

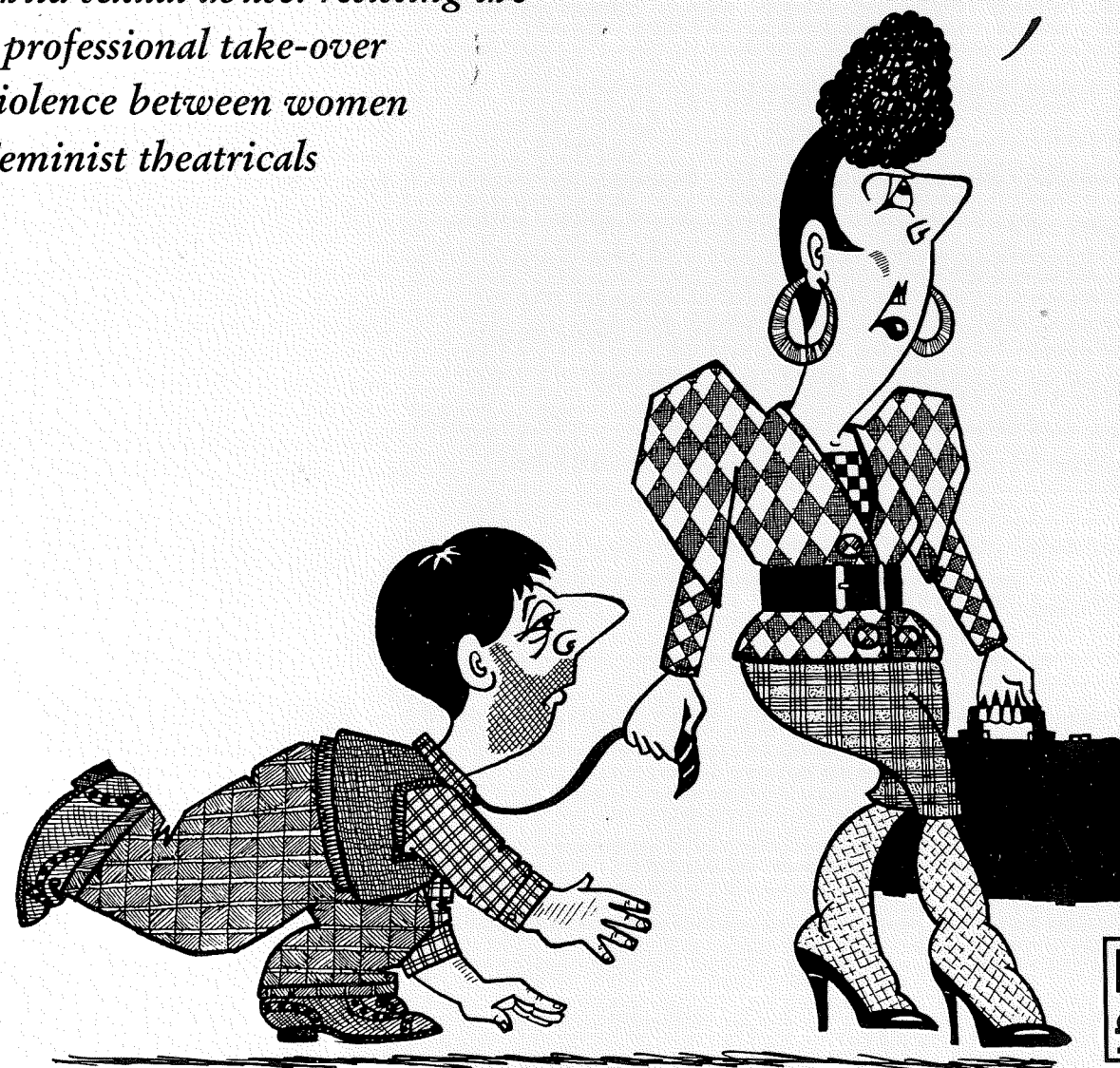
Trouble

The radical feminist magazine

& Strife

Thinking feminist, thinking black
Back to the future of women's liberation
Putting your money where your mouth is
Child sexual abuse: resisting the
professional take-over
Violence between women
Feminist theatricals

POST-FEMINISM, HAH!
TWO STEPS FORWARD—
THREE YEARS IN
CHIROPODY!



No.16
£1.95

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 & Strife is produced collectively by Lynn Alderson, Margot Farnham, Cath Jackson, Susanne Kappeler, Liz Kelly, Sophie Laws, Lyn May and Sara Scott, with help from Hilary Allen, Sue Allen, Alison Dickens, Judy Stevens, Catherine Tidnam, Harriet Wistrich. With many thanks to the Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Centre for the use of their space and resources.

Typeset by SuperSetting (01-960-4402)

Printed by In-Speed Printers, Unit 1, Portland Industrial Units, Kingsway, Luton LU4 8HA (0582 405686)

Distributed by Turnaround (01-609 7836)

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Cover design by Lyn May.

Cover illustration by Cath Jackson.

A MAGAZINE FOR AND BY BLACK WOMEN

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Feminist Audio books, the only service providing women's books on tape, have lost their grant and urgently need volunteer office workers. Travel and childcare expenses paid. Call FAB now on 01 251 0713 or 251 2908.

We are looking for women to write contributions for a proposed collection of writings by lesbian survivors of sexual abuse and incest. Any form welcome - poetry, fiction, prose, autobiography, theory. Any women interested, please contact by July 16: Ruth - (0223) 327 271
Annie - (0223) 321 148

Contents No.16

Trouble & Strife

Letters.....	2
Jeux Sans Frontières: international campaigns against sex tourism <i>Trine Thoen and Nina Kristianson</i>	10
Bitter Ironies: the professionalisation of child sexual abuse <i>Liz Kelly</i>	14
Intimate Questions <i>Barbara Jones</i> on feminists and money.....	22
With Our Own Hands: violence between and by women <i>Ellen Bell</i>	26
<i>Liz Kelly and Sara Scott</i>	28
'68, '78, '88: <i>Sophie Laws</i> reviews a new collection of writing about the last 20 years of feminism.....	30
Creating a politics of appearance - the national fat women's conference: report by <i>Heather Smith</i>	36
Black Women and Feminism <i>bell hooks</i>	42
Feminist Theatricals: <i>Lynn Alderson</i> interviews <i>Gillian Hanna</i> of Monstrous Regiment.....	47

Letters

Well in context

Dear Trouble and Strife,
I was pleased to see that your last edition included a look at *The Well of Loneliness*. Cath Jackson does us all a service by taking a radical look at this text. And, yes, it does have many failings when read within the present political climate. However, it is, I believe, foolhardy to dismiss this historically important novel as something we don't need. True, it does contain a very negative view of woman's attraction to her own sex but before we condemn the novel in today's terms we

should be fully conversant with the context out of which it arose in the first place.

Cath Jackson states that *The Well of Loneliness* was written 'in a context where lesbian sexuality is seen as totally separate from women's sexuality'. The assumption here is that women had an acknowledged sexuality at the time Radclyffe Hall was writing. But Hall, herself, was born into a set of nineteenth century beliefs about the non-sexuality of women. The man-made inversion theory to which she turned for an explanation of her attraction to women is not a theory that separated her from women's sexuality – that, it was presumed, did not exist. It is a theory that allied her with men. Unlike women, they were allowed an active sexuality. Seeing herself as a man in the wrong body provided Hall with a rationale for her lesbian feelings. Stephen Gordon, in what Cath Jackson rightly perceives as 'her patronising and dominant behaviour', is acting as the man she thinks herself to be. A heterosexual man to whom 'sexual brutality' can be the norm. To suggest, as Jackson does, that there is some causal link between *The Well* of 1928 and the S/M dykes of today deflects attention from the force that pervades both: heterosexuality.

We do need *The Well of Loneliness* for at least two reasons. First, when read within its own historical and ideological context, it can inform us about the pervasive nature of heterosexuality. Secondly, it made a political statement by seeking out a framework within which women could relate with each other – and publishing it.

Yours sincerely,
Carol Ann Uszkurat,
London N16.

Solidarity with GABRIELA

Dear Trouble and Strife,
The Philippine Women's Support Group has been re-established to publicise the issues confronting women in the Philippines and to draw people in this country into solidarity work with the Philippine women's movement, GABRIELA.

The Philippine Military has labelled GABRIELA a Communist front and has

therefore exposed women to violence from vigilante and paramilitary groups – and also from the Military itself – as attacks on progressive organisations continue to escalate.

Initiatives already established by the Support Group include:

- 1) the compilation of an extensive bibliography of materials available in Britain on Philippine women's issues;
- 2) publicity and educational work to promote a better understanding of the women's struggle;
- 3) co-ordination with women's groups in the Philippines to exchange materials;
- 4) the generation of political support in Britain for GABRIELA and other women's organisations.

An admirable history of organisation and protest by women in the Philippines deserves celebration, support and – now more than ever – international recognition. For further information please contact the Women's Support Group,
11 Goodwin St,
London N4 3HQ.
Tel 01-272 5317.
Philippines Support Group

Sexual subjects

Dear Trouble & Strife,
I was deeply confused by Susanne Kappeler's peroration on the current debates about sex and politics.

I would like to know what this 'sexual subject' does when she is not currently being desired by another 'sexual subject'? Steers clear of all representations of and books about sex, eh? After all they are a substitute for the 'real thing'. Why should sex, and sex only, be unrepresentable in fictional or cinematic terms? What is this weird split between 'doing' – presumably 'real' and good, and 'reading' – somehow 'second-hand' and therefore bad. I suggest Susanne has an extremely simplistic notion of the relation between fantasy and reality – after all what is art about but trying to communicate – and why shouldn't we try and communicate about our sexual practice/fantasies and experience? What is so 'unreal' about that? And to say the

government is only interested in censoring 'political' activity is untrue – obscenity trials and customs confiscations are an issue for lesbians too. Susanne objects to creating a private model of 'desire' but I can think of no more private notion of what sex is about than that we should 'do' it only with the right woman and never talk, write and create or consume images about it in between.

Has Susanne never fancied a woman in a film, or identified with a character in a book, or thought a lover looked good in the clothes she was wearing – are these experiences 'unreal' – nothing to do with 'sex'? It must be wonderful to be a 'sexual subject' with such a clear understanding of the distinction between sexual and other sorts of pleasure. Is this person 'real' is what I want to know?

In sisterhood,
Allegra Damji,
London E9



Judy Stevens



Judy Stevens

Letters

AIDS and female genital mutilation campaign – 2nd anniversary

Dear Sisters,

Two years ago, we launched this educational campaign against AIDS, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices that endanger the lives of our women. Education has been recognised all over the world as a great agent of change and with this realisation we launch this campaign to forestall the myths often associated with some of those cultural practices in order to induce our women to refrain from them. Some societies believe that if the clitoris is not excised it will harm the male organ during intercourse. Some believe that a woman without excision is unclean and will smell, and that the clitoris excretes things that make a woman smell. Others believe that if the clitoris touches the baby's head the baby will die. This made us to believe that if women don't have any contrary information, they cannot risk the death of their baby. Just demystifying or giving information can contribute a lot of change.

Moreover, the campaign was prompted by the fact that unlike Europe and America where AIDS has occurred in men mostly homosexual the opposite is the case in Africa where women are noted carriers. In addition, it is the sexual aspect of AIDS that has riveted public attention over the disease and it is not without good cause, but in Africa recent research has shown the sexual aspect coupled with female genital mutilation is the cause of the present wide spread of AIDS. Uli Linke of the University of California, Berkeley, USA has associated the spread of the disease in sub-Saharan and Central Africa countries to the practice. Said in her letter to the professional journal *Science* in January 1986:

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 nine months during which time anal intercourse is a common alternative. It is noteworthy that the recent outbreak of AIDS in Africa corresponds geographically to those regions in which female genital mutilation is still practised.

We have also attested to this fact, for since the mutilation is performed with special unsterilised knives and blades often gummed with strata of blood of other victims, AIDS virus are easily transmitted from one woman to another.

Since the launching of this educational campaign two years ago over the radio, television, newspapers, public enlightenment and through home visiting, we have met with failures and successes. Some traditionalists have labelled us traitors to our own people for exposing the shameful practices of our women in the public. Government agencies have considered the subject too sensitive to assist educational programme with funding and we have therefore been thrown into serious financial difficulties that this year we were forced to cut our budget by 49 per cent. Nevertheless, our gains during the period have been very rewarding and encouraging. Our field workers have covered over 150,000 square kilometres of our sub-continent and have met with seven million rural women and schoolgirls whom they persuaded to refrain from the practice. Through the radio, television and newspapers, we have counselled our women that purity is spiritual and comes from within and not by ritual mutilation of vaginal organs. As we mark this occasion, this educational programme is being launched in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Central Africa for the rural women of that region. This is another milestone in our struggle for freedom from age-long traditional and cultural practices which have become instruments of oppression, abuse and exploitation; and another bold step in fulfilling our ultimate aim of making this programme a continental one.

I wish on my behalf and that of our women to express our sincere gratitude to you for your moral and financial support to the programmes of our centre through which we were able to make such gains during the period under review. As we enter the third year of our struggle, it is expected that our budget might be near to \$100,000 considering the new sectors that we have opened. As in all campaigns military or otherwise, enough funding is needed for effective execution to ensure victory. We therefore earnestly appeal

to you for your continuous support as our task is such that cannot be accomplished overnight. As a non-governmental women's organisation we depend mostly on donations from our friends and supporters for the running of our programmes and services, our success so far is made possible by your support which is a clear indication that you care.

Once again, thank you for your support and solidarity in this difficult time of our struggle. We believe that many little steps of many little people can change the face of the world.

For sending of donation or inquiries write to: Hannah Edemikfong (Mrs), Women's Centre, Box 185, Eket, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, West Africa.

In Sisterhood,
Hannah Edemikpong (Mrs)
(Women's Contact Person)
Akwa Ibom State,
Nigeria

When legal statements become pornography

Dear Trouble and Strife,
Recently Rights of Women heard of yet another disturbing aspect of the treatment of rape in the legal process. The information comes from the experiences of a probation officer in Wales, unfortunate enough to have two convicted rapists amongst her clients. Both these men, despite having been convicted, were still claiming innocence. Both had in their possession prosecution papers concerning their cases. Fine, all right and proper – all men have a right to know the case against them in order to defend themselves. But just let's stop a minute to consider what this involves. Included in these papers were the statements made to the police by the raped women. One, made by a 67 year old woman, included her name and address and intimate details of her bed time routine – a step by step account of how she prepared for bed plus details of her earlier menstrual cycle, sanitary protection and sex life as well as her account of the rape. To convince his family, friends, and the inhabitants of his home village of his

innocence, the rapist had taken it upon himself to show this statement around the village. The second rapist had a similar set of documents, and ostensibly for similar reasons, had chosen to pass his papers around the prison where he is serving his sentence.

The fact that convicted rapists legitimately can have such documents in their possession and can do with them what they will is, I think, enormously problematic. It raises important questions regarding the anonymity afforded to raped women. With such details being passed around, the woman is being vicariously raped again and again as each man enjoys this form of legal pornography. The impact of this on a woman in a small community must be devastating. Not only is anonymity for women in these circumstances seriously undermined, but with her name and address being made public property by her rapists, she may be put at risk of further attack from men, who having vicariously enjoyed the rape, might want to do it for real, consider her an easy target, or from misguided 'loyalty' to the first rapist be motivated to seek revenge.

Various august legal bodies have been consulted about this situation. The Law Society, while not happy that such intimate details can become public property, consider it right and proper that rapists have a right to see the case against them. The Haldane Society also considers that the rapist's or defendant's rights cannot be compromised by a denial of access to the woman's statement, but suggest that in cases of rape and sexual assault this should only be allowed in the presence of a solicitor, who would be responsible for ensuring that the papers don't leave the office. While it's doubtful, in my view, that many women would willingly place such trust in a solicitor prepared to defend a rapist, it could be a step in the right direction. At the very least, a solicitor who then breaches such a rule by allowing a rapist full possession of such papers, could be called to account and disciplined.

The underlying difficulty, though, is that once again in relation to rape and sexual abuse the legal rights of a rapist and those of

Letters

the woman he has abused are in direct conflict and current legal practice recognises only the rights of the rapist or defendant.

Identifying a solution to this problem is tricky, given that like it or not, we have to concede that rapists are entitled to a defence. It seems that at the very least we can:

- (i) demand that solicitors, not the rapists themselves, should have possession of all papers regarding the case, with rapists being allowed only supervised access to them;
- (ii) inform women considering reporting rape or sexual assault to the police of the current position, so that they can take it into account in reaching a decision;



Judy Stevens

- (iii) establish a working group of women with legal experience to consider the situation, with a view to exploring whether further safeguards are needed for women reporting rape and sexual assault.
- (iv) explore guidelines for interview practice – that evidence not relevant to the case, such as information on her bedtime habits, earlier menstrual cycle or sex life should not be included.

It seems quite likely that readers include women with experience of work on this issue. If so your thoughts on this question are important whether or not you want to be involved in a working group. So do please be in touch.

The Home Office acknowledges it's the man we know

Still on the subject of rape, a Home Office research report, published on 21 Feb 1989, has now acknowledged a fact feminists have been pointing to for a long time, that is, that most women who are raped are raped by men they know in their own home. This study, 'Statistics of Offences of Rape', Home Office Research Study 106, by Lorna Smith, showed only a third of reported rapes are stranger rapes. In the language of the report: 39 per cent of reported rapes were stranger rapes, 30 per cent were by former husbands or lovers and 31 per cent were by acquaintances – 'the sort of men who drop in for coffee'. From feminist research, we know that these figures will still under-represent the extent of rape by men we know, as these are the rapes women, aware of malestream perceptions of rape, are least likely to report to the police. This study began its life as a study of rape prevention. Women from two Metropolitan Police areas, Lambeth and Islington, who had reported rape to the police, were interviewed, with a view to working out what they did/didn't do to avoid the attack. The Home Office was intending to produce a package of advice to women on preventing rape. In fact the study more or less accepts that there is no simple advice they can offer.

Presumably the finding that 60 per cent of rapes reported to the police are by men

women know, has forced them to reconsider or reject the malestream perception of rape as stranger rape in a public place. As such, their previous advice to women about not going out alone/after dark/or in certain areas, advice which effectively places women under curfew is recognised to be as hollow as feminists have claimed. Perhaps now instead of the women-blaming explanations of rape, together with those which blame the environment, and which frequently have racist connotations in highlighting the euphemistic 'inner city', the Home Office will be forced to turn its attention to men and masculinity as currently constructed, in seeking to address the problem of rape.

A difficulty for the experts now is how can they simultaneously actively engage in the promotion of heterosexuality and warn women that they are at most risk from the men they live with or entertain as 'family friends'. From now onwards, they will have to take on board what feminists have been saying for years, that is that the rapist is not the fabled 'big bad wolf' but an ordinary man – some woman's husband, lover, son, brother or father.

Jill Radford for the
Sexual Violence and the Law Group,
c/o Rights of Women,
52-54 Featherstone St,
London EC1Y 8RT

Women against fundamentalism

On May 20th 1989, Women Against Fundamentalism had a meeting to discuss its response to the demonstration by Muslim fundamentalists, which took place on 27 May 1989. The fundamentalists are demanding an extension of the blasphemy law and a ban on 'The Satanic Verses'.

After a lot of discussion, it was decided that we would make a protest at the demonstration to announce our presence to the world. We want to assert our secular traditions of organising and say that religious leaders don't speak for us. We believe that Britain should become a fully secular state and that we should work towards that by 1) Defending Salman Rushdie's right to publish and our right to read and express ourselves.

- 2) Abolishing the blasphemy law.
 - 3) Opposing state funding of separate religious schools and demanding a high standard of secular state funded education, which is sensitive to the needs and aspirations of all children.
 - 4) Opposing the establishment of separatist religious institutions which try to control women such as religious refuges and separate religious schools for girls.
- Southall Black Sisters,
52 Norwood Road,
Southall,
Middlesex.

Dear Sisters,

We are writing in haste to as many women's groups as possible, and especially those representing Black, ethnic minority women and lesbians. We believe that the battle against the fundamentalist versions of all religions is one in which women's voices should be heard. Women – especially those of us fighting for the right to control our own lives, bodies, and sexualities – are often in the front line of attack by fundamentalists.

The enclosed statement was drawn up by a meeting of groups and individuals who are determined – in the light of the Muslim demonstration on 27 May and the NF counter-demonstration against it – to break the silence and try to create a middle ground between the racists and the fundamentalists on the Salman Rushdie issue, so that a range of dissenting voices may be more clearly heard.

Asian, Iranian, Turkish, Jewish and Iranian women attended the initial meeting, and we are appealing to you to support this initiative.

Among the groups which were involved in drawing up the statement are: Southall Black Sisters, Women Against Fundamentalism, the Socialist Conference, the Campaign Against Repression in Iran, Feminist Review, Labour Briefing, as well as a number of writers and individual members of the Labour Party Black Sections and civil liberties groups.

We hope you will endorse the enclosed statement and allow your name and/or that of your organisation to be added to it. Would

Letters

you also please consider making a donation towards the costs of mounting this initiative.

Please get in touch if you have any questions or would like to become more involved in any way.

Yours,

Gita Sahgal (Southall Black Sisters)

Clara Connolly (Feminist Review)

Mike Marqusee (Socialist Conference)

For the right to dissent Against racism and fundamentalism

We are a number of diverse individuals and groups who have come together to voice our concern about the issues of censorship, racism, and fundamentalism which have arisen around Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*.

We support Rushdie's right to publish his book and we reject the attempts of both fundamentalists and racists to use this affair to promote their own ends.

There has been much talk of Rushdie's book giving offence. We are offended by:

- the use of this affair to mount racial attacks on the Muslim community in Britain.
- the sanctimonious claims, made in the context of increasing censorship and widespread racial discrimination, that British society somehow embodies the values of pluralism and the right to dissent.
- the claims of some religious leaders to speak for everyone in the Muslim and black and ethnic minority communities.
- The racist assumption that Muslim and black communities are monolithic, and the attempt to identify Islam as a whole with fundamentalism and terrorism.
- the use of the book by fundamentalists to control dissent and repress diversity within their own communities, in particular their attempts to thwart women's struggles to control their own destinies.

We reject the attempt to present the controversy surrounding this book as a crude 'Eastern vs Western' conflict and we believe that such a false view only assists those who would restrict our right to public discussion and dissent.

No culture or society has a monopoly on the values of pluralism and the right to dissent. Indeed, all over the world, people from many different backgrounds and in many different cultures are involved in struggles for these values and rights. We see our campaign to defend Rushdie and against both racism and fundamentalism as an intrinsic part of those struggles, including the struggles of the Iranian people against Khomeini's repressive regime.

We believe that as long as any religion is given a privileged position by the state, the right to dissent, and indeed the right to freedom of worship, is undermined. We call for the abolition of all blasphemy laws, the end of state aid to religious education, and the disestablishment of the Church of England as necessary preconditions for the development in Britain of a genuinely pluralist, democratic society – a society which has never existed in this country.

Salman Rushdie's right to write and publish is also our right to read, to think, to criticise, to dissent. It is the public's right to open and honest discussion and debate.

In the face of the appalling distortion of these issues by both fundamentalist and racist forces, we cannot be silent. We urge others to join us in supporting the right to dissent and opposing both racism and fundamentalism.

News from Berlin

Dear Trouble and Strife,
It's a good time for being in West Berlin: What is known as the new 'Red-Green Government' is called by the women of Berlin the 'Women's Government'.

West Berlin, similar to the 'counties' (Länder) of West Germany, has its own government, although under the tutelage of the Allied Forces which are still in occupation of the Western part of the city. One of the functions of the Allied Forces is to prevent the rise of fascism, and in the past, it has indeed been the case that neo-fascist parties were prevented from participating in elections. This time, however, the fascists have chosen to name themselves 'Republicans' –

and were promptly allowed to participate in elections. What originally looked like very ambiguous election results, particularly because of an 8 per cent share of the votes for the 'Republicans', has led to a highly exciting new government. Just as the fascists had gained, so had the Greens (AL – Alternative List), while neither the Conservatives (CDU) nor the Socialists (SPD) gained a clear majority. As a result, the SDP and the AL negotiated a Coalition.

Elections determine a number of seats rather than specific candidates. While the Socialists started debating whether they should give 30 or 50 per cent of their seats to women candidates, the AL decided to give all their three seats – i.e. a 100 per cent quota – to women. So that when the SDP emerged with its radical offer of five women and five men, the new government was composed of eight women and five men!

Now it was a matter of putting up candidates for the seats, and here the second miracle happened – at least, it all seems like miracles to a visitor from Britain: the AL chose three women candidates, none of whom was a party member. As I have discovered since, this was the stage where the autonomous feminist movement was active at a feverish level, networking, proposing candidates, lobbying, persuading candidates to accept, etc. So perhaps it isn't simply a funny coincidence that the new 'Senatorin' or minister for family affairs, women's affairs and affairs of young people is an out-lesbian feminist lawyer, Anne Klein. Among her many new commitments is one to promote what in Britain are known as 'pretend family relations'!

The other women ministers are: Jutta Limbach (SPD, Justice); Heide Pfarr (SPD, Federal Affairs); Sybille Volkholz (AL, Education); Anke Martiny (SPD, Cultural Affairs); Michaela Schreyer (AL, Ecology and City Planning); Barbara Riethmüller (SPD, Higher Education and Research); Ingrid Stahmer (SPD, Health and Social Services).

Not surprisingly, women's issues figure prominently in the new coalition manifesto: there are plans for a new anti-discrimination bill; positive discrimination in all sectors of

public employment (and training) until a 50 per cent quota is reached; with a simultaneous freeze on new male employment and/or promotion; an end to forms of unprotected part-time contracts and agency work, which mainly affects women (i.e. the city will not contract with companies with such employment contracts); plans to expand women's studies and to improve the position of women in higher education; 10,000 new creche and nursery places by 1992; financial and political support for work against male violence, among which a women's taxi service (with DM seven million – ca. £2.3 million – earmarked for the pilot scheme); a new Refuge for Girls, and additional housing all over West Berlin for the existing three women's refuges.

It is easy to see why women and especially feminists are experiencing an unfamiliar sense of rekindled exhilaration and optimism, reminiscent of the heady days of the early seventies. Expectations are running high, but perhaps twenty years of experience of the hard reality of mainstream politics will be a crucial complement which will enable feminist politics to shift into a new gear.

The first unusual step of the new 'family and women's minister', Anne Klein, consisted of her visit to two women from Berlin who are held on remand in northern Cyprus and awaiting trial for alleged murder. They are a mother and a daughter who were on a camping holiday, and who were attacked by a young Turkish Cypriot, who battered the mother and raped the daughter. After a desperate struggle and fight, which left both women injured, the man died. The German tabloid press, in no way lagging behind *The Sun* and *The Sunday Sport* but unhindered by the British press restrictions on reporting about court cases, ran headlines about Sex and Drugs on the Beach, and Mother Jealous Because He Preferred Daughter. With her visit to the two women, the 'Senatorin' for women's affairs wanted to make a public statement that sexual politics and sexual violence against women are taken seriously by the new government.

A far cry from the one-woman government of some other country I know.
Yours,
Susanne Kappeler,
Berlin.

Jeux sans frontières

In Norway, the Women's Front have campaigned against the sex-tourism industry. Taking joint action with women in Thailand, the Philippines and Spain they have successfully challenged and hindered the growth of an international trade in women as a leisure pursuit.

This account is written by two members of the Women's Front, Trine Thoen (National Board) and Nina Kristiansen (Chairwoman).

In Norway, like most Western countries, organised sex tourism is a fact. In particular we have a club called Scan Thai Travellers' Club. This club arranges sex tours to Thailand. They publish a brochure where the members are told where to go to buy prostitutes, where to find young ones, what to do with VD and so on.

The introductory chapter is an attack on Norwegian women, in particular the Women's Front, and it tells how few rights men have these days, after decades of women's struggle:

The Women's Front and other equal rights fanatics choose to completely disregard what one before called 'the small difference'. Men's deepest instincts are to admire and protect women. To compete with women is totally against nature. How can one discuss equal pay for equal work when one is supposed to disregard that 'woman has a gold mine of her own'.

Scan Thai tries to justify sex tourism by blaming it on the Norwegian women and our strength. The agency has stickers that say 'Tired of the Women's Front. Travel to Thailand'.

The rest of the brochure is practical information on how to go about as a customer of prostitutes. But interwoven in the

information, ideas are put forward about prostitution as a part of Thai culture. Sex tourism is justified by presenting it as something 'natural' for Thai women:

Women in Bangkok you have to pay for – for one night, for one week or for your whole life. In return, they wish to give you a lot of care and sex.

Sex tour agencies, like Scan Thai Travellers' Club, portray Asian women as different – with different qualities than white women. Asian women are defined in terms of what Western women are not. Racism rests upon the categorisation of 'otherness' – of Western people as the people, and Third World people as the 'others', the servants of the people. This view has roots back to colonial times. This definition of Third World men and women as the 'Other', as different, has throughout history legitimised all kinds of violence against them. Sex tourism is a clear case in which the 'difference' in coloured women serves as the objective for legitimising the purchase of sexual services by Western men from the women of the Third World.

As long as the women in the Third World are looked upon as different it helps to prevent the moral conscience of potential cus-

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tomers from questioning the legitimacy of sex tourism. Western men can exercise their social and economic power, and pursue their sexual fantasies without guilt. Only with this kind of logic can sex tourism be marketed in countries which are characterised by puritanism and protestant ethics.

For many years the Women's Front of Norway has fought against the pornography industry's promotion of Thailand and the Philippines as sex paradises for Norwegian men. And when Scan Thai Travellers' Club started advertising their tours in 1983, we started demonstrating against them.

We picketed at the airport when the Norwegian men left, showing posters saying 'Stop exporting Norwegian prostitute customers' and condemning organised sex tourism. The March 8 Committee of Tonsberg, the town where Scan Thai has its offices, had banners in the March 8 demonstrations saying 'Stop the sexist and racist activities of Scan Thai Travellers' Club'.

Last year Scan Thai sued us for libel. They sued the 13 women in the Tonsberg March 8 Committee. The terms Scan Thai took to court were 'Trafficking in women' and 'Racist activities'.

The trial took place in June 1988. We asked our international women contacts for support and used their letters both as evidence and in the publicity around the trial. Siriporn Skrobanek, from the Foundation of Women in Thailand, was our main witness. The 13 women won the case, and in the verdict the judges refer to and quote from the letters of support. This shows clearly the importance of linking up, and of international women's solidarity.

The Scan Thai Club has also sued the Women's Front National organisation and two women in Oslo – also for libel. This trial will take place in August 1989. Scan Thai's claim for economic compensation totals £36,400 for the Oslo trial.

Mail-order brides

The Women's Front has also worked against the mail-order bride agencies in Norway. Most of them specialise in Filipinas. We have again demonstrated at the airport when groups of men are leaving. In 1986 we arranged a joint demonstration together with GABRIELA of the Philippines. We picketed when the men left, and GABRIELA met them when they arrived, with slogans in English and Norwegian. I would have liked to see the men's faces when they realised that the Filipino women are just as fanatical, crazy and strong as the Norwegian women who they are so happy to leave. Both demonstrations were well covered by the media.

We have also urged the Norwegian government to take action against the mail-order bride agencies based in Norway. Both to stop the agencies' sexist and racist advertisements and activities, but also to help the women who have already come to Norway. Many of them have few contacts outside their husbands and do not know their rights as women in Norway. In connection to this the Women's Front has fought proposals for a new law on immigration, which makes the situation worse for immigrant women, making them even more dependent on their husbands.

The government has taken action by giving money to research on this issue, but as always they do just enough to please the public, and it is our duty to pressure them into doing more.

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Paper submitted at the first USA conference on trafficking in women 22-23 October 1988 by Trine Thoen – member of National Board and Nina Kristiansen – chairwoman, the Woman's Front of Norway.

At this conference an international coalition was set up. The Japanese women who are producing the first newsletter have asked for donations (in dollars sent registered post). Money should be sent to:

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OVERSEA SUPREME SERVICE ORDINARY PARTNERSHIP

Worsening of world-wide situation

Sex tourism does not only take place from Western countries to the Third World, but also from Northern Europe to Southern Europe. It is common for Scandinavians to go to Spain during winter time to be in the sun as a break from our long dark winter months. There is big money involved in this and some of the travel agencies wanted to attract more male tourists by putting up pornographic shows with Spanish prostitutes. They also put up tours for men to the prostitution areas. A delegation from the Women's Front went down to the women's movement in Mallorca and we started to co-operate on informing the public about this.

The Spanish feminists made a TV programme while the Women's Front was there, and when they came home, the Women's Fronters spoke out against the travel agencies and how they profit from women's poverty.

After a time of pressure the travel agencies stopped organised prostitution sightseeing

and stopped taking their tourists to pornographic shows. Now there is only a Danish travel agency which promotes such shows in Norway. But we will work to stop that one too.

The Spanish women's movement got publicity and used this to demand more programmes for Spanish prostitutes. This is yet another example of how effective and important global women's solidarity is.

For us in the Women's Front of Norway we see it as our duty to stop the Norwegian customers, because they come from the country in which we are situated and where we are working. We want to stop the army of men from our own culture who travel overseas with their money, their twisted dreams and their penises to exploit women in other countries.

At the same time we work together with the women's movements in different countries and support them in their struggle against the root causes of the poverty that leads women into prostitution.

The UN's decade of women 1975-1985 has shown that excluding some areas, women's relative access to economic resources, income and work has become worse. Their workload has increased and their relative and absolute nutrition, health and educational status had become intolerable. It is worst for destitute women, and increasing numbers of women have joined their ranks. This development has hit women in the Third World the hardest. This occurred during a period of expected growth.

To fight sex tourism and trafficking in women it is important to look at the situation for women as a whole. It is important to see the different factors that cause prostitution in order to find the correct strategies to fight the reasons for it. Patriarchy, poverty, multinational companies' exploitation of the female workforce, imperialism, neo-colonisation, a profit-oriented economy, the World Bank and the IMF - we must fight all these to fight international trafficking in women.

In Norway the Women's Front has done this by for example attacking Norwegian foreign aid and industrial policies. An important condition in Norwegian development aid is now the promotion of Norwegian industries. Up to 90 per cent of some loans to the Third World countries have to be used in the purchasing of Norwegian goods and services, meaning that little remains for the development of the local economy and improvement of the condition of women.

We have also put pressure on Norwegian political parties and solidarity organisations to include a women's perspective in their analysis of the world. We work against imperialism by supporting the people's liberation movements in countries like Afghanistan, Palestine, Eritrea, The Philippines and Nicaragua.

We have used the knowledge and experiences that we have achieved through international co-operation on issues like sex tourism and pornography to expand our struggle against imperialism and to give our analysis new and more concrete substance.

For us in the Women's Front, everything is women's struggle. Women's liberation is not an issue among many others. Oppression of women is found everywhere in society. No issues are gender neutral. If we are to realise the society we hope for, we must change everything from economic reality to mental awareness.

We must stop saying 'them' and 'us' about different women around the world - realising that our struggle is common - that our problems are the same, that female poverty and exploitation of women is global.

Norway has become famous around the world because of the fact that our prime minister is a woman and, because 50 per cent of her cabinet are women. But at the same time women are becoming increasingly poorer in Norway - one of the richest countries in the world.

Old women, single mothers, immigrant women, women employed in the service sector, women working in the public sector, young women - are all feeling the tightening of the government budgets in Norway - and our standard of living gets worse. Some of us turn to prostitution to make ends meet, just like a Filipina factory worker who cannot feed her children on her small wage. In Norway women are still second class citizens, and the Women's Front works on many issues and areas. We work with women and employment, the six hour work day with full salary compensation, unemployment, single mothers, day care centres, lesbian struggle, anti-racism, and the struggle against sexualised oppression. And we try to keep a global perspective on our work.

We must realise that the same mechanisms keep women down all over the world. And we must fight globally to liberate women. For example if we succeed in putting an end to prostitution in Norway, and the Norwegian men instead travel to Bangkok to exploit women, we will maintain the idea that women can be bought and used, and the idea about the 'otherness' in Thai women.

But at the same time as we see that our problems are global and common, we must respect each other's independence and strategies.

We must come up with a comprehensive analysis of the situation for women and study the local implementations of oppression and exploitation.

We know that we are fighting international politics and big money. And it is perfectly clear that we can do something about it.

Special thanks to the Stichting tegen Vrouwenhandel in the Netherlands for contributing to our analysis of international trafficking in women. □



There are currently at least three groups in Britain working on trafficking in women.

Women's Committee
Philippine Support Group
11 Goodwin St,
LONDON N4 3HQ
(supporting mail order brides)

Tourism Concern
8 St Mary's Terrace
Ryton, Tynes & Wear
NE40 3AC
(sex tourism)

Women Against International
Sex Trafficking (WAIST)
c/o Women's Centre
34 Exchange St
Norwich
NR1 2AX
(sex tourism and mail order brides)

BITTER IRONIES

The 'incest industry' draws heavily on groundwork laid by feminists but has failed to take on board a feminist analysis. Liz Kelly argues that in the face of an organized male backlash it is essential to the protection of women and children that we preserve and develop feminist services and make alliances with radical professionals.

The extent of public concern about the sexual abuse of children, the fact that it is now more or less accepted that it often happens in the home and that abusers are usually trusted adults, suggests that some real progress has been made. Add to this some legislative reform, increased resources for research and treatment (more noticeable in other western countries than in Britain) and you get a sense of feminists having made a major impact. Reality is, as always, more complex and contradictory.

We have always had a dual track position in relation to sexual violence: campaigning for professionals and the state to take on the issues whilst building autonomous women's organisations in the community. In the late 1980s it is the professionals and the state who are centre stage. We are on occasion credited with having raised the issues, but it is clearly now time for the 'real experts' to take over. This raises a series of contradictions for us, not to mention bitter ironies. It is not just co-option and watering down which we have to contend with, however, but the emergence of a concerted backlash, organised by men, to resist our questioning of their sexual exploitation of children. These two shifts highlight how without a strong campaigning women's movement (which, after all, forced the recognition of these issues in the first place) 'gains' can be transformed, necessary connections separated. They also demonstrate the danger of placing too much faith in the professions and legal system.

A genderless crime

Feminist theorists and activists did not just make child sexual assault visible, but also developed an analysis and an explanation. We placed sexual assault of children within our analysis of male sexual violence and our critique of male heterosexuality. For us, the connections were obvious (it is overwhelmingly men who abuse, and girls and young women are the majority of those abused) – and in a way they are for anyone who thinks about these issues coherently for more than two minutes. That is why these 'facts' are less acceptable than the gender neutral ones I began with. A range of techniques have been used to hide or deny these uncomfortable truths, since their implications are so obvious. The systematic refusal to address the fact that

the vast majority of abusers are male is the clearest example of our analysis being screened out of public discussion.

Throughout the 'Cleveland crisis', in social work journals, in newspapers, in academic papers, we read about "abusing parents" and "abusing families". That in reported cases there are seldom *any* women suspected of sexually assaulting children was never mentioned – except by feminists. The press statement and briefing document issued by the Feminist Coalition Against Child Sexual Abuse (FCACSA) the week the Cleveland Enquiry was published was ignored. No-one wanted to hear – a media and professional consensus had been reached which excluded any question other than whether Marietta Higgs was right or wrong.

The first bitter irony we have to contend with is that having argued against the universal 'he' in language, we now face the deliberate misuse of gender neutral language which masks gender specific behaviours. Even writers who explicitly acknowledge that the vast majority of reported incest cases are of fathers abusing daughters, refer thereafter to "parents" and "families".¹ Even with the 'facts' they cannot bring themselves to name men, let alone fathers.

But women do it too

A slightly different, and in some ways more subtle, dismissal of feminist analysis of the 'male monopoly' is to begin by accepting that *currently* it appears that it is men who sexually abuse children. The implications of this are then neatly side-stepped by an insistence that abuse by women is underestimated, it is just more hidden, and hence not visible in reported cases or survivors' accounts. This dubious claim is justified by asserting that women have more legitimate access to children's bodies; therefore, women are more able to hide abuse of children.

I do not want to dismiss the fact that a few women do sexually abuse children. What concerns me is the way evidence we *do* have is ignored and evidence we *do not* have is invoked to support an ideological position. By asserting that lots of women abuse too, they just haven't found the survivors yet, the 'new experts' justify refusing to engage with feminist analysis, refusing to recognise men's power in the world and in the family.

It's a bitter irony which Louise Armstrong has pointed to in the context of the US: that whilst it was adult survivors, feminist writers and activists who put this issue on the agenda, a professionalised "incest industry" is taking over, and is being built on ignoring our analysis.²

The "Incest Industry"

In the US, and to some extent here too, a new professional specialisation is emerging – people whose careers (and notice how many of the most 'successful' are men) have been built on the investigation, treatment and 'prevention' of child sexual assault. Within this group there are individuals who are passionately committed to supporting women and children, but very few have a coherent political analysis which would enable them to see just how challenging this issue is and, therefore, how difficult real change is going to be to achieve.

The process is only beginning in Britain, but today in the US literally thousands of professionals are paid to work on child sexual assault. There are specialists who assess children – medics, social workers, child psychologists; specialists who 'treat' children, families, abusers and adult survivors; specialists who investigate, prosecute (and defend) cases – police, lawyers, 'victim' advocates; specialists who design and conduct training programmes for workers; specialists who design and conduct 'prevention' programmes for working with children, young people and parents; specialists who conduct research and write books. The creation of this tier of 'experts' from within the professions means that many of the basic insights feminists developed concerning sexual violence and its impact have been lost, or deliberately ignored.

More than any other form of sexual violence, child sexual assault has become mainstream. In one sense this was inevitable, since state agencies are charged with protecting children. But the speed with which the issue has been professionalised, and the dominance of the medical and legal models in particular, is alarming. The language that is now increasingly used reflects this process. We used words like "talking", "telling" and "naming" when we spoke or wrote about our own experiences or those of other women: children apparently "disclose". This word is

rapidly invading the language of feminists who work with survivors too. The interviews and medical examinations of children are called "diagnostics", even where children have already told someone about the abuse. Who is diagnosing what?

The suggestion that only trained specialists should interview children ignores the fact that most children choose very carefully who they tell – they choose someone they think they can trust, someone they know. Rather than use this person in investigative interviews (as a few thoughtful agencies are doing, where possible) children are taken to a room (usually equipped with two-way mirror and video equipment) and interviewed by two

the mainstream has shifted perceptibly and very rapidly to believing them only if they say it in the right place, at the right time, to the right person. Right for whom?

Whilst many cases are more complicated than this, for example, a baby cannot tell who has abused them and some children are too frightened to tell, the influence of the law, the standards of 'proof' and 'evidence' it requires, now determines how all workers respond to this issue. Whilst I don't want to underestimate, or ignore, the major problems and contradictions in taking child sexual assault cases to court, many of the discussions about 'proof' and 'evidence' fail to distinguish between what you need to know in order to prove a case in court and what you need to



strangers (the preferred combination in many areas often being a male/female, social worker/police mix). This is another bitter irony, given the focus on stranger as abuser in some 'prevention' programmes, and the relative success we have had arguing that women who have been raped do not want to be interviewed or examined by a man.

Unless a 'disclosure' is recorded on tape, and/or there is supporting medical evidence, it appears that few workers are willing to state that the child has been abused. From a principled feminist position of believing children,

know in order to believe that a child has been abused. Unless these issues are addressed separately, changes in policy and practice may result in worse, rather than better, protection for children.

Similarly, the discussion of the impact of abuse on children reflects none of the understandings that feminists have developed. The word "victim" and all the assumptions that underpin it are used unproblematically. In much of the therapeutic work that is done with child and adult survivors there is little evidence that professionals notice the creative

ways which survivors tried to resist at the time, and are coping over time. Instead, a picture emerges of lifetime traumatisation which can only be halted by therapeutic intervention; intervention which has future 'heterosexual adjustment' as a central concern.³

The work of feminist organisations which put child sexual assault on the public agenda is more and more marginalised, especially our principle of self-help and commitment to challenging issues of power when supporting women and children. Very few of the 'new experts' have even begun to look at how racism, classism, heterosexism and ablistm might affect how child and adult survivors understand their experience. Nor do they explore how these additional forms of oppression might affect the options that were and are open to survivors in coping with abuse, let alone how these issues might affect their own perceptions and practice as professionals.

What little money there is available for services, resources and research in Britain (much larger amounts have been distributed in other countries) is going not to those groups who began this work, but to newly created, and self-defined, 'centres of excellence'. As the professionalised incest industry grows feminist services like Rape Crisis lines and Women's Aid refuges face closure.

From bad to worse – the backlash

The lack of political understanding of many of those in the professions now charged with responsibility for tackling child sexual abuse resulted in complacency: they thought they had won the major battles, and that all that was at issue now were decisions about resources. They did not anticipate men's organised resistance, such as happened in Cleveland and is happening on a much larger scale now in the US, and so were unable to respond strongly or effectively. Indeed some of the criticisms we would make as feminists have been used, not to further the interests of women and children, but those of men (and a few women) suspected of abusing children in their care.

Since the old strategy of insisting that children lie and/or fantasise about abuse will no longer wash, the untruth is now laid at the door of either 'zealous' professionals, or 'vindictive'/'paranoid' mothers. Both are bitterly ironic. It has taken years of work to

get professionals to countenance the possibility, let alone the probability, of abuse – now they are castigated for seeing it everywhere. The 'orthodox' approach to incest has maintained that mothers collude, and are in some way party to the assault of their children by their partner – now women who seek the support of the law in protecting their children are accused of inventing the abuse.

The role of professionals came into question during several cases of abuse of large numbers of children by staff, and their contacts outside, at day-care centres. The cases are now notorious in the US, and two in particular got national coverage similar to that in Britain around Cleveland – they are known as the *Jordan* and *McMartin Preschool* cases.

RUNNING FOR THEIR LIVES

As in Cleveland the issue of whether the children had been abused, and a number of them had said they had which was why investigations happened in the first place, got lost in arguments about legal technicalities. Both cases involved prosecution of a number of individuals (including several women). Each defendant had a lawyer who was entitled to cross-examine each child. It was during the *Jordan* case that defence attorneys began questioning the 'supportive' stance taken by workers investigating assaults on children, suggesting that the words "diagnostic" or "validation" interview implied a bias from the outset. They thus felt justified in using a confrontative style of questioning when cross-examining the child witnesses. Videotaped interviews, which were originally introduced to prevent children having to be interviewed many times during an investigation, were now used by defence lawyers to discredit their testimony. Unless the child said exactly the same in court as they had on video, the defence lawyer questioned their credibility. Many of the carefully developed interview techniques which have been used to enable children to speak about what has happened to them were attacked, as was the criminal investigation of the case.

These tactics meant that the Jordan case fell apart in court; the prosecution withdrew the case before most of the children had given evidence. As with Cleveland, the complexities of what happened were lost as the US public breathed a sigh of relief – they did not have to believe so many young children had been systematically abused by professionals employed to care for them. As with Cleveland it wasn't the children who were the focus, but the 'over-zealous' professionals.

At the same time as these cases were being conducted a shift was occurring in relation to incest cases. A questionable study of 18 cases where abuse was discovered only after the woman had separated from her male partner, concluded that in ten cases, the accusations were false.⁵ The authors do not present the grounds by which they reached

"I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO TELL"

this conclusion, but the underlying assumption was that mothers make their children say that they have been abused in order to win in custody and access disputes. These findings were transformed in several media reports from a small exploratory study into proof that 55 per cent of *all reported cases* are false accusations!

The impact of this 'idea' has been remarkable: men, particularly white middle class men who can afford legal fees, now no longer need explicitly to deny abuse. They can make a counter suit for custody of the child and the major issue in court becomes the mental health of the mother. Mothers have been described as "the real abuser" on more than one occasion in court.

In *The Battle and the Backlash*⁶ a case is documented where it took a mother five years, 50 hearings and eight lawyers to get her daughter's abusive father denied parental rights. Clearly men's rights are vastly more important than arguments about the impact of repeat interviews and appearances in court on children. This woman was instructed by the court to hand her daughter over for access, for what she knew would be further abuse. When she refused to do this and moved states to defy the court order, she was held to be in contempt of court.

Women find themselves in a desperate

Catch 22. It doesn't surprise feminists, nor some child protection workers, that children first tell about abuse when their mother has already decided to leave their father. For the first time they have the possibility of safety, they need not feel responsible for the break-up of the family, they are no longer in the daily control of their abuser. Women who believe their children do not want them to be abused again and so challenge access, using the abuse as grounds. Since depriving a father of his paternal rights is seen as an extreme thing to do, the courts require proof. Children, therefore, have to be medically and psychologically examined. If fathers contest they have the right to second opinions – more examinations.

Cases rapidly become arguments between the experts, and courts increasingly require psychological assessments of the parents. Here the misogyny of psychiatry comes into play, since fault can always be found with women, mothers in particular, for not being 'good enough'. The men on the other hand tend to be assessed only on whether they fit clinical profiles for paedophiles. Phyllis Chesler's research on contested custody is instructive here. Her book, aptly titled *Mothers On Trial*, documents how 70 per cent of the mothers lost custody. In a proportion of these cases the father had physically and/or sexually abused a child, the mother or both. She argues that:

Our standards for 'good enough' mothering differ sharply as a function of gender as well as race, class and religion. An ideal father is expected to legally acknowledge and economically support his children. Fathers who do *anything* (more) for their children are often seen as 'better' than mothers who are, after all, supposed to do everything. The ideal of fatherhood is sacred. As such it protects each father from the consequences of his actions. The ideal of motherhood is sacred too. It exposes all mothers as imperfect.

The men get organised

The outcome of the Jordan day-care case was the formation of VOCAL (Victims of Child Abuse Laws). The group exists to defend those 'falsely accused' and they are the major group pushing the idea that women use allegations during custody and access disputes. Some members of VOCAL see those who believe that children have been abused as

MOTHERS

"unprofessional" or "misguided", others label them "malicious". VOCAL now have over 100 groups in 40 states, and a similar grouping PAIAC (Parents Against Institutional Abuse of Children) has been formed in Australia. Whilst the names of both groups would suggest that they are concerned about all forms of abuse of children, in reality they focus on sexual assault and defending men. There are two groups in Britain which might develop in similar ways: Families Need Fathers and PAIN (Parents Against Injustice).

The basic position of VOCAL is that once abuse is suspected the accused are denied their constitutional rights – they are not presumed innocent until proven guilty. VOCAL has challenged all the recently introduced legal reforms as well as innovations in investigative techniques. Some of the positions they take are:

- children should not be removed from the home (and presumably nor should suspected abusers) since this amounts to a presumption of guilt;
- The testimony of investigative workers should be treated with caution since their methods presume guilt or that children have something they can be encouraged to tell;
- the use of leading questions, as well as anatomically correct dolls, are means of coaching children to say certain things;
- most evidence presented to the court is not 'proof' but opinion;
- all interviews with children should be videotaped; if there is any suggestion that children are being led or 'coached' then the case should be dropped;
- allowing children to give testimony on video links, or behind screens denies the rights of the defendant and suggests guilt to the jury;
- it is inappropriate for any professional to advocate for the child, since there are no equivalent 'parent advocates'.

Note the ways in which all the attempts to make testifying easier for children are turned around to suggest this is an unfair treatment of the defendant. VOCAL have been very quick to pick up on any argument which might support their case – they too note that there is now an 'industry' connected to child sexual abuse, but their concern is that

this is creating a 'moral panic' alongside the fact that many professionals have a financial interest in 'diagnosing' cases of abuse.

They have also kept a sharp eye on debates between professionals and researchers about whether psychological diagnoses such as *The Child Sexual Abuse Syndrome*, *The Accommodation Syndrome* and *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*⁸ are scientifically valid. Feminists have also questioned these conceptualisations, but our unease centres on the dangers of simplistic models which fail to reflect the complexity and diversity of experience. What VOCAL's attack has done is rapidly undermine the practice in US courts of having 'expert witnesses' whose testimony can support the case that a child has been abused.

VOCAL now boast the 'A Team' – 'experts' and lawyers who specialise in challenging the prosecution evidence – i.e. children's evidence and evidence of adults who believe the child has been abused.

ON THE

VOCAL are secure enough to be explicit about the A Team's objectives – 'A' stands for annihilation!

Through their organisation, a clever tactical approach and use of the media, VOCAL are having an impact on professionals. Even though many know that some of VOCAL's members are abusers and paedophiles they are a powerful lobby. The extent of their success is evident from the fact that several well respected academics participated in their first conference and the fact that many commentators now accept without question that accusations of abuse which are part of custody and access disputes are more likely to be false allegations. The quote which follows is from a woman (!) lawyer who has acted for VOCAL members:

There are a lot of people who sexually offend their own children who are excellent parents, despite their little hang-up. It's not as if they abuse all the time – it maybe two or three times a week over a prolonged

RUN

period . . . People think the worst thing that can happen to you is sexual abuse, it's not – it's being removed from your parents.⁹

The next move in VOCAL's attack may be to produce more justificatory nonsense like this, to undercut the recent acceptance that sexual assault of children is damaging.

The women get organised

Faced with so many women losing custody to abusive men, women in the US responded creatively. Now a network, sometimes called an 'underground railroad', but with the name Sanctuary, provides escape routes and hides women and their children. Interestingly the network brings together feminists and community organisations like Mothers Against Raping Children (MARC), an organisation of adult survivors and mothers passionately committed to protecting children who are being abused. The need for confidentiality means that members of the network limit the numbers of contacts they have, each being able to move women and children one step. This necessary secrecy means no-one knows how many women and children are currently 'underground' – some say hundreds, others thousands.

Whilst women have sheltered other women and children informally for decades, Sanctuary formalised these arrangements following two cases heard by the same judge in Mississippi in 1986/7. Judge Sebe Dale shared Cleveland MP Stuart Bell's peculiar idea that suspecting upstanding men of assaulting their children was a witchhunt, and he too used the Salem analogy. Both fathers had responded to the accusations of abuse by applying for custody of the child. Despite the children having told their mothers about abuse, and medical and psychological evidence supporting this, the judge awarded custody to the fathers.

Both women spent some time in jail for refusing to hand their children over. After serving ten days Dorrie Singley went into hiding with her daughter Chrissy. Karen Newsom had already sent her daughter into hiding and spent 43 days in a Mississippi jail. She then broke down and revealed where her child was. She was held for a further three days and interrogated about her child's protectors. Meanwhile Dorrie was experiencing strange symptoms, on October 13th she was

admitted into hospital with a brain aneurism; she died the next day. This is an extract from the last entry in her journal:

Judge Dale, Honorable, isn't that what they call you? Honorable, isn't that what you're supposed to be? I find this hard to believe. An honorable man would protect the innocent, rather than the accused. At least that's what I always believed. I thought justice was what protected a victim. How wrong I have been for 27 years . . . For now my children as well as I am a victim of your injustice. It sickens my soul to think you have such power. The power to destroy a human being's life. To turn that person inside out, without even blinking. To turn your head on a criminal who could destroy another life. Literally destroy this time.

Dorrie's passion and distress arose out of her growing awareness of how terrified five year old Chrissy was of ever having to see her father again. With her mother dead, Chrissy's future looked bleak, and the feminist lawyer who represented both mothers in court – Garnett Harrison – was increasingly harassed by the court, threatened with being de-barred, and/or being sent to prison if she did not reveal Chrissy's whereabouts. Six weeks after her mother's death Chrissy was handed over to the juvenile authorities in San Francisco, in the hope that they would protect her. Despite the efforts of many women, within four weeks she was returned to the custody of her father.

While Sanctuary provides an escape route for some women and children, providing housing, money and travel arrangements, it is a drop in the ocean, and may reach breaking point soon, not least because the FBI are involved in a massive investigation in an attempt to break the network. At the same time many mothers are choosing to send their children into hiding whilst trying themselves to take on the legal system, to fight for justice. More and more of them are ending up in jail: Elizabeth Morgan has become the longest serving prisoner for contempt of court in US history – she has been in prison for almost two years! The latest ironic twist is that in late 1988 Tim Foxworth (Chrissy's father) filed a \$152 million law suit against 18 people who had sheltered Chrissy.

Whilst Sanctuary has created an alternative for some women and children, Louise Armstrong points out that the analogy with the underground railroad developed by Black slaves and Black and white abolitionists is:

. . . inaccurate in one crucial way: for these women and children, *there is no North*.

There is no state, no place, where safety can be relied on, no area in the country that promises protection. Indeed, ironically, I am told that women from Canada are seeking haven here – even as US mothers and children look towards Canada for hope.¹⁰

In case British women are tempted by the cosy security of thinking this couldn't happen here – it already has, and has been for some time. The difference here is that the men are not organised – yet.

So where to now

The fact that there is no 'North' means we have to continue our dual track approach – but with more commitment and courage.

Unless we are prepared to abandon growing numbers of women and children to a life underground, we cannot afford to stop making claims on the state and legal system for change. We must think through the changes we campaign for, rather than accept the piecemeal tinkering that has been introduced so far. We also need to develop ways of entering into strategic alliances with professionals who are committed to supporting women and children, so that a coherent and strong resistance to the backlash can be organised.

If we are to have any chance of resisting total professional take-over, any chance of providing alternatives to adult women, young women and children, we cannot afford to lose any part of grass-roots services organised by women for women. We must begin to find ways of securing what we have, adapting to new circumstances and developing new networks and institutions. There are various ways we can do this. For example, feminists in professional jobs should commit themselves to lobbying for, supporting and, where appropriate and possible, developing independent women's groups. All of us have to begin to take seriously what may be necessary to, as Charlotte Bunch says, 'support our own'.¹¹ I suspect that more feminists support organisations like Friends of the Earth financially, than make annual donations to their local Rape Crisis, refuge or Women's Centre. We all probably spend more on books, alternative health care, therapy and leisure than we do on maintaining the institutions we have created. Their continued existence may depend on whether or not we choose to 'support our own'.

We also need more women committed to

'going public'; highlighting injustice and oppression through media actions and other forms of direct action. It took creativity and risk-taking to open the first refuges, and many women are now taking risks every day to keep women and children safe.

A war has been declared on women to preserve the right to father-rape. It is a war that feminists triggered by speaking out. If we do not join in we will have done no more than colluded in what is a cruel joke.¹² □

For more information, or to send donations:

Sanctuary, PO Box 50476, New Orleans, LA 70150

Letters of support to Elizabeth Morgan can be sent to:
Elizabeth Morgan, MD, 223390, Cell 20,
South One, 1901 O St, Washington DC
20003

Notes

1. Jeffrey J. Hauggard and N. Dickon Reppucci, 1988, *The Sexual Abuse of Children*, Josey-Bass (see chapter 5).
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8. See Chapter 4 of Hauggard and Reppucci (note 1) for a discussion of these models.
9. Hechler, p. 126.
10. Louise Armstrong, 1988, 'Child sexual abuse: fighting to end the rape of children', *Off Our Backs*, March, p. 22.
11. Charlotte Bunch, 1987, *Passionate Politics*, St. Martin's Press.
12. Armstrong, 1988, p. 23.

The Feminist Coalition Against Child Sexual Abuse can be contacted c/o CASU, Ladbroke House, 62-66 Highbury Grove, London N5 2AD. Copies of the briefing document are available for £1, and a southern area conference is planned for September.



INTIMATE QUESTIONS

One of the things privilege means is money. As feminists we have not often discussed how money fits into our lives. Barbara Jones asks what we should expect of one another?

It has always been basic to my feminism to recognise that we live in an unfair world; that some have far more than their due and others hardly enough to survive. It is this difference in privilege between people that capitalists have always exploited, because the less privileged you are, the fewer choices you can make. And I have always thought it to be a responsibility of feminists to acknowledge and redress the balance of privilege. We have explored to some extent the privileges that belong to class, race, gender and disability and found ways of saying what they are. So far I haven't seen any such attempts to say what privileges money brings, so here's a beginning.

It is a privilege never to be too worried about being in debt because 'daddy' will bail you out. Anyone who has the security of knowing that someone else (and it is usually the family, often a man) will get you out of a financial difficulty, even if only in the direst need, is in a much better, more secure, more powerful position than a woman who does not have access to this facility; and therefore she has more options in life.

It is a privilege to have access to extended and interest free loans, again usually

supplied by the family and which often over a period of time are written off. Other women without this advantage have to pay interest for the privilege of using capital supplied by a bank, building society or loan company – if they are able to provide enough reassurance to a bank manager in the first place that they are a 'good risk'.

It is a privilege to be given enough capital to pay a deposit on a house, again usually from the family. This is a favourite gift for the wealthy to use because not only does it keep the money in the family but it also goes on the one commodity which never loses value. Housing is one of the basic necessities of life; we all need adequate and secure places to live. Although there are many valid arguments against the ownership of property, it is not the owning of houses I object to so much but that not everyone is privileged enough to be able to do so.

It's a privilege to inherit wealth and property, and I would even go so far here as to say that feminists should accept that we have only as much rights to an inheritance as everyone else, including those with nothing to inherit, and should act accordingly.

Steps forward

The list of privileges due to money and wealth is endless: paid-for holidays abroad, mum's old car, sets of clothes for the children, profit from increased house prices; and of course, because nothing's ever simple, they vary according to who it is giving and getting. It's very different for a woman who's always had to struggle in life to receive an inheritance than it is for a woman who's always been used to a good income. I would argue that it is possible to take a good look at how we use money and are used by it in our lives, and to find radical new ways to change our relationship to it and with it.

The first step has to be to find a way of defining ourselves and our sense of self worth that doesn't involve money, as this immediately rids money of power over us; in a society based on money this is not easy. We all need money to survive, and I certainly don't think we should forget how important it is. I'm not advocating the attitude that money is meaningless and let's all live in scruffy clothes and squats; more that our peace of mind should be dependent on us making our society a place where *everyone* can have those things in life we'd like for ourselves.

Let's face it: the rich get rich off the backs of the poor. A lot of achieving richness involves being mean and nasty; it means exploiting those in a less powerful position, but since very few people openly operate on these motivations, how does it happen?

Everyone likes to have money but no-one likes to admit it. It's more socially acceptable to be 'broke', but being broke can mean very different things. For instance, we all have a tendency to spend up to or beyond our means. For a woman with kids on the dole this means having no cash for a few days before each giro arrives, no money for day to day necessities like bread and milk. It means always buying second-hand clothes, hand-me-down furniture. Never having a holiday. At risk of losing your home because the landlord wants to move back. Now her situation of being broke is completely different from the woman who spends a lot of her salary on drink and entertainment, paying the mortgage, buying new clothes, replastering the kitchen and getting educational toys for the kids so that by the end of the month she's overdrawn on her credit card. Being broke

has far more to do with what you've spent your money on and how much you've spent than on how much cash you've got in your pocket. I've heard feminists call themselves *poor* because they have no *cash* and the next moment they're off abroad on the money they've made from owning capital assets, like rent from a house. This is not poverty, but it is dishonesty, and it is ripping off other women by claiming an unreal equality.

Capitalist behaviour

Feminists are not at all immune to these capitalist ways and often adopt a sort of inverse snobbery to go with them. For instance, there are those who live in squats whilst owning houses elsewhere; those who pay concessionary rates at discos and keep quiet about their savings account; those who get hand-outs from their families and only buy their own drinks in the pub; those who can afford to buy new clothes but can't afford to support women's projects; those who pretend to be less well off than they are, distort the truth about their backgrounds, or forget to mention it. Since capitalist behaviour is not confined only to those who have money, there are also those who mouth off at wealth and particular women without living in a sharing way themselves. Being poor doesn't necessarily mean you're not a capitalist, only that you haven't had a chance to prove it yet.

A favourite riposte to any question about the use of money is 'It's my money, I worked for it, and I can spend it how I choose. Don't you *dare* tell me what to do with it.' Well fine, yes, ok; but that's not a feminist answer. We are supposed to be able to question everything, especially the personal. It is threatening to have someone ask what you're doing with your power, but we need to be able to meet that challenge if we are to be able to use money as a power for the sort of change we want to see. Unfortunately, more often than not the acquisition of money and wealth creates the great divide between the haves and the have-nots.

What happens to women who 'make it'? They start going to places they never used to go because they couldn't afford it. They start mixing with women they didn't use to mix with, who also go to these places. They lose their old friends who can't keep up financially with the holidays abroad, the new car, who



Angela Karach



Angela Karach



feel uncomfortable with the inequality in life-style and living standards and the way all their time seems taken up with working/money-making. They embrace capitalism like an old friend, with a relief; they can relax and enjoy a respite from the struggle of being a feminist. It's easier, moving from seeing everything as political – what to pay at discos, where to eat, who to mix with, who to work for, how to make/get money – to seeing only certain things as political. A great gulf opens up in which the voices of poorer women start sounding resentful, envious, and above all, unreasonable. Life takes on a new perspective and old principles don't seem so important any more. They say, money's not political, it's mine.

But it is not unreasonable to resent someone who is adding to your oppression, and very often the women who launch into newfound wealth, using their spending power to buy greater freedom of choice, become consumed by capitalism before they know it, and are trampling on the rest of us and learning to call it something else, or blaming us for our inability to do what they've done.

All sorts of justifications are used, like 'I've worked bloody hard for years with no money to get where I am today' or 'I put a lot of effort into getting off my backside and getting trained. Now I've earned it.' This last one implies that those of us who haven't 'made it' either haven't tried, don't really want to change, or are simply *too lazy*. Rarely is there an acknowledgment that women can make a positive choice *not* to make it, when making it means reaching a position where you have the power to exploit others. It is also rarely acknowledged that lots of women work hard all their lives, never make any money and are never recognised or appreciated. Coupled with these attitudes is another one: 'If feminists are on the dole it's because they want to be, because anyone can get a job if they really want to.' Very often women who've made it feel hard done by, that they're misunderstood by those who haven't made it, that they should be praised not criticised; and if they do try in some way to redress the balance of privilege then they want women to be grateful, rather than seeing it as nothing more than justice.

Positive change

There are ways of using money for positive change, if we only have a little imagination and belief in ourselves. Take housing for instance, something we all need. My favourite ideal for accommodation is a nationwide network of housing associations providing well-maintained houses and flats of a good standard that can be swapped when you want to move house; no private ownership at all. However, this is a completely unrealistic goal at present; what is possible is for us to recognise the privilege that ownership of property gives, to let go of our possessiveness about something it's debatable whether we should have at all if we believe in equality. Without giving up our own security we can act towards other women in a spirit of sharing rather than possession.

Where I live we set up a fund to overcome the problem of having no capital but wanting to buy your own house – it's cheaper to buy than to rent here. By anonymous donation we raised enough money to pay deposits, legal fees and necessary improvements prior to moving in and supported working class lesbians through the process of feeling able to obtain and obtaining a mortgage. It doesn't, in reality, take a lot of effort to pay a cheque into a housing fund, but it can make a huge difference to someone's life.

Inherited wealth doesn't have to be a well-kept secret or a joke at a party, but can be used to bring about positive change for all of us. It is possible to set up collectives of women to decide where and to whom the money should go so that no-one has personal responsibility for it or can use it to enhance their own power and status. Alternatively, wealth can always be given away anonymously. There are also well-established methods in existence – charitable trusts – which, with well-designed constitutions and aims, can serve the same purpose but on a more formal basis.

Death, another taboo subject, can offer the opportunity of changing the way money is distributed. By leaving a will a woman can halt the patriarchal practice of her property going to her next of kin (usually male) and leave it to, for instance, the Rock October Trust who are setting up 'Old Dykes Homes'. Any unmarried woman who dies suddenly will have

all her possessions taken by 'the family' as lovers of such women have found to their distress.

Income sharing is another way that two or more women can combat capitalism. This can be in the form of it being accepted practice that women with greater wealth pay more towards the cost of shared meals, shared transport, shared holidays, shared houses etc. It can be more formalised, with an agreed-upon redistribution of one woman's salary to others. The method I prefer, because it removes the link between the woman and 'her' money, is for a group of women to decide on an acceptable income; all those who earn or receive more than this pay the excess into a fund, and all those who earn or receive less take an income out of the fund.

Skill exchange

Sliding scales is another more or less accepted practice by which those with more share their privilege with those with less. For this to be really effective, however, the breadth of the scale has to reflect women's true incomes. For instance, to expect a woman with an income of £35 per week to pay £3.50 for an hour's treatment – 10 per cent of her income – is not the same as expecting a woman with an income of £150 to pay £10 – only 7 per cent of her income. Almost always what happens with sliding scales is that the poorer you are, the more, proportionately, you have to pay.

Skill exchange as an idea and in practice has been around for quite a while too. This is the process whereby whatever skill or talent each woman has, whether it be for childcare, accounting, or mending staircases, is accepted as of equal value, hour for hour. So to two women's mutual advantage, each can benefit from the skill, knowledge and time of the other without the need for exchanging money. You can have a kitchen fitted in return for weekly massage.

Women who own their own houses can share them with others – it doesn't have to be anybody, it can be friends or lovers who don't pay rent, the 'tenant' paying their share of all the bills and maintenance (not home improvement) costs. If you're buying a house on a mortgage, and then you have a tenant who is paying rent, you are in effect getting that tenant to pay your mortgage from which you will reap all the profits and she will be home-

less if you decide to sell or fall out with each other. Especially now that house prices are so high, and one woman can't afford a mortgage alone, rather than exploit other women who are in even less of a position to buy, you can make a legal agreement: the tenant pays rent and when the house is sold in the future she receives a percentage of the selling price that reflects how much she's 'invested'. Equally, if a woman does work on your house that improves its value, you can make a similar agreement so that the profit, which is due to privilege, is more fairly distributed.

So the idea is this: we can look at the power relationships that have to do with money, wealth and property. Although it is likely to be a difficult process, it is also challenging and inspiring. There is no reason why we, as feminists, should go along with the ideas and principles of capitalism. In fact I argue that you can't be a feminist if you are a practising capitalist. Capitalism and patriarchy go hand in hand, if we can accept that we are all brought up with patriarchal attitudes that we then have to uncover and rid ourselves of, then we must also accept that we are all brought up to be capitalist and we must struggle to liberate ourselves from that also. It requires a sense of responsibility to accept our privilege and to do something constructive about it; with a little thought and ingenuity that should be possible.

Capitalism is something that is present in our everyday lives, in the smallest transaction and the most personal of exchanges. It's a way to use or abuse power, to feel superior to others, to feel smug and self assured, comfortable and safe. Feminists, to whom the personal is political, should be asking ourselves these questions:

- Would you be happy to let anyone see your bank balance or savings account book?
- Do you, or would you, pay another woman less to look after your children or clean your house than what you yourself earn each hour?
- Do you feel justified in taking rent from a woman who lives in your house?
- Do you think that professional skills are worth more – are more important – than other skills?
- If you inherited £10,000, how much would you spend on yourself?
- Do you think I'm impertinent to ask these questions? □



with our own hands

1

Ellen Bell writes of her personal experience of violence and abuse from a woman lover and the failure of feminist organisations to provide support.

The irony is had a man ever treated me that way I would have recognized it for what it was. But it was done to me by a woman, a lover, and it has taken several years for me to name it as abuse, as battering. I carried on this denial not only because it was too painful to admit those things were happening to me, but also as a community lesbians are refusing to acknowledge that battering and abuse do go on in lesbian relationships. Lesbians have been at the forefront of struggles to combat male violence against women, why do we often remain fence-sitters when it happens among ourselves?

I was in a relationship for several months with a woman whom I later discovered was known for her violent and abusive behaviour. At first it was very passionate and intense, but gradually her behaviour changed. In arguments if I cried she treated me with contempt and berated me for being weak. She began to criticise my physical appearance and my choice of friends, when we were out with other women she'd accuse me of flirting and would physically drag me away from conversations with friends. I was often kept awake all night by her tirades and on occasions she'd prevent me going to work. I don't remember the first time she hit me, but I remember the time she repeatedly slapped me across the face; locked me with her in a bathroom and hit me because I'd been talking to a friend; ripped up my new shirt whilst I was wearing it; threatened to break my nose when I wanted to leave a party; kicked in my bedroom door when I tried to escape her violence. Incidents such as these became more frequent but there were always times when she was loving and caring and she always apologised profusely afterwards.

Throughout this I couldn't see her behaviour for what it was: abusive, controlling and violent. Like many battered women I made excuses for my abuser and I tried to deny what was happening. Like most abusers she refused to take responsibility for her actions: she had been battered as a child so she couldn't help it; she was drunk so she didn't mean it; she hadn't really hit me, just pushed me; anyway, I'd caused the whole argument in the first place. I wanted to accept these explanations and as time went on and the incidents became worse it became harder to admit how frightened of her I was and how far fear kept me in the relationship. Her control over me became greater as I realised that to resist only meant long sleepless nights, violence and long tirades of insults.

It is hard enough for heterosexual women to name the violence in their relationships, in many ways it is harder for lesbians: we don't expect it from each other. I know I still carry around some of those naive beliefs I had when I first came out about women-loving-women; we expect our relationships to be different. It is men who are violent, not women, not lesbians and especially not lesbian-feminists. To admit that there is violence in our relationships is to admit that we are less than perfect and we feel if the world-out-there were to get hold of this information it would use it in its usual homophobic fashion.

Choosing to exercise power and control

There's also the myth that if there is violence in lesbian relationships then it's a fight between equals. After all, men can batter because they're conditioned to, they're bigger

Index to Trouble and Strife issues 10-14, L to Z (continued from issue 15)

- L** **Labour Party:** 'In Labour' - Lynn Alderson interviewing Sarah Roeloffs, 12:33
- Leigh, Sue:** 'Growing Old Disgracefully' - attitudes to middle age, 10:20
- Leonard, Diana:** interviewing Fujieda Mioko, 'Japan's First Wave', 12:26
- Lesbianism:** Zehra, 'Different Roots, Different Routes' - Ethnic minority Lesbians, 10:11; Janice Raymond interviewed by Susanne Kappeler, Liz Kelly and Kathy Parker, 'The Politics of Passion', 11:38; Susanne Kappeler, 'Who's Afraid of Andrea Dworkin?', 12:44; Rosemary Auchmuty, 'You're a Dyke, Angela', 10:23; Annabel Farraday, 'Lesbian Outlaws' - past legislation against Lesbians, 13:9; Gail Chester, 'Section 28', (letter), 14:3; See also **Clause 27/28/29**
- Levine June:** Nickie Roberts, 'So Much to Say' - Review of June Levine and Lyn Madden: 'Lyn, a Story of Prostitution', 14:23
- 'London Rape Crisis':** Romi Bowen and Bernadette Manning interviewed by Lynn Alderson and Liz Kelly, 10:49
- Lopez, Isabel Ros:** 'Hands that can't be trusted', (letter), 10:7
- Loughran, Christina:** 'Organizing Against the Odds' - 10 years of feminism in Northern Ireland, 11:48
- Manchester:** 'The Mancunian Way' - Sara Scott and Al Dickens interviewing Angie Cooper, 12:49
- Manning, Bernadette:** interviewed by Lynn Alderson & Liz Kelly about the London Rape Crisis group, 10:49
- Maza, Liza:** interviewed by Cath Jackson about the Filipino women's coalition, 'When the Revolution Came', 14:13
- McCamley, Caroline:** 'States of Emergence' - Feminism in Northern Ireland, 14:46
- Middle Age:** Sue Leigh, 'Growing Old Disgracefully', 10:20
- Mioko, Fujieda:** interviewed by Diana Leonard, 'Japan's First Wave', 12:26
- N**
- Naoko, Iyori:** 'Sick and Tired of Japan', 12:13
- Ndaba, Julia:** interviewed on Azanian Liberation by Liz Kelly, 'Hijacking in the Name of Solidarity', 14:31
- Nielsen, Sigrid:** 'From the Faraway Nearby', 11:55
- O**
- Ono, Martha:** translated Japanese articles, in 'For a Song', 12:13
- P**
- Palmer, Helen:** 'In Sisterhood', 14:26
- Parker, Kathy:** interviewing Janice Raymond, 'Politics of Passion', 11:38
- Polemic, feminist:** Attar, Dena, 'The Controversial Feminist', 12:16
- Police:** Sara Scott and Alison Dickens, 'Controlling with Kindness', the 'softly-softly' approach to rape, 13:40
- Pornography:** Debbie Cameron, 'That's Entertainment?' - Jack the Ripper and the Celebration of Sexual Violence, 13:17; Jill Radford, 'Sexual Murder' - Review of Deborah Cameron and Liz Frazer: 'Lust to Kill', 13:47; Susanne Kappeler, 'International struggles against Pornography', 14:27

Potts, Laura: 'With Women', (review of 'Feminist Practice in Women's Health Care', edited by Christine Webb), 11:43

Prince, Mary: Joan Grant, 'Call Loud - the History of Mary Prince, Caribbean Abolitionist', 14:9

Prostitution: Tono Haruhi, 'Military Occupation and Prostitution Tourism', 12:10;
Tsukamoto Yumi, 'Trafficking in Women: Sex Tours Come Home to Japan', 12:11;
Iyori Naoko, 'Sick and Tired of Japan', 12:13;
Tono Haruhi 'A Heightening Appetite for Asian Women', 12:14;
Debbie Cameron, 'That's Entertainment?' - Jack the Ripper and Sexual Violence, 13:17;
Susanne Kappeler, 'International Struggles Against Pornography', 13:27;
Cath Jackson interviewing Liza Maza, 'When the Revolution Came', 14:13;
Nickie Roberts, 'So Much to Say' - review of June Levine & Lyn Madden: 'Lyn, a Story of Prostitution' and Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander (eds), 'Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry', 14:23

Racism: Zehra, 'Different Roots, Different Routes' - Ethnic minority Lesbians, 10:11;
Gail Chester, 'A Goldmine of Knowledge' 800 African Writers ripped off, 10:35;
Ruth Chigwada, 'Not Victims, Not Superwomen' - black girls and education, 11:19;
Joan Grant, 'Call Loud - the History of Mary Prince, Caribbean Abolitionist', 14:9;
'Hijacking in the Name of Solidarity', Julia Ndaba interviewed by Liz Kelly, 14:31

Radford, Jill: 'Sexual Murder' - review of Deborah Cameron and Liz Frazer: 'Lust to Kill', 13:47

Rape: Romi Bowen and Bernadette Manning interviewed by Lynn Alderson and Liz Kelly about the London Rape Crisis group, 10:49;
Sara Scott and Alison Dickens, 'Controlling with Kindness', 13:40;
See also **Violence against Women and Pornography**

Raymond, Janice: interviewed by Susanne Kappeler, Liz Kelly and Kathy Parker, 'The Politics of Passion', 11:38

Reproductive Technology: 'What is FINNRAGE?' (letter), 10:2;
Robyn Rowland, 'Facts, not fantasy visions', (letter), 10:3;
Pat Spallone, 'A plurality of opinions', (letter), 10:5;
Dale Spender, 'Criticising criticism', (letter), 10:7;
Isabel Ros Lopez, 'Hands that can't be trusted', (letter), 10:7;
Jalna Hammer & Sheila Saunders, 'Personal Attacks', (letter), 10:9;
Alice Henry, 'Knowledge is Power' (letter), 10:10;
Gena Corea, 'Counterpoint', (letter), 11:4;
Mary Jennings, 'Don't close off the debate', (letter), 12:2;
Judy Hunt, (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation), 'Abortion and Disability', 13:37;
See also **Family Politics**

Ritchie, Beth: 'Coalitions, Leadership and Power': interview by Liz Kelly on the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 12:5

Roberts, Nickie: 'So Much to Say' - review of June Levine & Lyn Madden: 'Lyn, a Story of Prostitution' and Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander (eds), 'Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry', 14:23

Rockett, Sally, (letter), Dena Attar, 14:2

Rowland, Robyn: 'Facts, not fantasy visions', (letter), 10:3

Russia: Bridget Foster, 'Tales from a labour ward', (review of Julia Vosnesenskaya's 'The Women's Decameron), 10:45

Sargent, Mary L: interviewed by T&S on direct action and feminism, 'Rising in Resistance', 11:7;
Letter on Direct Action, 13:2

Schoolgirl Stories: Rosemary Auchmuty, 'You're a Dyke, Angela' - the rise and fall of the schoolgirl story, 10:23

Scicinska, Jola: 'Proud to be Jewish, Glad to be Gay', (papercuts), 14:8

Scott, Sara: 'Sex and Danger: Feminism and AIDS', 11:13;
'The Mancunian Way' - interviewing Angie Cooper about Feminism in Manchester, 12:49;
'Controlling with Kindness': police and the 'softly-softly' approach to rape, 13:40

Segal, Lynne: Liz Kelly, 'The New Defeatism', (review of Segal's 'Is the Future Female?'), 11:23

Sex Industry: See **Prostitution**

Sexuality: Margaret Jackson, 'The Spinster and her Discontents', (review of Sheila Jeffreys' 'The Spinster & Her Enemies'), 10:40;
Sara Scott, 'Sex and Danger: Feminism and AIDS', 11:13;
Susanne Kappeler, 'Who's Afraid of Andrea Dworkin?' 12:44;
See also **Lesbianism**

Sheila Saunders: 'Personal Attacks', (letter), 10:9

Single Women: see **Spinsters**

Sisterhood: Janice Raymond in discussion with Susanne Kappeler, Liz Kelly and Kathy Parker, 'The Politics of Passion', 11:38;
Helen Palmer, 'In Sisterhood', 14:26

Slavery: Tono Haruhi, 'Military Occupation and Prostitution Tourism', 12:10, and 'A Heightening Appetite for Asian Women', 12:14;
Tsukamoto Yumi, 'Trafficking in Women: Sex Tours Come Home to Japan', 12:11;
Iyori Naoko, 'Sick and Tired of Japan', 12:13;
Joan Grant, 'Call Loud - the History of Mary Prince', 14:9;
Cath Jackson interviewing Liza Maza, 'When the Revolution Came', 14:13

Smyth, Ailbhe: 'States of Emergence' - Feminism in Northern Ireland, 14:46

South Africa: See **Azania**

Spallone, Pat: 'A plurality of opinions', (letter), 10:5

Speed, Ann: 'States of Emergence' - Feminism in Northern Ireland, 14:46

Spender, Dale: 'Criticising criticism', (letter), 10:7

Spinsters: Margaret Jackson, 'The Spinster and her Discontents', (review of Sheila Jeffreys' 'The Spinster & Her Enemies'), 10:40

Therapy: Laura Potts, 'With Women', (review of 'Feminist Practice in Women's Health Care', edited by Christine Webb), 11:43;
Janice Raymond, interviewed by Susanne Kappeler, Liz Kelly and Kathy Parker, 'The Politics of Passion', 11:38

Violence against women: 'Coalitions, Leadership and Power', Liz Kelly

interviewing Beth Ritchie on the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 12:5;
 Debbie Cameron, 'That's Entertainment?' - Jack the Ripper and the Celebration of Sexual Violence, 13:17;
 Jill Radford, 'Sexual Murder' - review of Deborah Cameron & Liz Frazer: 'Lust to Kill', 13:47;
 See also: **Children - Sexual abuse; Pornography; Rape**

Voznesenskaya, Julia: Bridget Foster, 'Tales from a labour ward', (review of Vosnesenskaya's 'The Women's Decameron'), 10:45

Walker, Alice: film of Walker's novel 'The Colour Purple' reviewed by Dorothy Francis, 10:18

Ward, Margaret: 'A difficult, dangerous honesty' - 1986 Conference on Women's Movement in Ireland, 12:36

Ward, Wendy: 'Antidotes to despair', (Letter), 11:2

Webb, Christine: Laura Potts, 'With Women', (review of Webb's edited collection 'Feminist Practice in Women's Health Care'), 11:43

Wilson, Anna: 'Fit for What?' (reviewing Jeanette Winterson's 'Fit for the Future') 10:17

Winterson, Jeanette: Anna Wilson, 'Fit for what?', (review of Winterson's 'Fit for the Future'), 10:17

Wistrich, Harriet: 'Clause 29', 13:7

'Women Rising in Resistance': see **Direct Action**

Women's Movement - History: Margaret Jackson, 'The Spinster and her Discontents', (review of Sheila

Jeffreys' 'The Spinster & Her Enemies'), 10:40;

Algeria: Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas, 'Against Nationalism' - the betrayal of Algerian Women, 11:29;

Ireland: Christina Loughran, 'Organizing Against the Odds' - 10 years of feminism in Northern Ireland, 11:48;

Margaret Ward, 'A difficult, dangerous honesty', 12:36;

Ailbhe Smyth, Pauline Jackson, Caroline McCamley and Ann Speed, 'States of Emergence', 14:46;

Japan: Fujieda, Mioko, 'Japan's First Wave', 12:26;

Sara Scott and Al Dickens interviewing Angie Cooper: 'The Mancunian Way' - 12:49

Women's Movement: Current developments:

Liz Kelly, 'The New Defeatism', (review of Segal's 'Is the Future Female?'), 11:23;

Sigrid Nielsen, 'From the Faraway Nearby', 11:55;

Ella Bahaire, 'Yuppie Feminism', 11:56;

Julie Bindel, 'The State of the Movement', 13:50

Writing and feminism: Dale Spender - on feminist book reviewing, 'Criticising criticism', (Letter), 10:7;

Gail Chester, 'A Goldmine of Knowledge' - SIDA rips off 800 African Women, 10:35;

Dena Attar, 'The Controversial Feminist' - on the need for a feminist polemic, 12:16;

Susanne Kappeler, 'Who's Afraid of Andrea Dworkin' - on feminist book reviewing, 12:44

Y Yumi, Tsukamoto: 'Trafficking in Women: Sex Tours Come Home to Japan', 12:11

Z Zehra: 'Different Roots, Different Routes' - Ethnic minority Lesbians, 10:11

and stronger and they have the force of the law on their side, but most women are about the same size, we don't have those male attitudes about violence, nor does the law provide us with any props. But violence and abuse is about *choosing* to exercise power and control over another person. My abuser wasn't bigger than me, in fact she was quite a bit shorter, I don't even think she was very much stronger either. But the hurt she inflicted, both physical and emotional, was very real. Women do fight back against their batterers - this does not change battering into a fight (nor would we suggest this was so in a heterosexual relationship) but somehow among lesbians we have forgotten to look at the power dynamics that underlie our relationships.

And who do lesbians who are being battered turn to for support? Often our community denies it or refuses to take it seriously. After ending the relationship I cut off a lot of friends who had witnessed my ex-lover's violence and abuse (not only towards me) because they continued their friendships with her. I could not trust anyone who appeared to condone her behaviour or who might provide a means for her to contact me. I felt ashamed and responsible for what had happened - a silence existed around battering in my relationship like that which exists around all violence against women - except in the instance of male violence we are at least allowing ourselves to speak out.

We know already that the police provide very little help in cases of domestic violence, and as a lesbian I certainly wouldn't trust them to come to my assistance in any event. But what would I have done if the violence had escalated so far that I needed to call assistance urgently? And what if I had wanted to press criminal charges? I have no doubt that many lesbians would have considered calling the police a treacherous act, and there have been instances where battered lesbians have done this and been ostracised by many in their community. But what double standard are we acting out when we want male abusers prosecuted with the full force of the law and we allow women to do it without sanction?

All the agencies that exist for battered women largely serve the needs of heterosexual women, for a battered lesbian to enter a women's shelter would be to risk a lot of homophobia from other women there and

from Social Services. Lesbians have been very prominent in building up organisations like Women's Aid, but, as so often happens, our own needs have been put on hold.

Isolation

Writing this article has been a long process for me. It began by getting away from the woman who had abused me, this included giving up my job and moving house. I then largely isolated myself from a women's community in which I could no longer feel safe and spent a long time building back my self-esteem. For many months I lived in fear of encountering my ex-lover, I was very depressed and had disturbing nightmares. During this time I did not recognise that relationship as a battering or abusive relationship nor did I feel angry about what had happened. I felt guilty, scared and totally lacking in confidence, and I never talked about it, it was far too painful.

Two and a half years later I began a new relationship and was able to begin talking about what had happened with a woman who I could trust and with whom I felt safe. Talking about it helped me realise the full extent of the pain I'd bottled up for so long. A few months later I moved on to San Francisco where I started working on a crisis line for battered women. I was amazed to find they had a lesbian services project, they dealt with battering in lesbian relationships in our training and I took several lesbian callers on the line. It was only then that I named my relationship for what it was. And talking to callers, lesbian and straight, I began to recognise what I'd gone through as an experience shared by many battered women.

I realised that my abuser was not an individual aberration - her behaviour followed the pattern of a batterer. I could stop denying what had happened and stop feeling guilty. I was staggered when I read 'Naming the Violence' (a book by lesbians about battering in lesbian relationships) to have my experience so closely reflected in the personal accounts written by other lesbians who'd been battered. It was such a relief to know I was not the only one.

Battering and abuse in lesbian relationships is something we cannot afford to deny, it *does* happen and we must talk about it. We have a responsibility to those lesbians who are being battered. It is not a pleasant thing to have to wash our dirty laundry in

public, but if we don't it's at the expense of women who are silenced and unable to go anywhere for support. Battered lesbians suffer the same experiences as women battered in heterosexual relationships, but they also suffer discrimination from agencies and silence from a community which speaks out against male violence but does little to prevent women's violence against women. We must make the lesbian community a safe place by ending this silence, by offering real support for lesbians who are battered and by holding batterers accountable for their actions. All violence as control is wrong, regardless of the sex of the perpetrator.

2

Liz Kelly and Sara Scott raise some of the difficult questions about developing a theory and practice around violence and sexual abuse when it is perpetrated by women.

Why has it been so difficult for feminists to face the issue of violence by women – to their children, and/or to other women? Have we seen this as threatening our view of women as 'nicer', more caring, preferable as individuals to men? Have we unwittingly held onto nineteenth century ideas about women's purity, fearing that our cause would be undermined if we admitted that there are women who are less than perfect? Do we fear that acknowledging that women too can sometimes be nasty will undermine our analysis of the crucial role male violence plays in the maintenance of women's oppression?

Whatever the reason, feminists' collective refusal (with a few important exceptions) to honestly explore these issues has left us vulnerable to the 'women do it too' attack on our analysis, and has left women and children who are being abused by women vulnerable since our services have not been accessible to them.

Feminism is an analysis which enables us to explore issues from the standpoint of women, it is becoming a perspective which takes account of differences between women. We can, therefore, look at any issue from a feminist perspective. The central concepts in

feminist analysis are power and domination.

Violence is not 'natural' to men and 'unnatural' to women: it is one means by which power can be gained and maintained – between nations, social groups and individuals. In relation to male violence against women we argue both that the use and threat of violence helps maintain men's power over women and that individual men can abuse individual women simply because they have the power to do so. The relationship between male power and violence is, therefore, mutually exclusive: all human beings can choose to use violence. The difference is that men's violence is legitimated through definitions of the nature of men and women and their relationship to each other.

Violence is culturally sanctioned in a range of contexts where relations of dominance and subordination exist. Depending on one's position in various hierarchies one learns that it is, or is not, acceptable to use violence. White heterosexual men have the most access to legitimised violence. This socialisation, however, is not brainwashing: men and women learn, fail to learn and unlearn behaviour considered appropriate for their own or the opposite sex in complex and contradictory ways.

One important principle of feminist practice has been to support other women, but in not taking on the complexity of issues surrounding violence and its use, we have frequently reacted towards women who have been violent to other women and/or their children as though they are indeed 'unnatural' and 'not women'.

Red-herring or a slippery fish?

Women are not exempt from having power over others, particularly children, by virtue of being women. Nor do they escape the oppression of all women by using what power they have in an abusive way. For example, we know that women sexually abuse children in less than 2 per cent of cases – it is very rare, but it happens. We can continue to side-step this as the red-herring it usually is, or we can grasp the slippery fish and begin to develop a feminist understanding of women as abusers. We owe this to the adult survivors of such abuse who currently feel we do not want to hear what they have to tell us.

What feminists have done is develop an analysis of women's *self* abuse: around alcohol, drugs, self-mutilation and suicide. To a lesser extent a few women have attempted to place an understanding of women's physical abuse of their children within the context of motherhood under patriarchy. Some mothers take tranquillizers, some burn their babies with cigarettes, others 'cope'. What these explanations have told us is that for women our powerlessness in the world sits alongside limited power over others (children especially) and over our own bodies. Given that violence is always an expression of power over others, it is not surprising, that the main targets of women's aggression are their children and themselves. This analysis neither condones women's violence to children nor provides excuses for why men abuse women and children. We should not, therefore, be afraid that by developing an understanding of women who sexually abuse children, or of women who beat up their women lovers, we will undermine our analysis that these acts are generally ones of male power, or that it will lead inexorably into the trap of feeling sorry for violent men.

The only alternative to our developing such understandings is for us to redraw the boundaries of feminism, to limit it only to a commitment to women who are 'victims'. The question is whether the primary division around which feminism is organised is to remain that between men and women, or to become one between perpetrators and their victims.

By facing a series of questions we can begin to move on. Do refuges, which were set up to shelter and provide safety for women escaping domestic tyranny by men, provide the same service to women escaping women? If not, why not? Why, in many refuges which were originally thought of as 'safe space', is the physical abuse of children living there and the occasional use of violence between the women themselves ignored? When feminist services around rape, child sexual abuse or domestic violence are approached by women abusers do we turn them away as we do men? If not, then what?

These questions are pressing. We are increasingly faced with dilemmas: what work we should be doing? How should we respond to professional interventions such as one

recently undertaken at Styal women's prison with women who had 'sexually abused' children (see Community Care, 27 April)? Where do we refer women for whom these issues are central to their experience? Unless we begin creating a feminist theory and practice then the professionals will impose their agenda both in the public sphere, and on women they are involved with.

There are two places we could draw some insight from. Firstly, the support work done with child and adult survivors of sexual abuse by men on their anger towards their mothers, and the fact that in some cases their mothers knew and ignored the abuse. In this work we have tried not to blame women for acts they did not commit, whilst recognising their responsibility (when they did know) for not acting to protect the child, and the sense of betrayal felt by adult survivors.

Secondly, there are a growing number of accounts by survivors. Books like *Naming the Violence* tell us the stories of women who have encountered abuse from other women. They represent an important 'coming out'. They are problematic for radical feminism only when they are annexed to a liberal agenda which fails to distinguish between male and female violence. We need to see such personal accounts not as a threat to theories we hold dear, but as opportunities to develop more comprehensive understandings of power, violence and the oppression of women.

We cannot growl with justifiable fury at medical, legal and media refusals to accord child sex offenders the male gender, and at the same time ourselves not differentiate the rare woman abuser from men who commit similar acts. In becoming an abuser, of her child or lover, a woman is not rendered sexless or an honorary man. The only way to begin resolving some of these troubling issues is to look at each situation and ask how far and in what ways is this similar to men's use of violence and how far and in what ways is it different? What is the difference between individual power and legitimated, institutionalised power? What additional betrayal of trust takes place when a girl is abused by her mother or a woman by her female lover? How should our communities deal with women who are violent to other women? and who should be challenging and supporting them? □

'68

'78

'88

What have the last 20 years meant to feminists? Sophie Laws offers her own thoughts on the impact of feminist politics on her life, in the light of a new anthology of women's writing about this period of hope, confidence and, lately, re-evaluation.

I was looking forward to reading this book partly because I had been asked but failed to write for it, and I hoped that other women might be able to help me with the distress that stopped me. The way the book frames its questions, as a backward look – '68, '78, '88 – itself sets up some of the difficulties, but of course many of us really are looking back in this way, and trying to make sense of where we are now and how we got here.

1988/89 is a very depressing endpoint for a discussion of women's liberation politics, with a stunningly reactionary government in its tenth year and showing few signs of collapse. It tears at the heart to be asked to look back from here to times of such confidence and hope. However we all know that such reflection is good for us, and many brave women have written for this anthology, nearly all of them finding the strength to write optimism into their final paragraph, if not throughout.

Given the importance of the project of telling our own history, it is a pity that the hasty production of the book shows through. Though the blurb refers to the book as oral history, it isn't. All the pieces except one, an interview with an ex-disciple of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, are written by women who have all been set the same task – to reflect on their experience over the last 20 years. The editor has imposed a kind of structure, after the event, by grouping the articles together in themes, with short introductions to each

section, but this doesn't quite come off. The quality of the contributions is distinctly patchy. The shared format encouraged women to recite the groups they'd been in, demos attended, in a way which becomes trying after a while. Some of the most successful pieces take snapshots of the three years, rather than giving much of a narrative.

I would like to have cut all those apologetic first paragraphs. If I had written a piece, I probably would have written one too, in awe of the task, but would have appreciated being told it wasn't necessary!

As a group, the contributors come disproportionately from an anarchist/libertarian socialist tradition, women who have been involved in politics outside the WLM as well as within it. To generalise wildly, while they tend to be radical feminists rather than old-style socialist feminists, they also tend to have a perspective which places women's oppression as an important one among many forms of oppression rather than seeing it as the only priority for women. While I share that background and find it an interesting perspective, for a book which claims a broad base for itself, women who call themselves lesbian feminist or separatist are conspicuously absent.

One complacent line in Amanda Sebestyen's introduction, that there are 'many more men inside these pages than you'd find in the usual feminist anthology', reads to me as a touch anti-lesbian. It is surely too late to go

on as if there was some kind of orthodox feminism which it is fun to offend against? – and absurd for the editor to write as if the contents of the collection came as such a surprise to her!

Speaking of compulsory heterosexuality, there was one article which I felt should not have been included in any anthology calling itself feminist. I put off reading Griselda Pollock's 'Feminism and Marriage' until last. When I finally faced up to it my worst fears were realised. Her line appears to be that marriage is OK, indeed a positive feminist choice, as long as you can bring in a very high income (preferably without working *all* the time) and employ a nanny. Working class women, the nanny herself for example, and even averagely well-off middle class women, do not appear to be able to choose an egalitarian marriage. This felt to me like a betrayal. Griselda Pollock is at present enjoying hugely all the well-publicised benefits of a privileged marriage. She is hurt that her feminist friends are not as thrilled for her as she is. She wishes to explain. What is not clear is why her explanation should be published under a title which implies that it has something to do with feminist theory or practice.

What happened?

Whilst some of the articles are pretty much accounts of women's lives, and others address specific issues, the inescapable question lurks behind all of it – what happened? Is it possible to maintain that the WLM is as active and powerful as it ever was, just differently organised and containing different women? Many of the changes we have seen have certainly been for the better. But it has to mean something that no one has organised a national conference since 1978, that *WIRES*, the national newsletter, and now *Outwrite* have closed down. While recognising the enormous influence the movement has had on society generally, we have to ask why the organised movement of the '70s has fractured so thoroughly.

Feminists are now, particularly, being driven to try to understand ourselves within a historical context. Although this book is obviously part of that process, no one's brief was to give a general account, an overview, and the life-history format tends to prevent women from seeking general explanations.

However its basic tone of voice does make a pleasant change from the smart, sneery attitude of so much recently written by clever/academic types, declaring the movement out of style. Maybe they are that brittle partly because they are just as upset by our many defeats as the old-fashioned

And when the Revolution came – guess who was left holding the baby...



women's liberationists who write this book, but aren't willing to admit it. There are less charitable explanations.

I also found it a relief that most of the pieces do not seek to allocate blame or to be self-righteous about how right they/we were in those days. Many women have felt betrayed (and indeed have been betrayed) by other women in one way or another over the years but it does not follow that the current state of the movement can be attributed simply to:

- (a) heterosexual women's failure to abandon men
 - (b) white women's racism
 - (c) revolutionary feminists' vanguardism
 - (d) liberal/socialist/middle-class feminists selling out
 - (e) SM dykes polluting the lesbian body with hateful alien ideologies
- or
- (f) early women's liberationists' failure to anticipate all the above!

Like many of my friends, I still grind my teeth over tactical mistakes made ten years or more ago, and perhaps we might have done better if everyone had managed to remember the value of a respectful and sisterly attitude towards all women, however annoying they might be. But I think we have to see that this cannot be the whole story.

I do not think that the present weakness of WL politics can be attributed to ideological weaknesses in the movement's philosophy as such. Some socialist feminists have written, trying to bury the movement, that it was defeated by its own failure to understand race and/or class. One especially annoying aspect of this claim is that it denies the fact that the very women who fought for recognition of these issues in the movement, at all its stages, were themselves working class, or Black, or disabled women's liberationists. My experience was that a great number of feminists worked extremely hard to understand oppressions they did not share and that most active feminists gradually developed a sophisticated understanding of racism, class oppression, the oppression of disabled people and of the many ways in which power can be used and abused. Preoccupation with differences among us took its toll in grief, but was surely enlightening and strengthening in the long run.

In some ways the apparent strength of the movement in the '70s and early '80s may have contributed to its downfall. Among all the demands for recognition from oppressed sections of the movement, an unfortunate formula arose, where women spoke about feminists having a responsibility to create a 'safe space' for *all* women. What was not understood was that even though no doubt the movement gave some of us a greater sense of 'home' and security than others, none of us had the *ability* to create safe places for any of

She only wants me for her politics...



Cath Jackson

us. The point was, and is, that we are in struggle. If we better understand the complexity of the many oppressions suffered by women the struggle will be a more effective, intelligent and moral one. But we cannot make safe places for *ourselves* most of the time, let alone for anyone else. This business of safe places has stopped us from looking outside, at the rest of the world, at what we are up against.

Wider economic and political forces have a huge impact on us – we still need to work out in more detail how this works in specific relation to sexual politics. Recently I keep hearing the suggestion that it was the relative prosperity of the 1970s which produced the liberation movements of the period – or is the suggestion just that such movements took the form that they did because of individuals' greater freedom to spend time in political work? I cannot grasp the reasoning which sees radical politics as a kind of luxury which is somehow too expensive for today. Why wouldn't a relatively comfortable generation just bathe in its privileges?

Hope

Political optimism is partly about an optimism about human nature. Many articles in '68, '78, '88 refer to these issues, though few confront them as directly as Rachel Bode:

On a bad day I can still find it possible to believe that women and men may come to share power equally – but on a bad day I foresee a society not improved by the change.

Certainly the anarchist (and some of the socialist) tradition takes a highly positive view, seeing most evil coming from power structures which encourage abuse of power and believing that free people in a society which prevents any excessive accumulation of power will generally behave well.

As we watch the British people re-elect a frighteningly dogmatic and effective right-wing government three times, and the opposition fractured by sectional interests pursued to the bitter end, it is hard to retain such a view.

Radical feminists hold no brief for human nature as such, taking the simple view that women's oppression is caused by men's individual and collective self-interest in keeping women down. However many women have been deeply disappointed to see women, too,

behaving in oppressive ways. Where can the spiritual core of a free society come from if even women abuse power, given half a chance? A vast body of socialist thought concerns the reasons why working class people do not necessarily pursue what socialists believe to be their best interests as a class. Feminists are only beginning to develop a similarly complex understanding of why women do not necessarily act in unity with other women.

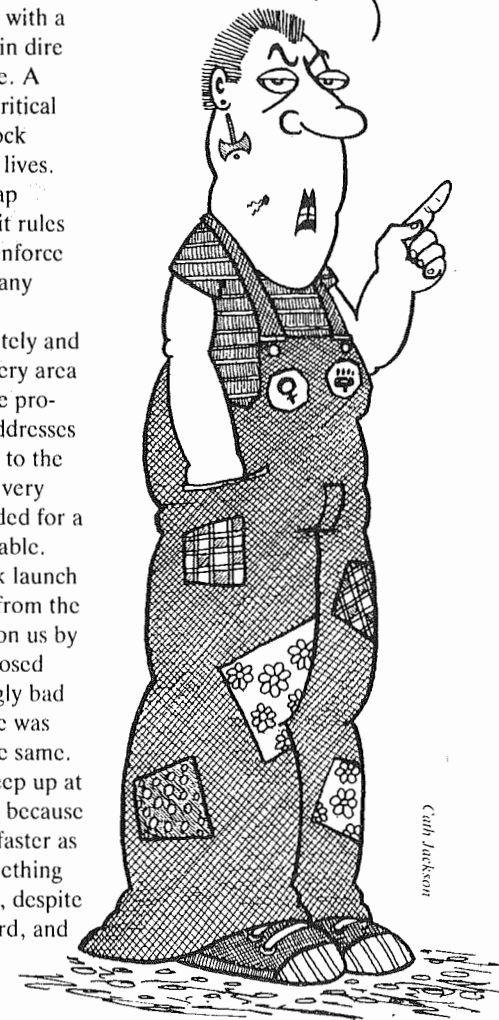
Many liberal and socialist feminists have turned to psychoanalysis and other patriarchal accounts of women's personality structures and inner natures for explanations. What these depressing analyses fail to explain is how, if women are so masochistic, a movement for women's liberation ever emerged! We have to do better than that.

The possibility of economic independence is a crucial variable, and the effect of all these years of Thatcherism is now showing, with a generation of girls growing up, many in dire poverty, in a crass consumerist culture. A repressive educational system stifles critical thinking and economic constraints block women from developing independent lives. Domestic service re-emerges as the gap between rich and poor widens. Benefit rules and low pay for women increasingly enforce dependency on men and family for many women, especially young ones.

Class divisions are being deliberately and amazingly thoroughly deepened in every area of life. This is absolutely no time to be promoting any kind of feminism which addresses itself to employers of nannies and not to the nannies themselves. We need to look very hard at what basic conditions are needed for a radical feminist view to be even thinkable.

Diana Leonard spoke at the book launch about how those of us in work suffer from the intensification of the demands put upon us by this government: endless change, imposed from above, combined with increasingly bad conditions of service. Diana's example was teaching – the health service is just the same. Thus feminists are having to run to keep up at work, even to do the work badly, and because we are women of principle, run even faster as we try to resist and try to express something of what we believe in within the work, despite all the pressures against us. Di Leonard, and

Love is a Phallogocratic Plot!



Cath Jackson

The book launch: 'The Women's Movement's Future: without disabled women?'

The organisers of the launch for '68, '78, '88 made one simple but very serious mistake. They forgot to think about access for women with disabilities. The venue chosen had stairs everywhere, beginning outside the front door, no accessible toilets, no special parking spaces. Once inside, the meeting was to be held in the basement, while socialising before and after took place on the ground floor, with a steep flight of chairs in between. Impossible for wheelchair users, it would present quite a challenge to many less severely disabled women.

The failure to think about this was particularly out of order when one of the contributors to the book is severely disabled. Excuses about lack of time and lack of money are simply not good enough. The least that could have been done would have been to hold the whole event on one level, but even that had not happened.

A disabled woman somehow scaled the front steps and made a protest (putting up posters, see title), and many women present supported her. A statement was read affirming the unity of all women, stating that meetings such as this were incomplete without disabled women, and proposing that the meeting be postponed and reconvened at an accessible site. A number of women walked out, but the meeting proceeded.

many of the contributors to the book, encourage us to give ourselves credit for what we do achieve.

Taken over by the movement

Lee Comer's piece touched me immensely. She writes about the joy of belonging to a small group of women discovering the realities of women's oppression for themselves, and doing a great deal of exciting work 'for the group'. She expresses well the experience of being taken over by feminism:

When people say 'It changed my life', do they know how their lives might have been? The Women's Movement changed my life in the same way that unplanned motherhood did. Neither event was reversible. And they are inextricably woven. I had my first and only child in September 1970, just as the women's movement began to take recognisable shape. I felt equally responsible to both, and happily relinquished any inner needs I might have had (but could not readily name) to serve their every whim. They exercised complete control of me for ten years. I wrote about feminism, acted out feminism, scraped a living through feminism, and conducted my private life through feminism.

And now, she says, she suffers, unable to adjust herself to the present day, and feeling that that massive identification with a cause may have hindered her in developing an ability to know what she personally needs. This syndrome, where one's personality has been entirely shaped by feminism, is rather an odd and unglamorous sort of problem to have. While the personal consequences of absorption in other kinds of political struggle, particularly the old left, have been discussed a good deal, not least by feminists, this particular situation has not been.

More often one reads accounts where a true inner self is released by the reinforcement of women's worth by feminism. Much feminist fiction sees a conventional life going off the rails in one way or another, doing what she always wanted to do (letting the house get dirty often seems to be high on the list; artistic achievement follows). But what about those of us without the imagination for individual rebellion of this kind? We were perfectly happy being brave within a supportive, optimistic group: we did great things. We were fulfilled, facilitating other women's freedom - being an apparatchik in the women's movement was never boring. But now we are lost.

Most of us still try, remain involved to some degree. Many of us, like Lee, have found work which uses some of the excellent skills we developed in those years of frenzied activity. But we cannot delude ourselves that we are satisfied. It is terribly difficult to maintain a sense of one's own value when the context in and for which you developed your abilities is gone.

Like Lee, I cannot conceive of who I would have been without the WLM and am struggling, trying to find who I can be now that I have realised that the movement is not merely going through a slightly difficult few years before re-emerging, changed but still recognisable.

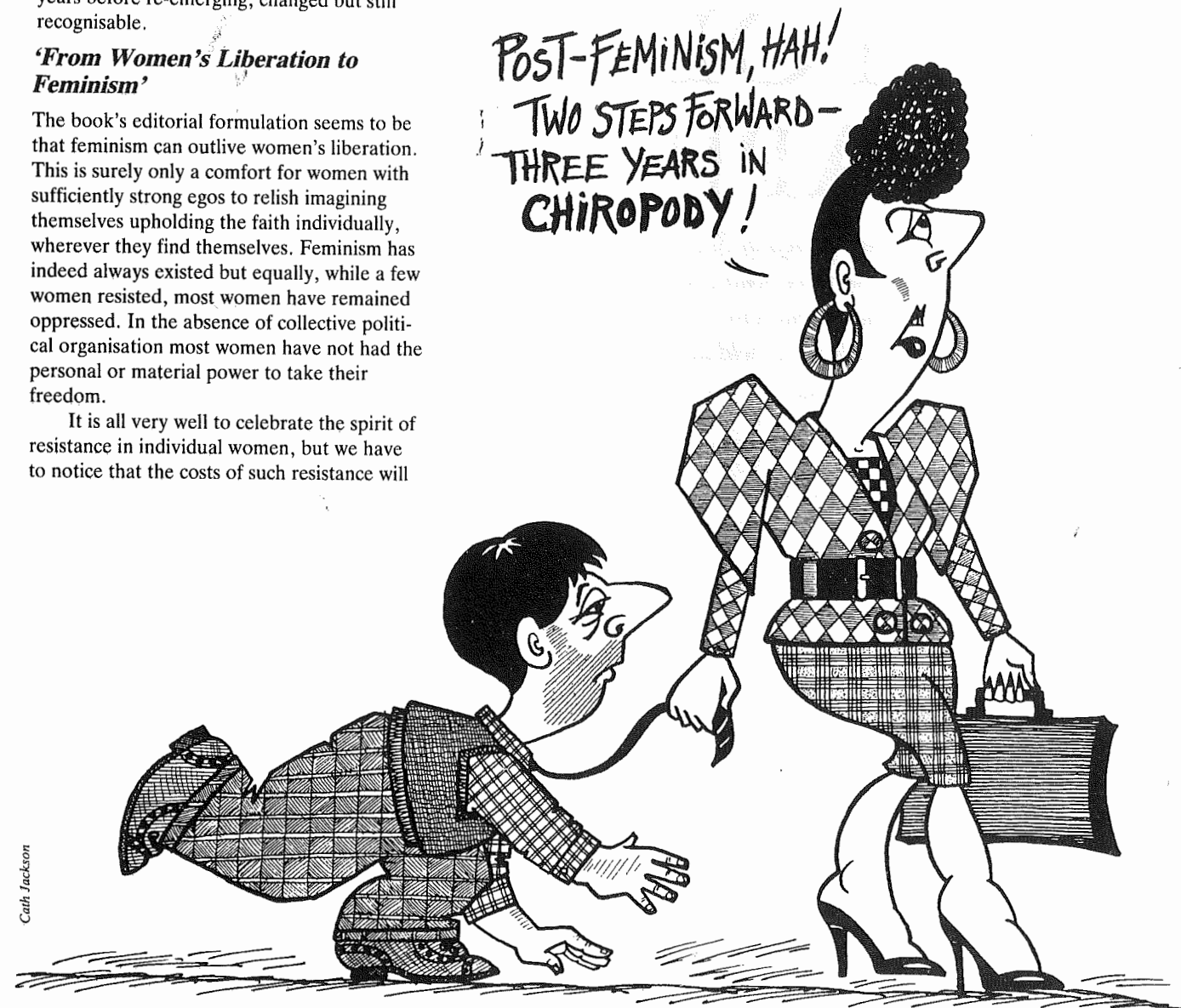
'From Women's Liberation to Feminism'

The book's editorial formulation seems to be that feminism can outlive women's liberation. This is surely only a comfort for women with sufficiently strong egos to relish imagining themselves upholding the faith individually, wherever they find themselves. Feminism has indeed always existed but equally, while a few women resisted, most women have remained oppressed. In the absence of collective political organisation most women have not had the personal or material power to take their freedom.

It is all very well to celebrate the spirit of resistance in individual women, but we have to notice that the costs of such resistance will

be too high for many women. It is also obviously the case that an individual sticking up for her idea of 'feminism' may not act in solidarity with other women. Since class privilege is often the source of the confidence and the means to be a rebel as an individual, this way of thinking can lead to a dangerous narrowness of vision. I still want a women's liberation movement which fights for every woman's freedom. □

'68, '78, '88: *From Women's Liberation to Feminism*, Ed. Amanda Sebestyen, Prism Press, 1988, £5.95



CREATING A POLITICS OF APPEARANCE

Fat women in Britain have come together to challenge destructive myths associated with body size and to plan a greater presence within the women's movement and scene. Heather Smith reports on the first national fat women's conference held in London in March.

The London Fat Women's Group formed in 1987 after the publication of an article and an interview on fat oppression in the September issue of *Spare Rib*. The women who produced this material wanted to put fat on the feminist agenda in Britain and to establish appearance as an area of intervention for feminism. The London Fat Women's Group aims to challenge all forms of fat oppression by establishing a network of support and campaigning groups to work for change. We organised the first national fat women's conference to extend our work within and beyond London.

Media coverage

The media promotes an obsession with fat. Most women's magazines regularly feature diets and exercise regimes aimed at erasing all 'spare' flesh from a woman's body. The extensive media coverage the fat women's conference received indicates the extent of this obsession. Television, radio, newspapers and magazines provided space for a radical redefinition of fat. We were interviewed by *The*

Guardian, The Daily Mirror, Bella, Radio 4, Radio Belfast, The World Service, Radio Wales, TV am, After Nine, Open Air, Open Space and Wogan. While the coverage of our perspective on fat was tokenistic and temporary, we succeeded in reaching a much wider range of women than confinement to the feminist and alternative press would have allowed. This publicity helped to fill the conference to capacity (170). We also received 400 applications which we could not accommodate and over a thousand letters from women who support, or want to know more about, fat liberation. Media interest proved very problematic on the day of the conference, however. We had decided to exclude the press as we wanted to create a safe and supportive atmosphere in which to explore issues around fat. Several reporters stayed outside the building and hassled women as they arrived at the conference. Some reporters attempted to take photographs of the dance workshop through the windows and some reporters tried to participate in the conference.

. . . big women can be extremely imposing. A large woman who is not apologising for her size is certainly not a figure to invite the dominant meanings which our culture attaches to femininity. She is impressive in ways that our culture cannot tolerate.

Appearance matters. Images make complex statements about identity. Such statements are culturally and historically specific and, while their meanings are not fixed or static, in the 20th century they are the products of capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy. Women are the bearers of cultural myths and signifiers of status in many cultures. Our bodies are defined and controlled in the interests of profit and power. We are taught to equate beauty with 'success', social mobility, sexual desirability. Those women who do not conform to constructed aesthetic ideals are punished and excluded. Western cultures, structured around polarity and hierarchy, promote competition and conformity. Concepts of 'superior' and 'inferior' are central to discourses on 'beauty'. Affirmation depends on negation: white is valued at the expense of Black; status is attached to youth by the devaluing of aging. Fear and hatred of fat pervades western cultures. The status of thin bodies depends on definitions of fat as disgusting and diseased. Fat women are excluded from many activities and possibilities because of our size. In the US and Britain fat women's organisations are challenging the negative myths and stereotypes associated with fat. We are emphasising the structural and institutional processes involved in the abuse and exclusion of fat people. We are making links between racism, class oppression, ableism, ageism, heterosexism and sexism when exploring the politics of appearance.

Debates about sexism had included feminist critiques of sexual objectification and sexual stereotyping but had excluded investigation of the ways in which women whose appearance is 'unacceptable' are negated and abused.

Images and sexuality are inextricably linked. Appearance significantly affects our sexual choices. Flesh has been eroticised in rigid and exclusive ways in western cultures. Women whose bodies are defined as 'defective' are pushed to the erotic margins of this society. Positive images of sexually active fat women are absent from mainstream and alternative media. Even pornography which explores marginalised and taboo sexualities, covers fat only in specialist issues. Fat women are considered undesirable, asexual, maternal, or sexually desperate. We are misrepresented as dirty, ugly, stupid, irresponsible, out of control and greedy. The stigma attached to fat means we are low status as lovers and as employees.

The equation of fat with disease denies fat women access to adequate health-care. Most doctors erroneously blame all our illnesses on fat. They perpetuate the myth that fat is a question of personal choice and control by automatically linking size with food consumption and recommending starvation as a passport to 'good' health. Thousands of women risk their lives undergoing dangerous surgery such as stomach stapling and intestinal bypasses and many thousands more damage their health through diets, diet pills, jaw wiring and breast reduction operations. Fat women are ridiculed by the media. We are laughed at, sworn at and spat at on the street. We are often prevented from participating in sport and leisure activities because of harassment. Public transport and the design of public spaces often excludes fat people.

Lesbian Workshop Three

Facilitator: Heather Smith

We used extracts from *Shadow on a Tightrope* as a basis for exploring issues around fat, desire and sexuality. Again, women emphasised the difficulty of being sexually confident and fat. Some women observed that they had never been attracted to a fat woman and thought that maybe their thin lovers represented status for them – a compensation for their fat. Other women spoke of how hard it is to have sexual relationships with thin women who don't understand their struggles around fat. We all felt that the lesbian communities were exclusive – it's not trendy to be fat. There were lots of fat lesbians at the conference but we realised how few fat lesbians are on the scene.

Suggestions for change

We made a commitment to establish a fat lesbian group; to visit various pubs and clubs on the scene and make a BIG impression; to make contact with fat lesbians who are isolated outside London; to challenge the fashion industry and ask thin women to boycott shops which sell nothing we can wear; to seek support from thin women; to stop hiding away and apologising for our existence.

The plenary

The atmosphere was full of warmth and celebration. Most women felt that the conference had been a strengthening and empowering experience. It had provided us with the opportunity to share our collective struggles around fat and to gain support and affirmation. For many women it was the first chance they had ever had to explore how fat had limited and damaged their lives. For all of us it was a new experience to be with so many fat women who were so positive about themselves: refusing to apologise about their size; asserting their right to exist and stressing their commitment to challenging all forms of fat oppression.

Workshop reports established many areas for intervention:

- A health group will lobby the NHS to provide
- unbiased medical research to establish the exact relation between fat and health
- an end to harassment

- more holistic medicine and a shift away from surgery and pills and a withdrawal of life-threatening operations such as intestinal bypasses.

- An employment group will seek union recognition of discrimination against fat people in recruitment and of size-related harassment at work and unfair dismissal.
- A fashion group will lobby the fashion industry to improve its provision to fat women. At present there are very few shops which sell clothes for big women. These shops tend to be specialist and, therefore, expensive. We want to have a choice of images at prices all women can afford and we don't want to have to travel miles to buy underwear or a pair of tights. This group will also challenge designers to produce clothes designed to complement a fat body.
- A writers' group will work on producing an anthology of writing of issues relevant to fat women.
- There will be fat lesbian, Black and Jewish women's groups in which we can examine how fat specifically affects our lives, can gain support and strength and can work for change within our communities.

Sexuality is a more difficult area in which to achieve change. We can work on developing our sexual confidence and on believing that we deserve, and are capable of inspiring, love and lust irrespective of size/appearance. Such self-esteem is hard to obtain in a sexual void. We can demand respect and equality but we can't demand desire. Desire operates in complex, often unconscious ways. It can't be prescribed and controlled. Erotic symbols are inscribed deep within our collective unconsciousnesses. Fat is considered the antithesis of erotic. Fat women should intervene in contemporary feminist debates on sexuality which cover issues like pleasure, desire, power and image. We must emphasise how existing erotic and aesthetic criteria exclude us from the sexual arena. We should encourage more exploration of ways in which we might redefine concepts such as 'sexually attractive' to include those women who are currently negated. We should form coalitions with all women who are penalised for their appearance such as old women and women with disabilities. We need to investigate how racist ideals of beauty affect Black women. Our

intervention will create more erotic possibilities for all women.

The conference was organised around the principle of self-definition. Some women felt this was problematic as some participants were thin. It is impossible to fix an exact definition of fat because fat women vary so much. Most women are dissatisfied with their bodies. We need to establish the difference between a thin woman who believes she is fat



Kathy Hall

woman who is fat and experiences abuse and discrimination because of her size. An examination of the practical effects of fat oppression should clarify the difference. Similarly, we need to stress that fat women are a very diverse group who experience fat differently: fat Black lesbians risk more harassment on the street; fat old women are more likely to be considered asexual than fat young women; very fat women experience increased problems of access and exclusion.

Women from all over Britain attended the conference and many regional contacts have been made. The conference was organised by

a very small group of women. We hope that many more fat women will become actively involved in campaigning for change. We need to make more links with minority ethnic women, old women and women with disabilities. Organising separately will enable us to gain strength and clarify our politics but we should prioritise a politics of coalition and action. Our work should be within a framework which acknowledges all the systems of exploitation which oppress women. We must

make links with women internationally to challenge cultural imperialism, capitalism and the colonisation of our bodies.

The disco

In the evening we celebrated with a disco. It was wonderful to be with so many sensuous fat women, dancing with confidence and taking pleasure in our bodies. Forced to exist on the social and sexual margins of a society which hates us, for once we broke through this confinement. It was great to see so many of us move centrestage. □

black women β feminism

Black women have rejected the racism of the predominantly white women's movement. bell hooks argues that this must not lead to a denial of the impact of sexism on black women's lives but rather encourage black women to build a feminist theory and practice relevant to all women.

Toward the end of 1987 I spoke at Tufts University at an annual dinner for black women. My topic was 'Black Women in Predominantly White Institutions'. I was excited by the idea of talking with so many young black women but surprised when these women suggested that sexism was not a political issue of concern to black women, that the serious issue was racism. I've heard this response many times, yet somehow I did not expect that I would need to prove over and over that sexism ensures that many black females will be exploited and victimised. Confronted by these young black women to whom sexism was not important, I felt that feminism had failed to develop a politics that addresses black women. Particularly, I felt that black women active in black liberation struggles in the 1960s and early 1970s, who had spoken and written on sexism (remember the anthology *The Black Woman*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara?) had let our younger sisters down by not making more of a sustained political effort so that black women (and black people) would have greater understanding of the impact of sexist oppression on our lives.

When I began to share my own

experiences of racism and sexism, pointing to incidents (particularly in relationships with black men), a veil was lifted. Suddenly the group acknowledged what had been previously denied – the ways sexism wounds us as black women. I had talked earlier about the way many black women students in predominantly white institutions keep silent in classes, stating emphatically that our progress in such places require us to have a voice, to not remain silent. In the ensuing discussion, women commented on black fathers who had told their daughters 'nobody wants a loud-talking black woman'. The group expressed ambivalent feelings about speaking, particularly on political issues in classroom settings where they were often attacked or unsupported by other black women students.

Their earlier reluctance to acknowledge sexism reminded me of previous arguments with other groups of women about both the book and the film *The Color Purple*. Our discussions focused almost solely on whether portraying brutal sexist domination of a black female by a black male had any basis in reality. I was struck by the extent to which folks will go to argue that sexism in black com-

munities has not promoted the abuse and subjugation of black women by black men. This fierce denial has its roots in the history of black people's response to racism and white supremacy. Traditionally it has been important for black people to assert that slavery, apartheid, and continued discrimination have not undermined the humanity of black people, that not only has the race been preserved but that the survival of black families and communities are the living testimony of our victory. To acknowledge then that our families and communities have been undermined by sexism would not only require an acknowledgement that racism is not the only form of domination and oppression that affects us as a people, it would mean critically challenging the assumption that our survival as a people depends on creating a cultural climate in which black men can achieve manhood within paradigms constructed by white patriarchy.

Often the history of our struggle as black people is made synonymous with the efforts of black males to have patriarchal power and privilege. As one black woman college student put it, 'In order to redeem the race we have to redeem black manhood.' If such redemption means creating a society in which black men assume the stereotypical male role of provider and head of household, then sexism is seen not as destructive but as essential to the promotion and maintenance of the black family. Tragically, it has been our acceptance of this model that has prevented us from acknowledging that black male sexist domination has *not* enhanced or enriched black family life. The seemingly positive aspects of the patriarchy (caretaker and provider) have been the most difficult for masses of black men to realise, and the negative aspects (maintaining control through psychological or physical violence) are practised daily. Until black people redefine in a nonsexist revolutionary way the terms of our liberation, black women and men will always be confronted with the issue of whether supporting feminist efforts to end sexism is inimical to our interests as a people.

White feminism/white racism

In her insightful essay 'Considering Feminism as a Model for Social Change', Sheila Radford-Hill makes the useful critique that

black women producing feminist theory, myself included, focus more on the racism of white women within feminist movements, and on the importance of racial difference, than on the ways feminist struggle could strengthen and help black communities. In part, the direction of our work was shaped by the nature of our experience. Not only were there very few black women writing feminist theory, but most of us were not living in or working with black communities. The aim of *Ain't I A Woman* was not to focus on the racism of white women. Its primary purpose was to establish that sexism greatly determines the social status and experience of black women. I did not try to examine the ways that struggling to end sexism would benefit black people, but this is my current concern.

Many black women insist that they do not join the feminist movement because they cannot bond with white women who are racist. If one argues that there really are some white women who are resisting and challenging racism, who are genuinely committed to ending white supremacy, one is accused of being naive, of not acknowledging history. Most black women, rich and poor, have contact with white women, usually in work settings. In such settings black women cooperate with white women despite racism. Yet black women are reluctant to express solidarity with white feminists. Black women's consciousness is shaped by internalised racism and by reactionary white women's concerns as they are expressed in popular culture, such as daytime soap operas or in the world of white fashion and cosmetic products, which masses of black women consume without rejecting this racist propaganda and devaluing of black women.

Emulating white women or bonding with them in these 'apolitical' areas is not consistently questioned or challenged. Yet I do not know a single black woman advocate of feminist politics who is not bombarded by on-going interrogations by other black people about linking with racist white women (as though we lack the political acumen to determine whether white women are racists, or when it is in our interest to act in solidarity with them).

At times, the insistence that feminism is really 'a white female thing that has nothing to do with black women' masks black female



women with academic degrees are quite conservative politically. Their perspectives differ greatly from our foremothers who were politically astute, assertive, and radical in their work for social change.

Feminist praxis is greatly shaped by academic women and men. Since there are not many academic black women committed to radical politics, especially with a gender focus, there is no collective base in the academy for forging a feminist politics that addresses masses of black women. There is much more work by black women on gender and sexism emerging from scholars who do literary criticism and from creative fiction and drama writers than from women in history, sociology, and political science. While it does not negate commitment to radical politics, in literature it is much easier to separate academic work and political concerns. Concurrently, if black women academics are not committed to feminist ethnics, to feminist consciousness-raising, they end up organising conferences in which social interactions mirror sexist norms, including ways black women regard one another. For the uninitiated coming to see and learn what feminism centred on black women might be like, this can be quite disillusioning.

Feminist/womanist

Often in these settings the word 'feminism' is evoked in negative terms, even though sexism and gender issues are discussed. I hear black women academics laying claim to the term 'womanist' while rejecting 'feminist'. I do not think Alice Walker intended this term to deflect from feminist commitment, yet this is often how it is evoked. Walker defined womanist as black feminist or feminist of colour. When I hear black women using the term womanist, it is in opposition to the term feminist; it is viewed as constituting something separate from feminist politics shaped by white women. For me, the term womanist is not sufficiently linked to a tradition of radical political commitment to struggle and change. What would a womanist politic look like: If it is a term for black feminist, then why do those who embrace it reject the other?

Radford-Hill makes the point:

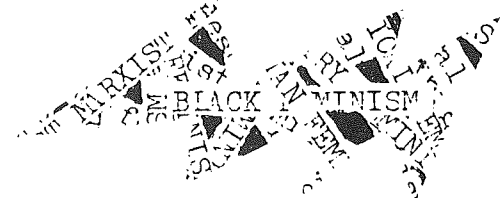
Not all black feminists practise or believe in black feminism. Many see black feminism as a vulgar detraction from the goal of female solidarity. Others

of us, myself included, see black feminism as a necessary step toward ending racism and sexism, given the nature of gender oppression and the magnitude of society's resistance to racial justice.

I believe that women should think less in terms of feminism as an identity and more in terms of 'advocating feminism'; to move from emphasis on personal lifestyle issues toward creating political paradigms and radical models of social change that emphasise collective as well as individual change. For this reason I do not call myself a black feminist. Black women must continue to insist on our right to participate in shaping feminist theory and practice that addresses our racial concerns as well as our feminist issues. Current feminist scholarship can be useful to black women in formulating critical analyses of gender issues about black people, particularly feminist work on parenting. (When I first read Dorothy Dinnerstein, it was interesting to think about her work in terms of black mother-son relationships.)

Black women need to construct a model of feminist theorizing and scholarship that is inclusive, that widens our options, that enhances our understanding of black experience and gender. Significantly, the most basic task confronting black feminists (irrespective of the terms we use to identify ourselves) is to educate one another and black people about sexism, which makes sharing feminist vision more difficult. Radford-Hill identifies 'the crisis of black womanhood' as a serious problem that must be considered politically, asserting that 'the extent to which black feminists can articulate and solve the crisis of black womanhood is the extent to which black women will undergo feminist transformation.'

Black women must identify ways feminist thought and practice can aid in our process of self-recovery and share that knowledge with our sisters. This is the base on which to build political solidarity. When that grounding exists, black women will be fully engaged in feminist movement that transforms self, community and society. □



Reprinted with permission from bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminism, Thinking Black* (Sheba, 1989)

Writing Our Own History

Feminist Theatricals



Monstrous Regiment is one of our most successful theatre groups. Gillian Hanna talks to Lynn Alderson about how women developed political theatre.

LA: How did you get involved in acting?

GH: I got involved by accident. I'd always been fascinated by it, but never thought it was something I could make a living at. When I was at college, Trinity College, Dublin, it had a very strong drama group. I initially got involved because my friend Paula said, 'I want to go down and audition, but I'm too scared, will you come with me?', so I did and ended up getting a part in a play. After that, I got terribly involved, and did that for four years.

I drifted into acting professionally in Dublin, just because it's such a small place – if you got known, people started asking you to do things, so most of my last year at college was really spent working. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do next. I'd wanted to be a simultaneous translator and work at the United Nations, but I couldn't face another four years training. It's all Michael Bogdanov's fault really. I'd worked with him a couple of times and he said, 'Well, of course you're going to go into the theatre', and got me an interview at the Everyman in Liverpool. I got the job – that was 1968.

LA: *Was the Everyman doing political theatre?*

GH: Yes. I was there at a very interesting time. To be doing things like Marguerite Duras at a small 'youth' theatre well, it seemed like the cutting edge. We did wonderful productions of things like Agamemnon influenced by the Vietnam war – it was really exciting. Later we did start to do more overtly political work.

LA: *Was this part of a political awakening for you personally?*

GH: I had been such a good little girl, a nice, middle class conservative! I can remember sitting and watching the results of the 1964 election when Harold Wilson got in and thinking, this is dreadful, what's going to happen! I'm so ashamed of it! Isn't that awful.

So, going to Liverpool was an absolute cataclysm; it changed my life on all fronts. You'd have to have no senses at all to not notice what was going on. Everyone was affected, infected by the political ideas coming from France and elsewhere – a huge change, both intellectually and emotionally.

LA: *There seemed to be a particularly creative impact of two things there, politics and theatre.*

GH: Yes, all sorts of things going on. In 1971/72 I went over to Newcastle and met Sue Todd. She was Associate Director at the rep. She had been involved in the London Women's Street Theatre Group and she brought all that with her. I had done some street theatre in Liverpool and then we started doing it in Newcastle – around issues like changes in the Rent Act. No rep today would produce and sanction that kind of activity.

LA: *Also you can't imagine street theatre in that way now – it's all contained, all in Covent Garden.*

GH: I remember seeing the People Show doing one of the most wonderful things I think I've ever seen. It was part of the Clyde Fair, which was a precursor to Mayfest. There was a sidestreet off Sauchiehall Street, on a very steep hill. I watched the People Show, they had complete climbing gear – crampons, ropes, the lot – climbing up this street. It was hysterical. That going on, plus people like us running around in the streets doing things with top hats and big cigars about wicked capitalism.

When I eventually joined a group called Belt and Braces, we did a lot of street stuff – it was political, but by that point more anar-

chistic – known as arseholing because you just went out and made an idiot of yourself, escaping from mailbags, things like that. I was still at this point totally committed to 'alternative' theatre; it was just so exciting, it was happening everywhere. Wherever you went you could find some extraordinary group of people who were doing stuff that you wanted to do – all kinds of issues. Everything was up for grabs, really, except women.

LA: *So how did Monstrous Regiment come about?*

GH: I got hold of a copy of *The Female Eunuch* – me and five million other women – stayed in bed, for days reading it, thought, Ah, the scales have now fallen from my eyes, I can see what it's all about now. Then Shulamith Firestone; it was like finding the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, finding something that suddenly made sense of my life, everything I had felt was wrong with my life and the world. You can't underestimate that sense of excitement. We really thought we were going to change the world. We knew it wasn't going to be easy, there'd be lots of struggles and even, in some of our more romantic moments, that some of us might die on the barricades, but we were certain that was what we were going to do.

I was still very involved in the boys' stuff at that point, and they, of course, weren't interested in taking on these issues. I didn't at first know how to bring together the two sides of the politics, the socialist side of my beliefs with the feminist side. It wasn't possible for me to be in other political groups, or women's groups, we were always on tour, it was hard to talk to people not in the troupe.

Anyway we were recasting a play to take on tour; it had one decent part in it for a woman which I was going to do, and one other part, literally a walk on, awful. The play was about coalmining, lots of parts for blokes. So we saw all these blokes, they were fine and then all these women came in to be auditioned and they were extraordinary. When they weren't working they were writing or doing one-woman shows and I thought, this is wrong, all these wonderful women who never have any work. So I decided to do something about it. Out of the women who came to audition I contacted nine or ten to discuss the possibility of a women's company, possibly attached to Belt and Braces. We met for the first time in August 1975, on the day there

was a huge flood – people were out in Hampstead in boats – and every single woman got to that meeting, even if she was three hours late and had to be put in a hot bath, every single one came, and we thought great, this is a good omen.

When it became clear that Belt and Braces had no interest whatsoever in doing this kind of work, we decided to go it alone. Chris Bowler, Mary McCusker and myself made ourselves unemployed for three months in order to set up a tour. Some dropped by the wayside; various others came in, like Sue Todd. We asked her if she'd like to direct the first show and she ended up joining the company. The difference about us was, we were not a group of politically-motivated women who wanted to use theatre as a means of expressing our politics, we were a group of theatricals, most of whom had histories in straight theatre, who wanted to use that. We used to say to each other that we didn't start out as a feminist company but as a bunch of stropky women and within five minutes we became feminist.

LA: *You had men in the company. Was that a conscious decision?*

GH: At the beginning we did. Yes, it was conscious, we had a lot of discussions about it. There were no separatists or radical feminists in the group, as it happened, but several socialist feminists and it was predominantly heterosexual. Those things influenced the direction that the group went in, in the beginning.

LA: *Scum was your first production, how did that come together?*

GH: It's difficult to describe. The input of the men was quite important at the beginning, but as soon as we realised what we were, the strength of the women, it got less. The first playwright we asked to write for us was a man, which is crazy when you look back on it. We used to meet intermittently in those days, we were all doing different things, and we drew up a list of things we wanted to do plays about – not issues, like abortion for example, but topics like witchcraft. *Scum* was a play with music (we could afford music in those days) about the women of the Paris Commune. It was set in a laundry. It was the story of how the women in the laundry got rid of the boss and ran the laundry themselves and how the act of doing that was in itself

consciousness-raising. It showed how they learned to do things.

The reason we wanted to do a play about the Paris Commune is because we came across a volume of documents from the Commune which included these extraordinary proclamations by the women's clubs, demands of equal pay, nursery care, and we said, this is one hundred years later and we still haven't got any of this. What the women of the Commune were wanting seemed to marry very closely with what we as women were wanting at that point: equality of opportunity, but equality of excitement also. It wasn't just about nurseries, schools and jobs, but also getting up on top of a laundry box and making a speech.

LA: *You were using this to say things about women in the '70s.*

GH: There was a scene in the play where three of the laundresses simply turned over their washtubs, got on them and shouted at the audience as if they were in the club, and as far as I remember that scene was taken verbatim from the documents of 1871. Later, several people said to me things like, 'It was terrific, except for that scene where you got all the modern stuff out, I thought that really didn't sit well' and I said 'What modern stuff?' And they said, 'You know, all that stuff about nurseries and schools etc., you should stick to the history.' It was exactly what got us going initially – that was what had given us the spur.

It was full of wonderful characters like the one I played, Mole. She was the spirit of revolution and she lived in a laundry basket. She did stuff with puppets and things and there was a romantic love interest, so it wasn't just about a list of demands. There was a tension about class in there also, middle class women and working class women coming together under adversity – that was an important theme. What we were trying to say was that women had more in common with each other despite their class.

LA: *What reaction did you get to Scum?*

GH: People loved it, absolutely loved it. We took it all over the country. But it was never acknowledged by the straight drama critics. I have a memory of a review in the *Guardian* saying something like 'Well, when this fad for feminism passes, things like this will be seen as the load of rubbish they are.'



Gillian Hanna in 'Shakespeare's Sister' by Monstrous Regiment.

Because feminism was very fashionable at the time, there was a strand that was very interested in what we were doing, and we wanted to talk to reporters about the serious politics of what we were doing, but the attitudes were more, 'What are the girls up to now?'

LA: *How did you get on? There must have been a lot of pressure on you all?*

GH: My memory is that in the first year the excitement of it carried us through the problems and difficulties. After that we started to have to face up to the real problems. There were deep disagreements which we didn't



Gillian Hanna in 'Origin of the Species' by Bryony Lavery, 1984.

want to recognise at first. A group of people who had gotten together in a moment of fury, it's only when the fury passes that you realise you may not have as much in common with each other as you had originally thought.

The fury was about everything. That's the other thing about the theatre: on one level it's a conscious, intellectual process to try to present or show some discussions, point of conflict, some explosion; but the other part of it is a deeply emotional experience, being in and doing and making theatre, and it's difficult to know how to bring that all together.

LA: *The impact of the personal and the political?*

GH: Yes, it's something I've had to think about recently, whether it was a mistake to try to bring together your working life and your politics. There is another way that people do it – their working life is here and their political involvement somewhere else. But I don't think that was possible with the women's movement, because there was no movement as such, you couldn't go to someone's house in Notting Hill Gate and join up – it's about your everyday life and the whole of your life.

For a lot of women, I think the play had the same effect as *The Female Eunuch*. It's not that it told them something they didn't know; it got them at the right moment when they were asking questions in their heads – it helped to open a door.

LA: *It must have been very rewarding.*

GH: I don't think we ever had time for that, it was such hard work. As soon as you got one show on the road, you were onto the next one.

Vinegar Tom – that was a completely different process from the first one. We had met Caryl Churchill on a Grunwick march – it turned out to be one of those wonderful coincidences. She had been writing a play for Joint Stock about Diggers and Ranters. In the course of doing the research, she had come across all this witchcraft material and got absolutely fascinated. She wanted to write a play about witchcraft and then we came along and said we were looking for someone to write us a play on witchcraft . . .

LA: *Why witchcraft at this particular point? There was a lot of interest in general in the women's movement, about witchcraft as persecution of women, violence against women in*

a historical perspective, witchcraft as women's resistance, was it that kind of interest?

GH: We had a lot of discussion about it coinciding with men taking over activities and work which had been women's prerogatives – professionalisation. Also, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses* was very important – we all read that. Also about fear, what people are frightened of – I suppose it's the same question you ask over and over again, why do they hate us, what are they so terrified of?

LA: *What did the play say about that, that there's no basis for their fear?*

GH: Well, there is and there isn't! The last song where we all lined up in front of the audience says, 'Look what are you frightened of, we're here – if you want to be frightened of us, here we are – we're all witches'.

LA: *It's a much less straightforward play than Scum, more complicated ideas. What kind of reaction did you get?*

GH: It was mixed. With both plays, a lot of men didn't like them and have never liked anything that we've ever done, simply because they think it's not worth bothering with. We used to have a little yardstick – still do – how much of a willie-shriveller is this one?

I have this sense that we were very taken aback by the hostility we met, we were so excited by what we were doing we didn't expect it.

LA: *And the truth seemed so self-evident?*

GH: Absolutely. But, a lot of the reviews were very hostile – and lots of other things made us very angry. Like you'd go to a theatre where you were going to perform and the technicians in the theatre would approach one of the men for instructions and that would drive us insane. The men were pretty good on the whole and would say 'You'll have to ask her'. But we did make some terrible mistakes with men in the group who were hostile to what we were doing but also attracted to it at the same time. Of course, ironically, some of the men who were originally in *Monstrous* are now doing very well in mainstream theatre.

LA: *You were seeing yourselves as a feminist group by this time?*

GH: Well, I don't know. Partly we were resisting all labels, which is stupid really. Now I embrace that label with glee, great glee.

LA: *Has the development of Monstrous reflected the changes that you've all gone through?*

GH: As a company, we've been decimated. At the beginning we had enough money (from the Arts Council) to employ 11 people, 52 weeks in the year. We now employ one person, an administrator, and everybody else comes and goes. We all know that we've got to grow up and there's no such thing as a free lunch, as those nice Tories keep telling us, but the National Theatre and the RSC find it hard enough to get sponsorship. Small-scale theatre has nothing to offer sponsors at all because there's nothing in the way of prestige, especially a group like us that's running around shouting the odds about women, still, after all these years. It would be ludicrous to think that we were ever going to get enough sponsorship to replace the dwindling Arts Council funds.

It means that you have less and less room to talk about the things you really want to put into your work and more and more time is spent just getting from day to day – especially since most of us do other work as well.

LA: *Did you always see yourself as a professional company?*

GH: Yes, it was terribly important to be professional and I think that was always very clear that we were one of that band of young theatricals, which was a recognised movement at that time. Of course that's all gone out of the window now, as companies get cut one after another.

LA: *What is Monstrous doing now?*

GH: We're trying to commission more young women writers, but at the same time we've been trying to 'up the profile' of it, because you quite often come across people who say 'Oh gosh, I didn't know you were still going'. You can no longer rest on any laurels, so, for example, two years ago we did an American play that had never been done in England called *My Sister In This House* – based on the same true events on which Genet based *The Maids*. It was terribly well received; we did it in Leicester and then brought it to Hampstead, and then nobody mentioned *Monstrous Regiment*. All the publicity and interest was about Hampstead Theatre Club, so we'd gone to all this effort to show people that we were still around and it was largely ignored.

In the early days there wasn't really a problem of who you were performing for because the women's movement was so lively and on the edge of everything – you per-

formed for that movement. Now that seems to have receded. Fifteen years on feminism is in quite a different place – there doesn't seem to be a lot of energy being generated and I think we reflect that. In a sense that was all we ever did, reflect what was going on in that wider movement. We're still here, clinging on by our fingernails, but where is the audience? Tell me why you haven't seen us for ages.

LA: *Well, I think there's a lack of information – I would have known about everything that was going on some time ago, newsletters, just going out and about and talking to other women. My own life has got much more introverted. My work is also involving in a political sense and so my social life is more simply social and less political/social. I don't think I'm alone in that.*

GH: No, I don't think you are. To that extent, I think we've lost our audience. I'm not sure that anything we can do will bring that particular audience back to us because that's part of a whole social change and we are only part of that change, not the cause of it. Also we have suffered terribly from the perception that feminism is no longer fashionable. You'll quite often ring up a place to get a booking and they'll say, 'Oh well, we did women last year'. It's almost like we've been completely re-marginalised again, not just as a company, but as women. There is a general – although I think completely mistaken – belief that women are now in the mainstream, that we don't have to bother about it any more.

It's now impossible to do a tour that doesn't involve 80 per cent one night stands. That is not the way to do good work. It's very much a question of dodging and weaving, hanging on by your teeth until you can find a way of turning events to your own advantage. We have just got stubborn and are saying we're not going to go away; we will hang on in there until it changes sufficiently for us to launch off again.

LA: *Who is in the group now?*

GH: Basically the group consists of the three women who initially made themselves unemployed to start it, Chris, Mary and myself, and our administrator Rose Sharp. We also have a pool of women we draw on. We have an advisory committee who meet four times a year and give us input, talk about what's wrong or right with the company, what they'd like to see us doing – it's an interesting forum.

And there are a lot of young women writers now, although we get caught in this thing that they don't necessarily want to write for us because we've been so marginalised. In terms of a writer's aspirations, they want to be seen in the world, so given the choice of the Royal Court or us, they will choose to write for what they perceive to be a wider audience that they can reach by writing for a more mainstream theatre.

LA: *So what do you feel about 'women's theatre'? There wasn't such a thing, now there is, but it's still not part of the mainstream.*

GH: I veer between being quite optimistic about things turning round and feeling we're a dead duck. It's exacerbated by all these people wanting to study us – it does make you feel like you're dead. Why do all these people want to write theses about us and study us on courses?

LA: *Is it not partly because that's one of the few areas of feminist activity left, academic work? There are no CR groups but there are women's studies courses and that's where a lot of young women first come into contact with feminist ideas. It's important that some things do survive so that when a new generation comes along that wants to know – they'll do something different from whatever it was we did, but hopefully they'll be able to make some of the links. One of the awful things is how we keep on having to do it all again, like you discovered with the Paris Commune.*

So, why are you still gleeful about feminism?

GH: First of all there is nothing that drives me crazier than hearing someone say, 'Of course, I'm not a feminist, but . . .' and I loathe 'post-feminism' – I think it's entirely meaningless. We haven't achieved anything of what we wanted: a few little things here and there, but the battle is still to be won, to be restarted. I'm not abandoning something that has been, I suppose, the most important thing in my life. The political atmosphere in which we work is like a trampoline, when it starts to improve we'll start to bounce higher and higher again. □

The Female Eunuch, Germaine Greer, Paladin, 1971.

Witches, Midwives and Nurses: a history of women healers, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, Writers and Readers, 1977.



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Summer 1989

Letters	2
Jeux Sans Frontières: international campaigns against sex tourism <i>Trine Thoen and Nina Kristianson</i>	10
Bitter Ironies: the professionalisation of child sexual abuse <i>Liz Kelly</i>	14
Intimate Questions <i>Barbara Jones</i> on feminists and money	22
With Our Own Hands: violence between and by women <i>Ellen Bell</i>	26
<i>Liz Kelly and Sara Scott</i>	28
'68, '78, '88: <i>Sophie Laws</i> reviews a new collection of writing about the last 20 years of feminism	30
Creating a politics of appearance – the national fat women's conference: report by <i>Heather Smith</i>	36
Black Women and Feminism <i>bell hooks</i>	42
Feminist Theatricals: <i>Lynn Alderson</i> interviews <i>Gillian Hanna</i> of Monstrous Regiment	47

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