is the last line of resistance, then you really have to question where that experience comes from. So my critique is of the overevaluation of feeling, especially as it affects women's relationships with each other, and also of the ways in which women have basically found it easier to share our pain than to share our strengths. There is almost a knee-jerk reaction to taking care of somebody else, but when that woman is strong or asserts herself then it's more of a conflict.

KP: I felt confused about what your position on the idea of a lesbian continuum is — at some points you seem to support it, but at others you seem to want to define lesbianism much more specifically, politically.

JR: There have been various attempts, within feminist writing, to grapple with the issue of who is and who is not a lesbian. Adrienne Rich's essay, *'Compulsory Hetero-*



sexuality and Lesbian Existence', is a classic piece of writing, though I think women like Barbara Smith, Blanche Cook and others said similar things before her — that the lesbian is the woman who has primary relationships with women and makes those relationships pivotal in life. So there's this expansive definition of what is a lesbian: not necessarily sexually relating to other women, or even with the intention to sexually relate to other women, but rather what defines a lesbian is this kind of primariness of other women. I found that very unsatisfactory.

I thought about it a lot when I wrote the book on friendship because I wanted to

speaking to women who were not lesbians as well as women who were. I wanted to take on this definitional question because I feel that a lesbian isn't any woman who has ever loved her mother, as anyone who is a lesbian knows. You pay a price for being a lesbian, a political price. And at some point, politically speaking, I think you make a choice to be a lesbian. Although I have never been anything but a lesbian, I still think that at some point I made a very conscious choice and I think women who would identify themselves as political lesbians made that choice in the sense of making it visible, articulating it to yourself first of all and then articulating it to a wider world. I'm not talking about simplistic definitions of 'coming out', or having to be 'out' in every aspect of your life. Women who have not made that choice, I wouldn't define as lesbians. I would define them as female friends. I wanted to say that there were different ways in which women made each other primary, and that it was important to consider all of the different ways in which women have put each other first in our lives. Which is not to say that I understand all of those differences, and I think I was clear about that in the introduction. I don't understand why woman-identification or making women primary does not translate into lesbian friendships for some women. But nevertheless that is the case, and I don't think we can regard that necessarily as lesbophobia. Lesbians can't continue to say, 'those women are lesbians, they just don't know it'. I think that's a really patronising way of looking at it — because they do know, and despite their knowing they still make certain choices.

It is interesting that the book has been criticised for having an invisible theory of lesbian friendship. A lot of straight women who have reviewed the book have basically said, 'she's really talking about lesbians, isn't she, she is not talking about friendship in general, she is talking about lesbian friendship, she's just not saying it'.

KP: I find that hard to understand because I felt you were being very specific about women's friendships and *not* lesbian friendships. And I was very uncomfortable with some of the comparisons you made between difficulties in lesbian friendships and hetero-

sexual friendships, I felt you compared them too easily.

JR: That was deliberate. I wouldn't have done that ten years ago. *The Transsexual Empire* in terms of its theory of lesbianism is probably a bit different from *A Passion for Friends*. But I guess what has changed my opinion somewhat is the whole movement for lesbian S&M. I think that I tended to positivise lesbian friendships and lesbian relationships much more than I would do now, because I have seen so many battered lesbians recently. It doesn't change my notion of lesbianism being the ideal condition for female friendship, but it does change my representation of it. Many lesbians have problems which do replicate, in certain ways, patterns in hetero-relations.

SK: I thought that one of the implications of what you were saying in terms of lesbianism, was that there isn't this kind of romantic hierarchy making *the* sexual relationship absolutely the most important, in the heterosexual romantic tradition . . .

JR: That's true. But also, in answering the expansive lesbianism school that Adrienne Rich has defined I was saying that it's important to the definition of lesbian, and in politicising lesbianism, not to take the sexual out of it, as I think Rich's definition has done. On the other hand, in prioritising the sexual you end up making relationism, and even the mechanics of sex, a priority over the political. It's the difference between the lesbian-as-lifestyle school and political lesbianism. In the kind of lesbianism we're seeing a lot of in the States right now, anybody can be a lesbian as long as they sexually relate to a woman; there's no politics. I think that's what has made the entrance of lesbian S&M so prevalent in the States, the politics has been taken out of it entirely. But on the other hand, once you take the sexuality out of it then 'lesbian' has no real content to it, everybody can be a lesbian as long as they are women identified.

KP: One of the things you said in the book is that your lover should be your best friend and your best friend should be your lover. How does that relate to your spectrum of political friendship? In my friendship network, my lover is one of my best friends, but she is not my one best friend. That's really crucial to how I relate, different

women bringing different things to friendships.

JR: That occurs in the section on passionate friendship, in which I was making the point that passion doesn't only have to be confined to lover relationships. I think a lot of us would recognise that in our friendships there is a lot of passion being exchanged. One response to this is that whenever there's passion it has to be acted on sexually, and if you don't, you're repressed or uptight or you've got a false theory about monogamy. I was trying to say that you can have very passionate feelings for another woman that don't necessarily have to be acted upon sexually, if there are reasons for not acting on them. And I think there are many reasons, like timing, or 'temperature', as I have said in the book. So I was trying to set a context for a passion that didn't necessarily have to be sexualised, and I was trying to make friendship not just into 'the personal is political' but the political is also personal. Friendships are also felt.

On the other hand, ideally I do believe that one's lover *should* be one's best friend.

To me, the context of intimacy and sexual intimacy generates another context of friendship — that intimacy generates a certain knowledge of another person and it seems to me that that intimacy should translate into something other than sexual intimacy, that it should translate into a friendship intimacy as well. I find it hard for those two to be split. I find it hard to say that a lover should not be a best friend, given the knowledge a lover has of you. Now, that may come out of the fact that I've been in a relationship for thirteen years, and I'm quite willing to admit that after that period of time one's lover does become one's best friend. It's not only a best lover relationship but a best friend relationship.

KP: But we are not really talking about lovers not being one's best friend, we are talking about other women also being best friends. It's possible to stop being lovers and still be best friends.

JR: It's certainly possible to be intimate and passionate friends, but I'm skeptical about how many 'best friends' one can have. Maybe you're more pluralistic about



this than I am.

KP: I remember feeling that one of the hardest things that was expected of me would be to remain someone's friend when I really wanted to be their lover and they didn't want to be mine. And all the judgemental attitudes that would come at me. I felt very scared that if the relationship wanted changing and I couldn't cope with it, then I was terribly at fault and not political enough.

JR: This is one of the things I've been critical about in the book in relation to the so-called feminist community — the way in which the feminist community seems to have such power 'over'. I don't want to use the word 'intruding' but in a certain sense it is. There is a way in which the community has come to have judgement over everything in women's lives that again I think is destructive. We have almost objectified the community in the sense of saying, the community has to take responsibility for this or the community mustn't do that, or the community has to do this. To the extent that it becomes in some circles almost a totalitarian institution, so that you know that if you split up with someone, the community is going to know about this, and there are going to be judgements coming from the community and women are going to be forced to take sides.

I was critical about that theory and reality of community because it reminds me of the convent, for one thing! — where the community had an enormous power over the individual and where there were basic intrusions into privacy. When we said that the personal is political, that got redefined into 'everything that is *private* is political'. The notion of privacy has somehow come to be seen as counter-revolutionary, as not in women's interest, when it really is. There has to be privacy that we preserve about aspects of our lives. For many women the "feminist community" has come to define everything in their lives, and they think they are accountable to a community which has jurisdiction over them. There is almost a promiscuity of gossip, talk and indiscretion which allows the community to make these judgements. Individuals have to take responsibility for checking the community as well as the community checking the individual.

LK: What are your thoughts about the areas that you feel radical feminism, either in the US or in general, should focus on?

JR: I think radical feminism has been eclipsed in the US, particularly within universities. There's been a real effort to minimise it, to deradicalise it, and this comes from many different areas. Radical feminism has to re-assert itself. One of the areas I talked about a lot in the book is 'worldliness'. I think that the stance on the part of some radical feminists in the past was a kind of absencing oneself from the institutions of the world. Some women thought that I was saying that we should uncritically assimilate into the institutions. I wasn't saying that at all, I thought I made that very clear. It's important to say that there is no haven, there is no pollution-free patriarchal space anywhere.

I think it's important for radical feminists and for radical feminism to work within all sorts of institutions as well as to work outside of them. That boundary, what it means to be in and what it means to be outside of institutions is not crystal clear to me, because I think that many women who have worked within straight institutions have done very radical feminist work while working in those institutions, and that a lot of women who have not worked within institutions have not done particularly radical work. So I would want to emphasise the necessity for women to reconsider the simplistic definitions that we've drawn in the past about what it means to do work within certain institutions and within certain groups. I see that as a real necessity for the future of radical feminism. I use this phrase in the book, — it's important for women to work as women, among women, among men. And to claim a woman-centred space in the midst of a world that men define for us. The tendency on the part of some radical feminists in the past has been to set up a kind of separate space and to think that this is the only space from which a pure politics can proceed. I think one can be a separatist within institutions. I am critical of a certain brand of separatism which I call dissociation from the world. I think that all of us have a responsibility to that world — we have a right to live in it and we have a right to claim a space in it. □

Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire*, 1979, Women's Press.
Janice Raymond, *A Passion for Friends*, 1986, Women's Press.
Adrienne Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, 1979, Onlywomen Press.

'with women'

What changes should we aim for in women's health care? Laura Potts reviews a collection of articles by women practitioners striving to achieve "a patchwork of the personal, the political and the pragmatic".

The book is a collection of eight contributions relating the struggles faced by women who are professional health care workers and feminists. It shows their struggles to avoid compromising their politics, to relate their feminist theory to their work practice and to survive in both personal and professional terms.

The book's title raises various questions: what is feminist practice? how does it relate to theory? and what sort of health care do we want? "Feminism is real only in so far as we can represent its perspective in the dailiness of our lives"¹ — and what is more commonplace than our experiences of health?

Democratising health care relationships and situations has always been a fundamental aim of the women's health movement. One aspect of this has been to challenge the professionalism which often seems to stand between us, the consumers of health care, and the meeting of our needs. A substantial proportion of women's health literature has considered this from our position as consumers. *Feminist Practice in Women's Health Care* fulfills an important role by discussing how women working professionally in health care can bring about feminist changes.

The contributors write from a variety of work backgrounds: nurses, general practitioners, teachers and researchers. Each shows how she is trying to bring about a different way of relating to women as 'patient', 'client' or 'student' in the dailiness of her work.

Them and Us

The picture the writers give of the ways in which they are challenging the barriers between consumer and professional is an optimistic one. It is undermined, however, by their tendency to fall into the very trap of partisanship they are trying to avoid: for in the terms of the women's health movement, we are all, in some way or other, most of the time, both receivers and provi-



ders of health care². Mary Twomey's and Merryn Cook's references to how they experience their *own* health are particularly valuable in making this crucial connection. But repeatedly (and in plenty of other women's health literature too) this assertion is negated by the language of the book. "Gaining information enhances *the* women's self-confidence, because *they* can then better understand *their* own bodies and what happens to them . . ." etcetera (p.25, Jane Black and Bie Nio Ong — my emphasis). Such uncaredful use of pronouns simply perpetuates the rules of 'them and us' in inappropriate ways. Having just grappled with this problem in a piece of collective writing myself, I know it's not easy to find coherent alternatives. One of the Filipino languages, Waray Waray, has several different forms of the pronoun 'we', each with its own distinct meaning to demonstrate where the speaker's loyalties lie and with whom she is identifying herself. Much more straightforward!

Christine Webb tries to bring together her experiences as both gynaecology nurse and patient, but while she shows us very clearly the two sides of the picture, there is no real integration. This is because, perhaps, as she says (quoting J A Ashley's *Power in Structured Misogyny: implications for the politics of care*):

The traditional professionalism of nursing has made us 'split ourselves off from the common life of women and deny our female heritage and identity in our work'. (p.111)

There are, however, a couple of chapters which have a happy note of integration. I found Maris Kirkham's account of her work as a midwife particularly inspiring. She writes how, for her, the word 'midwife' means in concrete terms what 'feminist' means ideologically — that is, 'with women'. Both she and Mary Twomey overwhelmed me with their enthusiastic commitment to their work and their lived feminism. I envy their passion and dedication which carry no trace, incidentally, of the self-sacrificing devotion traditionally supposed to characterise women working in health care. They demonstrate a fundamental baseline of feminist practice: that of genuine respect for other women.

Allowing a choice

I also value the openness with which some of the contributors expose the problems they encounter in dealing with the contradictions their politics pose for their work.

Sometimes the greatest struggle is to allow a woman the choice not to discuss things with us (Maggie Eisner and Maureen Wright (p.135).

I sometimes find it difficult to hold on to my belief that it is the elderly person who should decide what is best for herself. (Mary Twomey, p.60)

It is an openness shown most clearly by those writers who express what their feminism means in personal terms, rather than in the more 'objective' and 'academic' accounts. The day to day descriptions of their work give these women's contributions a lively authenticity and directness. But this whole area of trying to forge new relationships within health care practice is certainly however one of the most problematic for the women writing in this book.

Positive changes to existing health care systems are proposed by several contributors. Christine Webb writes of a "community of shared caring"; Mary Twomey sees the health care worker as an "advocate"; Maggie Eisner and Maureen Wright describe her as a



"mediator"; Maris Kirkham defines her role as helping women "beat their (sic) own paths around and through the system". It is a model of health care which recognises our individual needs and is woman-centred, described by Merryn Cooke in her account of her counselling work with a Rape Crisis Line as expressing "a respect for the client's (sic) potential to lead her own life and utilise her own resources." (p.148)

False equality

Several of the contributors, however, write of the problems they meet in trying to make 'sisterly' relationships across the "vast spaces"³ imposed by their profession — and, on occasions, by their feminism too. Hilary Barker has graphically described the pitfalls created by assuming such equal relationships are always possible and the false equality trap that lay in wait for her as she tried to "minimise any divisions between myself (as tutor) and the other women in the (women's health) group which might detract from an equality of power and participation between us".⁴ Maggie Eisner and Maureen Wright also recognise this:

In our eagerness to purge ourselves of our expert status (as GPs), we should not go to the other extreme and insist that we have nothing of value to offer. (p.123)

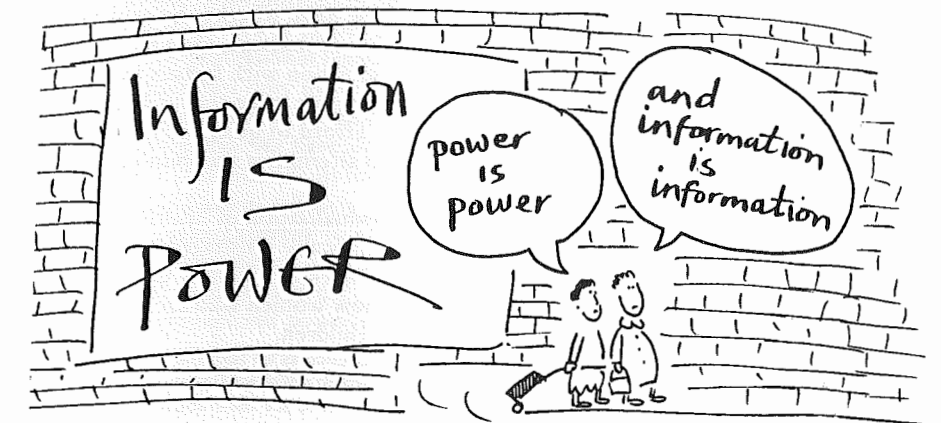
Our distaste for our position of authority may lead us to pretend it doesn't exist. (p.131)

They draw a very useful distinction between "the genuine authority which comes from the skill and experience we have been lucky enough to acquire" and the "false authority which comes from inappropriate power which we are given by society" (p.130). I am uneasy, however, with Jean Orr's picture of a restructured health visiting service. Yes indeed, the interaction should be one of equals, with the woman being seen as the expert on herself and her family, as she describes on p.77. But the "regular in-depth assessment of women we visit", spoken of in her next breath, seems at odds with this aspiration. The programme Jean Orr describes emerges, ultimately, as a simple restatement of the social control in which the professional still determines the boundaries and asks the questions.

Information and power

In considering these issues of power, both in our dealings with professionals and in terms of our control over our own lives, the women's health movement has stressed that 'information is power'. The contributors to this book all subscribe to this theory, detailing ways in which they can help women to reclaim control and power by providing more information than their colleagues traditionally might do. This certainly seems good feminist practice, but I am concerned that the shift in power that occurs when we, as consumers, take on new information (and which only slightly jolts the professional monopoly on control) all too readily becomes a shift in responsibility too. While such a shift in responsibility may be empowering, it can also, conversely, be traumatic and become a burden of worry. Because most health care encounters take place in a one-to-one individualised setting, whether it be an appointment with a doctor or a visit from the district nurse at home, we tend to have to take on that responsibility in isolation. Reinforced by the Tory exhortation 'Look After Yourself', the ideology of liberation becomes one of oppression, implying that we alone are responsible for our health and ill-health.

The women's health movement has, I think, been over-optimistic about the degree of control we can hope to exercise over our health and our lives in general. We may feel more confident in our dealings with health professionals; we may feel less alienated from our bodies. But I think we inevitably confront the broader context of our lives and health; the impossibility of taking control when so many factors that affect our



states of well-being are outside our control. To "recapture control" at this level requires energy and commitment that most of us are unable to devote. I valued the contributions made by the women writing in this book who are actively engaged in that struggle, but as Mary Twomey says so succinctly:

Control cannot simply be handed back without any changes in the system which generates the inequality. (p.56)

This is a theme that is echoed throughout the book but is, I feel, insufficiently developed by any of the writers. In terms of individual feminist practices there are plenty of examples of inspiring work, but the actual details of "changes in the system" remain undeveloped. Perhaps the conflicts of working "in and against the state"⁵ are too acute.

Individual solutions

Our state of health and the kind of care we seek and receive are determined by social, political and economic factors. This point is passed over by all the contributors, none of whom offer any detailed analysis of the institutional structures of class, race or sexuality which underlie and perpetuate the inequalities in health care. Yet a fundamental precept of feminist theory is the relation of individual experience of oppression to collective experience. It is important that the women's health movement places the experience of (ill) health in a broader social context and challenges the political and economic determinants. If we fail to do so, it remains legitimate for me to complain about the pain in my neck, rather than about what has caused it. I may be exercising greater control in my life by getting rid of the pain, whether by aspirin, herbs, relaxation or massage, than by confronting its association with factors in my life that are giving me it, be they difficulties in a job I can't afford to quit, bad housing when I have no alternative accommodation or whatever.

This individualisation of health problems is graphically illustrated by Bie Nio Ong in her work in a Family Centre. She describes how women who are 'abusing' their children, see their existence as an isolated individual one, unrelated to society as a whole, and that they therefore see their abuse as a per-

sonal problem. They cannot see any broader, less individualised explanation. (p.176)

We cannot be bullied into feminism and the notion of sisterhood may seem to be of uncertain benefit. Respect for each other implies not imposing a political analysis, as much as not imposing a particular treatment. As Jean Orr says:

What right do we have to encourage women to raise their consciousness if we cannot follow through with the help they may need? Are we to be just another form of tyranny, forcing women to confront aspects of their lives which are too painful for them to change? (p.71)

Our health may be our only reference point for dissatisfactions and complaints. As Merryn Cooke points out, we tend to regard physical ailments as entrance tickets to help and support.

Outside the system

One of the most important feminist challenges to current health care for women comes from outside the existing system where we strive genuinely to demedicalise our lives and provide the support we need. It is this aspect of 'feminist practice in women's health care' that is wholly missing from this book.

I therefore want briefly to describe a couple of examples of good feminist health care outside the professional models. Bristol

Women's Health Group grew out of a self-examination and self-help group and has done a great deal of very dynamic work over the last five years. In particular they provide a Well Woman Information Service, holding two sessions a week, in direct response to women's expressed needs for information and space to share experiences. Calderdale Well Woman Centre in Halifax is another group which has largely managed to avoid the medicalised context which characterises many Well Woman initiatives. Like the Bristol drop-in centre, there is a genuine feeling of that over-worked (and too seldom realised) feminist cliché, the 'supportive environment', recognised and valued by all users. Both projects, however, suffer from the dilemma constantly facing health work outside the established system — that of being dependent on women's unpaid labour.

From reading this book, you could well believe that no such autonomous groups, arising from and responding to women's expressed health needs, existed — that self-help groups went out with consciousness-raising. Ruth Wallsgrove, in an article in *Spare Rib* 170, September 1986, has demonstrated that activism is still alive at grassroots level; so, at varying stages of exhaustion and enthusiasm, are unfunded women's health groups.

It is disappointing that the focus of the book contributes to an unbalanced picture of feminist involvement in women's health care. I am particularly disappointed because this negates the contributors' expressed commitments to challenging the professionalism that traditionally characterises so much health care and stands in the way of

establishing the alliances we need to make in order to realise any new dimensions in women's health care. I feel the book, as titled, is seriously limited by the fact that the contributors are all (with one notable exception) professionals, working either in the National Health Service or in teaching. Perhaps this is a reflection of how feminist ideology has permeated the liberal 'caring' professions and thereby gained a degree of respectability. As Andrea Dworkin pointed out recently, in a lecture she gave at York University in November last year, it is only through the hard work of active feminists, listening to and validating women's experience, that violence against women and child abuse have become topics for public concern and foci for social work intervention. We have fought hard for our voices to be heard and for the acceptance of feminist ideas by the general public and the progress we have made here is by no means worthless. But as greater light has been thrown on the public and professional front of feminist input to women's health care, the shadow cast on other aspects has deepened. Women's health care has a much broader scope than that implied by this book and there are valuable lessons we can learn by sharing the experiences of all feminists involved in developing women-centred health care practices at all levels.

One further and, I think, crucial omission is a contribution from women involved in 'alternative medicine'. This is particularly startling given women's increasing use of the various branches of holistic health care. But I suspect that many feminist practitioners in this area of health care will be able to relate their experiences to many of the contributions in the book. The same dilemmas of power and control colour their professional relationships too.

We need not only different kinds of health care, but a radical restructuring of their delivery too. We have worked to dismantle the professional mystique around health and illness in self-help groups, validating our own expertise in a lay context. Good feminist practice must mean challenging the structures of professionalism which perpetuate our powerlessness. Only when we have done this can we make new alliances to develop truly women-centred health care. □

Notes

1. M. Howell, 'Can we be feminists and professionals?', *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, vol.2, pp.1-7, Pergamon Press.
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Angela Martin



Angela Martin



writing our own history: ORGANIZING AGAINST THE ODDS



In 1985 Christina Loughran wrote a series of articles for the Northern Irish feminist journal 'Women's News', based on the experiences of Northern Irish feminists during the last decade. Here we reproduce extracts from the 'Women's News' articles.

On an international scale, NI as part of Britain is an advanced capitalist area, but being on the periphery and under British occupation, NI is also one of those areas part of which is engaged in an anti-imperialist, nationalist struggle. That means we have both elements of traditional western feminism in the guise of liberal women's rights campaigners of the reformist and essentially middle-class kind, and elements of the self-described 'more revolutionary' feminism of anti-imperialist groupings. The anti-imperialist feminists come from both the left and republican parties and therefore are more directly oppressed than some middle-class reformists, as they are not only working-class but catholic or nationalist in upbringing and suffer under the occupation of the British army, UDR and RUC. Some women in these areas feel they have more in common with men in their oppression than with some feminists; others realise that certain things like violence against women threatens all women and have criticised left and republican parties for being sex blind and reactionary on women's issues.

There are also a growing number of

feminists who are neither in the anti-imperialist left, nor in the reformist groupings. Instead, they are found in single issue, distinctively feminist campaigns of a more radical nature. That is, they take a strong woman-identified line, organise in women-only collectives and live as independent a lifestyle as possible. Whether employed or not, these women devote all their lives to the needs of other women, both catholic and protestant, and have helped to establish Women's Aid, the Rape Crisis Centre and Women's News, and they form the back bone of the campaign for abortion reform. This has been the result of many years of struggle and defeat in the search for a new feminist autonomy.

In Britain, recently, many women have joined the Labour Party, in an attempt to build a feminist opposition to Thatcher and to ensure permanent gains for women in a future Labour government. They have made head-way in Labour-controlled councils and the GLC but these successes have to be balanced against the increased burden of unemployment and poverty, which is felt the most by black women, northern English, Welsh, Scottish and NI women. These have

brought a new crisis to feminism in how to cope with recession, cut backs and defending existing facilities in the wake of increasing needs.

NI shares in all of the problems of British feminists but as well as racism from the British we have sectarianism within. Because both the protestant and catholic right are so well organised, little movement has been achieved on key feminist issues like abortion, which is illegal under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act. Also the fight for basic resources, centres in which to meet, and fund raising, is made incredibly hard.

Early struggles

The earliest women's groups to emerge in NI had a specific socialist-feminist flavour. The Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (NIWRM) and the Socialist Women's Group (SWG) both started in 1975. This was International Women's Year and although little was gained on a practical level, media coverage did raise women's issues and some talk of what feminists had achieved in Britain and the USA was discernable.

Feminism does not develop easily in a war situation. Five years after women's groups started in Dublin, Northern Irish women were struggling to organise women in the universities, something which is still not fully achieved. The issues which dominated in 1975 were unemployment and the national liberation struggle. The left were divided on these issues, so it should be of no surprise that women would be divided along these lines too. Eventually it emerged that those women with most in common with the Communist Party of Ireland were members of the NIWRM. Members of the SWG tended to be sympathetic to the Trotskyist left. These differences affected policies, organisation, and how they viewed republicans and anti-imperialist unity. It was only after the formation of feminist groups that a more substantial coverage of women's issues was given by the left, in journals and papers.

Previously, women's issues were covered — if at all — in a very theoretical way. For example, the Belfast Telegraph on 28.4.75 covered the first women's film weekend, which was held at Queen's

University:

men were also welcome at the conference and in all, about 60 people attended the first discussion period on Saturday . . . an action group was formed with the aims of bringing the role of women in NI in line with that of their sisters in Britain.

Also published was the first research into women's position in NI as compared to Britain, compiled by Lynda Edgerton. This showed lower pay, worse working conditions, more sexism in education and a failure to extend the 67 Abortion and Divorce legislation to NI.

The action group met several times to campaign to have the Sex Discrimination Act brought to NI. Soon debate started on broadening out the group on the basis of a women's charter. Many long hours were spent that summer discussing the Working Women's Charter from England and the recently published charter of the Irish Women United, from Dublin. The NIWRM published theirs on October 13 and a conference was called to discuss it in Transport House on November 29. It was directed at 'trade unions, organisations and interested parties.'



Rolsin Conroy (left front) at the Irish Women Speak Out book launch in the Council for the Status of Women (CSW) offices, Dublin, June 1981.

Beth Ridgell

A Charter for women

Division again became apparent in discussion over a demand for the right of women to work to be included in the Charter. This was viewed by those sympathetic to the Communist Party as divisive and sectional, whilst others wished to stress that it was important to include women in the defence against unemployment, which many other anti-imperialists were involved in building. Also, there was considerable controversy over whether to actually call for the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to NI. Some thought this too restrictive in the light of attempts to restrict it in Britain. It was in the end subsumed under a 'parity of rights with the UK' clause.

The Women's Charter for NI called for equal opportunities in education, housing and work; equal pay for work of equal value; equality of legal and social rights; the right to maternity leave and childcare facilities; parity of rights for women in NI with women in England; improved family planning services and recognition for non-working wives and mothers. The NIWRM also developed a formal constitution, elected posts and had male members.

Some women felt increasingly dissatisfied with this and they formed the Socialist Women's Group in October 1975. For a year there was dual membership of the NIWRM. Increasingly, however, the NIWRM was criticised by the SWG because they believed that:

What women were offered was a reformist and objectively pro-imperialist women's movement in the guise of non-sectarianism . . . Their failure to state a position on British Imperialism quite evidently meant that they would never attempt to involve women in anti-imperialist areas in the women's movement.

Also, they felt dissatisfied with following policies which amounted to those being offered by the Communist Party and the Civil Rights Association.

In NI we have never had a tradition of equal rights feminism, indeed we never had equal rights for all citizens. In such an atmosphere, a call for women's rights, no matter how limited, is to be welcomed. The NIWRM has survived to the present day and opened a women's centre in 1980. But despite concentrating on trade union

activity, in order to attract working class women, its membership has remained the same, with some 50 members on paper and a dozen really active. However, this membership reflects activists, not rank and file members.

The SWG was never bigger than a dozen and started its first year with just five women. It went to the opposite extreme from the NIWRM, by taking definite 'purist' lines on issues as do most Trotskyist organisations and made joining dependent on agreeing to the group's manifesto. This was first published on March 8 1976. Part of the Manifesto stated that:

The SWG believes that the campaign which must now begin here should not simply set its sights on achieving parity of rights with Britain, but must be seen in terms of an overall struggle for socialism within which the question of emancipation of women is a vital part. We recognise the important part many women have played in the anti-imperialist and economic struggles of the past, but point out that too often their demands have been ignored by their male comrades and suppressed by the women themselves, out of a desire to preserve a supposed unity of forces.

The SWG also criticised the Churches and made explicit demands on the state for an end to government spending cuts, the right of women to work; a woman's right to control her reproduction including contraception and abortion on demand; maternity leave and socialisation of childcare; state financed refuges for battered women; creches and nursery schools; an independent income for women, the right to divorce; and viewed the family as an oppressive institution. Women, they argued, had to be in the vanguard of the struggle of the organised working class. The full liberation of women could only take place in a socialist society.

The SWG objected to men in the women's liberation movement, and held women-only meetings, but they rejected the more radical feminist 'woman-identified-woman' principle because as one former member put it, their experience was heterosexual and they had so many other issues to prioritise (interview).

The SWG finally stopped attending the NIWRM meetings when they split over the peace movement. As with Republicans and the anti-imperialist left, the SWG opposed the peace people while the NIWRM made

two contradictory statements on them, causing some confusion. This was because they had some members for and others against support for the security forces. They also used the occasion to speak out against the support given to the Troops Out movement in Britain. The SWG were alarmed by how Spare Rib and Wires (British feminist papers) were giving coverage to the Peace People as a 'women's movement'.

The real crux for the SWG came when, in attending centre meetings of the Relative's Action Committees (RAC's), they met politicised catholic working class women from West Belfast. These women had no contacts with feminism but made up the majority of those on the street committees who ran bus services to the prison, organised aid for dependants and effectively kept the struggle around the prisoners alive. When the blanket protest started in the H Blocks after the withdrawal of political status, it was upon these issues that women were involved in campaigning. Some women, dissatisfied with the undemocratic ways of Sinn Fein, in particular with the way in which it treated women as inferior, began to meet before RAC meetings. Eventually a few formed the Andersonstown Women's Group which was affiliated to the SWG. A Derry branch was later formed.

SWG Dissolves

Above all else, the SWG wanted to build a working class based women's movement, but because they had a worked-out position on things, they found it very difficult to translate it into accessible language, and the RAC women took offence over suggestions that the struggle for political status was male-dominated.

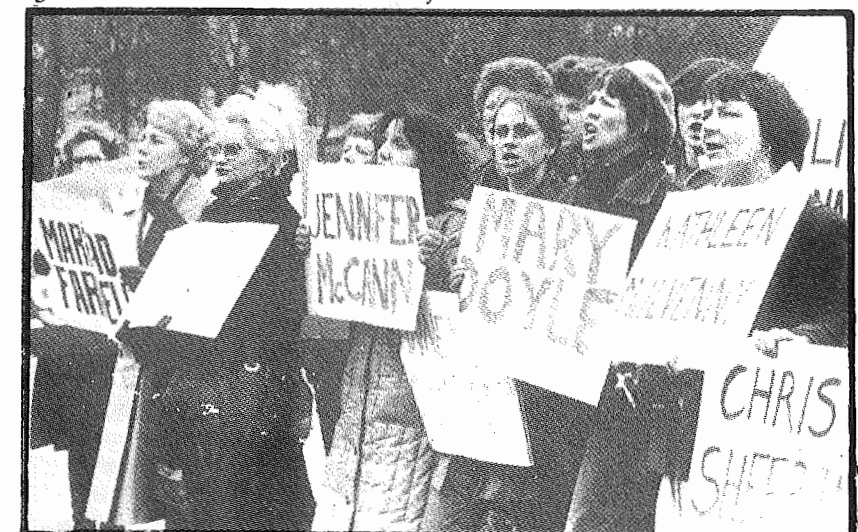
It was primarily over their relationship to the Andersonstown women that the SWG decided to dissolve. This was a painful and unanimous decision. They wished to become more broad-based and to disseminate socialist and feminist ideas, not just to the left, but:

to a wider number of women to involve them in the struggle to take control of their lives. (Women's Action, 29.4.77)

Active campaigns

After the Armagh debate and the dissolving

of the Belfast Women's collective, various single issue campaigns which started in 1980 now became most active. The Rape Crisis Centre soon moved to its own premises and opened in 1984. Their collective has since provided confidential help for any woman in need. In 1985 the Rape and Incest Line also opened to work more specifically in the area of incest. Women's Aid are opening a refuge for incest victims this year and between them, these services have provided information and media exposure on violence against women in the home and family life.



International Women's Day picket, on Armagh Women's Jail, in solidarity with women prisoners, 8 March 1983.

Other campaigns have developed such as the Northern Ireland Abortion Law Reform Association, which the Northern Ireland Abortion Campaign set up to gain broader support for the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to NI. These campaigns have suffered from their distance in Westminster and the almost complete lack of support among the established political parties — both the SDLP and the Unionists.

On the issue of abortion, for example, most of the local councils and the NI Assembly have passed motions opposing any proposal that the 1967 Abortion Act may be extended to NI. The Assembly debate was mostly conducted between DUP members and revealed complete ignorance as to the contraceptive methods available, their abortive effect if any, the procedures and implications of abortion and the underestimated numbers of women resident in

MANIFESTO
Socialist Women's Group

The Socialist Women's Group was formed in October 1975 to a group of women who were active in revolutionary politics and women's liberation groups in Northern Ireland. For some months, the formation of the SWG represented a team with the feminist oriented politics of the women's liberation movement and a recognition of the need to create the women's own social organisation of women from a class-based perspective. For others, it represented a recognition of the need to create the women's own social organisation of women. It was with the SWG, therefore, that the SWG was formed. It was with the SWG, therefore, that the SWG was formed. It was with the SWG, therefore, that the SWG was formed.

This specific oppression has, we believe, been almost totally ignored both in the anti-imperialist struggle and in the trade union movement, with the result that on the question of competing for women's rights, Northern Ireland is one of the most backward areas in Europe.

The Catholic Church has enormous influence in Ireland. In the South, since it exerts considerable influence on the state, it has consistently opposed the introduction of reform in family law, divorce and the provision of contraception. The Catholic Church in the Protestant churches in the North has meant that many of the health reforms concerning divorce, abortion and married women's property rights which are being introduced here, have been delayed or not introduced at all. Their reform work in Belfast, and an extension of the health service to include first cancer centres, other centres for mental health, etc. have, we must admit, not been done in any other area of the world. It is, we believe, as a result of the influence of women in Ireland.

The SWG believes that the campaign which must now begin here should not simply set its sights on achieving parity of rights with Britain, but must be seen in terms of an overall struggle for socialism within which the question of the emancipation of women is a vital part. We recognise the important part many women have played in the anti-imperialist and economic struggles of the past, but point out that too often their demands have been ignored by their male comrades and suppressed by the women themselves, out of a desire to preserve a supposed unity of forces.

Joanne O'Brien/Format



NI from both committees who travel to England for abortions. When it was mentioned that rape victims should be entitled to abortion the debaters felt that the only obvious innocent victim of a rape was the baby conceived as a result of rape!

In grass roots loyalist areas women have recently gained two new women's centres. However the most popular campaigns in these areas have been on preventing closures of schools, action on debt, benefit take-up campaigns and housing action. No specifically feminist issues have been taken up. When the Strip Searches issue was recently commented on by the UDA spokeswoman on women's rights she argued that feminists who would support the ending of strip searches were conning others into supporting Sinn Fein (*Ulster magazine April 1985*).

Attempts at bringing women together across the sectarian divide have made limited gains. Women's Information Days, whilst concentrating on popular general issues have raised awareness on issues such as violence against women, but these women go home to separate lives and sectarian division in very real practical terms. Mostly women meet in their own local community centres for education or health courses and various discussions, but in this case they would not mix with the 'other side'.

The NIWRM has supported many of

these initiatives as well as supporting the progress women have been making inside the trade union movement north and south. Reforms in divorce and domestic proceedings orders have brought them into line with the UK, making a real difference to women's lives.

Feminists, like other pressure groups here, unfortunately are unable to rely on the traditional liberal democratic reform mechanisms; instead we are forced to follow a haphazard path to reform which relies largely on pressure from outside NI. In the present new right atmosphere it is very hard to see further reform becoming a reality as the constitutional question is once again to the forefront of political debate.

Republican response

Those feminists who gave up their autonomy to go into Sinn Fein have on the other hand made real gains within their party in terms of the policies adopted. Sinn Fein are now in favour of a 'woman's right to choose' even though until 1985 they opposed abortion. They also support provision of free contraception, childcare facilities, an end to sex role stereotyping in education etc, and they support the campaign for divorce reform in the south. But there is little doubt that Sinn Fein have failed to contemplate how difficult it may be in future to implement their reforms.

The Strip Searches Campaign has revealed that many new alliances for the Armagh women's case are now possible. Support for ending the strip searches has come from the Catholic Church, trade unions and the British and Irish opposition parties.

Feminist options

Feminism everywhere is suffering from the effects of recession and the turn of many western governments to the right. Most feminists are also educated and middle-class and often divorced from working class life. Growing unemployment has made a mockery of legislation to end discrimination at work, whilst abortion reform in NI is as far off as ever. NI is not comparable to the UK when it comes to social democratic reform. The historical divisions along sectarian class lines makes it hard to organise

effectively.

Feminists here are organising against the odds and the surprising thing is that we exist at all. But our gains and existence are very easily ignored by the government and political parties alike, and that we must face up to.

By 1980 the NIWRM had conducted campaigns for the Sex Discrimination Act to be extended to NI, demanded better day care provision for the under 5s, and had worked on issues like divorce reform and helped to get the Domestic Proceedings Act extended to NI. They had a dispute with the EOC over access to meetings, policies, and funding for research, which they used to look at sex education in schools here. Statements were made supporting the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act and homosexuality legislation, and they called for an end to all repressive legislation, "including an end to all violence from whatever source". Indeed, in this period the NIWRM moved closer to the Communist Party policies, supporting the ICTU Better Life for All campaign and affiliating to the Women's International Democratic Federation, an alliance of Soviet-orientated women's groups. Some members went to Moscow and Budapest in 1978, raising issues such as women's changing employment patterns and poverty in NI. They also adopted a charter of children's rights which called for an education free from "sexism, racism, sectarianism and class bias".

Nevertheless, other women's groups did form who had connections with the NIWRM, reinforcing the need for a centre

from which to coordinate activity. Their women's centre was set up in '79, but soon ran into problems. Despite success as a campaigning base, as an advice centre it was initially a flop and just as it was getting started, feminist groups in NI were torn apart by the debate over the political prisoners in Armagh women's jail.

Challenging beliefs

In September 1977 the SWG reformed as the Belfast Women's Collective (BWC), arguing that it was:

vital to work in as wide a range of issues as possible, including those which may not initially meet with a big response because they challenge traditional political and religious beliefs. (*Women's Action May/June 1978*)

Together with the Andersonstown women, some members of the BWC decided to form Women Against Imperialism (WAI). But the WAI accused the BWC of being 'academic and middle-class' and of not giving the work of the Relatives Action Committee (RAC) full recognition:

It was seen as only one campaign among many. In our view, working with anti-imperialist women in the RAC is not just another campaign. Imperialism is the major dominating force in the lives of women throughout Ireland and specifically the women in West Belfast. (*Women's Action May/June 1978*)

WAI went on to attack the BWC in the same terms as both groups were criticising the NIWRM: for being 'reformist'.

Armagh brought ambivalent feelings towards republicans out into the open. Many members of the BWC did support Armagh but it was made difficult because





legislation, Trinity College, Dublin (TCD), November 1980.

they did not all see it as a feminist issue and what support there was being interpreted as support for republicanism and the armed struggle of the IRA:

We felt it was such an emotive issue and it got such a lot of international publicity that all of a sudden the anti-imperialist feminists were the ones who became *the* feminists... (Interview 7.2.85)

After various disagreements the BWC dissolved, with some members dropping out of feminist politics and others becoming involved in single-issue campaigns only.

The NIWRM had members both for and against Armagh, but in the end they decided not to opt for either position, in order to prevent a public split. They argued that:

The fact that a group of women prisoners is demanding political status does not make it a feminist issue, any more than the fact that Cumann na mBan exists makes a united Ireland a feminist aim. We do oppose the harassment and ill-treatment of all women prisoners, however, just as we oppose the treatment handed out to women in the name of 'community justice' by paramilitary groups. (NIWRM statement Oct 1980)

This, in turn, was translated as total opposition to the political status campaign. Women Against Imperialism were raising the issue of violence against women by battering, rape and the security forces. In their paper 'Saorbhean' they also wrote articles on health, contraception, prosti-

tution and sexuality. But the Armagh campaign soon became their only focus as they were caught up in fast moving events with the court case of the 11 women (8 in WAI), who were arrested at the first picket on Armagh on March 8 1979. They toured Ireland and Britain but the antagonism they encountered forced them to distance themselves from feminism. One member stated:

I don't want to be called a feminist — not yet — its remote somehow. Not earthy enough for what I'm struggling with. I want liberation from all oppression. I want the people to be free. I'm against imperialism. Feminists won't deal with that, from what I can see. (McCafferty, 1980: 66)

The question of Armagh meant that for WAI, other issues were viewed as a luxury: we are not forgetting about abortion and contraception, but there's a war going on and women have to show themselves in this war, they have to stand there and fight with the men, or the brand new 32 county socialist Republic will hold nothing for women.

It was just such an attitude which provoked Sinn Fein women to organise in their own party by late 1979. WAI fell apart under innumerable pressures in early 1981. The Armagh issue in bringing the relationship between feminism and anti-imperialist politics to the fore, destroyed the independent anti-imperialist voice and split what was left of the women's movement. □

We are beginning a series on the state of the Women's Liberation Movement. We would like to invite our readers to write short pieces on your personal views. Do you think the WLM has lost its sense of direction? Have you moved away from certain kinds of political work to others? Have your politics changed, and if so, how has this affected your personal life, sexuality and friendships. What are your priorities for the WLM now? Sigrid Nielsen and Ella Babaire open the discussion.

"From the Faraway Nearby"

Georgia O'Keeffe, American artist, gave one of her paintings a curious name: 'From the Faraway Nearby'. What she meant, I don't know, but the title describes feminist theory, and the tensions within it, as aptly as any phrase I've ever heard.

Feminism is a movement with two perspectives — and, unlike other movements, we make a point of weighting the two equally. We long to talk and think in universals — even our characteristic writing style uses 'we' to mean 'all feminists everywhere', and repeats the word 'women' so often that a writer finds herself wishing desperately for a synonym. Against this desire for the long view, the faraway, stands our belief that the political grows from the personal and that our own circumstances must always figure consciously in our picture of the world. Feminism strives to focus the long view and the close-up in one scene. Sometimes it nearly succeeds; just now the two views seem to be almost completely at odds.

Surveyed through the wider, 'universal' perspective — which in terms of my literal experience, means the English-speaking west with a bit of France thrown in — feminism seems to be going through the bleakest period of its recent history. If we were an organisation or a country, I would talk about 'splits' or 'civil war'. But the sides have no permanent names and few aims between them. It's possible to work or write as if there weren't a war on, and then wonder why everyone seems so tired and angry, dedicated and fed-up, all at once.

Since the failure of legal reform in the seventies (the ERA in the United States, the rarely used Equal Opportunities Act in this country) the women's (ex-liberation) movement has suffered from lack of a coherent programme or nationally accepted

goals. There has been no national conference since 1978. WIRES, the national newsletter, is no longer being published. Infighting is at an all-time high. The anti-pornography movement is now the best-known feminist campaign, but many women find its factual discoveries about oppression easier to accept than its theory or its separatist strategy. Given these divisions, large numbers of women have focused their energy on work in their own communities — work with practical results, which can be done by a few women with minimal support from an organised movement. We have turned away from the long view, toward the close-up.

Living in a close-up often feels as if everything is on top of you. Hopeful is the wrong word for it; it's a bloody miracle. For instance: in Scotland, where I live, feminist goals are not a social priority. There is not one single degree course in women's studies (English colleges and universities have 30). Less than 10% of university teaching staff are women. Local government women's committees arrived a year or two ago; the Edinburgh committee has no budget; others are headed by men. Government funding is meagre and hard to find; Edinburgh's radical bookshop secured a small loan in spite of the objections of a Tory councillor who asked whether visitors to the shop might be 'attacked by lesbians'. How many feminist or sympathetic women's groups can survive under these conditions? The Womanzone Trust recently found 320 in Edinburgh alone. How many are there in Glasgow? Aberdeen? Inverness? Anyone with the money for phonecalls or the time for letters is welcome to look for them. Many of the Edinburgh groups met in homes or flats, were self-supporting, and consisted of eight women or fewer. They were heavily concentrated in such areas as health, education, and childcare, but covered many other areas as well. A movement which can generate this kind of energy, faced with

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these kinds of odds, has a long life ahead of it whatever happens.

But what kind of a life? How much more could we do — if we had a country-wide communications network, national conferences, links with feminists abroad, a wide strategy and agreed-upon goals? If we had real debate and real dissent, instead of the current unwritten ban on opposition, so that the woman who gets her view out first and forcefully is the only one who is heard? If feminism developed a public sphere instead of a few bits of visibility for writers and the odd politician? What would it be like? If the theory war is ever called off, we may find out.

Sigrid Nielsen

Yuppie Feminism

One of the few 'societies' I joined when I first landed at university was the Women's Group. It seemed less frightening than the Lesbian and Gay Society, which I soon sussed as being totally male dominated anyway. I went along to the Women's Group a few times, got pissed off, and soon stopped going at all. The women I'd met there who I actually got on with had also quickly got fed up with it. What was it we had in common, I wonder? And the women who remain upstanding participants in the Women's Group, why? — What, apart from 'sisterhood', binds them together?

The point is, all being women, even 'feminist' women, does not make us 'all in the same boat'. The clashes between us are not located in 'personality' differences anymore than zodiac signs, but born out of inequalities of power, in terms of race, class and sexuality/lifestyle. A feminism which omits to see these issues as *intrinsic* to its struggle seems to me to be a hollow exercise masking privilege with good intention. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, it is *this* type of feminism which has most easily been taken up in institutions such as my university (by the 'right on' students, lecturers, and courses). It is a kind of comfortable Guardian Women's Page feminism, and it has very little to say to me.

The ambivalence I feel in relation to the idea of 'feminism' is rooted in a mistrust of particular people's motives for embracing

it so wholeheartedly, whilst at the same time managing not to actually challenge their own 'lifestyles' accordingly. For instance, the Women's Group is mainly geared towards important 'women's rights' type issues (such as health). I would support this interest, but ask why discussion of a more radical nature is so firmly resisted. I'm not simply talking about a debate about whether we sleep with one gender or another, I'm referring to a whole range of practices in our lives which go hand in hand with the choices we make over sexuality.

Of course, there are loads of women who are trapped into 'lifestyles' over which they have little choice, and I don't want to knock them. The 'feminists' I've got no time for are those *adamantly* heterosexual ones who refuse to look at the power they have invested in their lifestyle. I've found it's these straight 'yuppie feminists' who are often the most hostile towards lesbians ('lesbians give feminism a bad name'), and go on about not wanting to be 'labelled'. One such feminist told a friend of mine that she was on the frontline of feminist action by sleeping with men, because she was interacting with them, and had a real chance to change them (?). At its worst, it would seem that 'nine till five' feminism functions to resource women who choose relationships with men as a priority; in this scenario, feminism merely facilitates heterosexuality more comfortably, rather than challenging its underlying assumptions. In certain political cliques at this university, any self-respecting trendy woman would be hard pressed to land her Mr Right-On unless she called herself a feminist, and could come up with a few Virago Classics on her bookshelves.

This is starting to sound a bit one-sided. The other side to my ambivalence is the fact that I still need my friendships and alliances with a range of different women/feminists. I'm not interested in writing feminism off; obviously, *changing* it is a better idea. It's just that this process is often depressing and hard, particularly in terms of being a lesbian in an overwhelmingly straight environment. It's at those moments when it's good to have the support of gay men here, as well as other lesbians. But, of course, the alliance with gay men opens up a whole other can of worms!

Ella Babaire

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Letters	2
Rising in Resistance: direct action and feminism. A <i>Trouble and Strife</i> interview with <i>Mary Lee</i> <i>Sargent</i>	7
Sex and Danger: feminism and AIDS <i>Sara Scott</i>	13
Not Victims, not Superwomen: Black girls and education <i>Ruth Chigwada</i>	19
The New Defeatism: radical feminism bites back. <i>Liz Kelly</i> reviews <i>Is the Future Female?</i>	23
Against Nationalism: the betrayal of Algerian women <i>Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas</i>	29
The Politics of Passion: an interview with <i>Janice</i> <i>Raymond</i>	38
'With Women': <i>Laura Potts</i> reviews <i>Feminist Practice</i> <i>in Women's Health Care</i>	43
Writing Our Own History: Organising against the odds, 10 years of feminism in Northern Ireland <i>Christina Loughran</i>	48
The State of the Movement: reflections by <i>Sigrid</i> <i>Nielsen</i> and <i>Ella Bahaire</i>	55

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