

# Trouble & Strife

The radical feminist magazine

## Women



## campaign for



## justice for women



Free Sara Thornton

Thelma and Louise live!

Ritual/satanic abuse

Lesbian sleuths

New Age – same men

Women and power in Burma

No. 22  
£2.50

*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 Lisa Adkins, Lynn Alderson, Margot Farnham, Cath Jackson, Liz Kelly, Sophie Laws and Sara Scott; with help from Judy Stevens and Caroline Forbes. With many thanks to the Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Information Centre for the use of their space and resources.

Typeset by SuperSetting (081 960 4402)

Printed by In-Speed Printers, Luton LU4 8HA (0582 405686)

Distributed by Central Books (081 986 4854)

*Trouble & Strife* is available on tape.

Please note our new address: *Trouble & Strife*, PO Box 8, Diss, Norfolk IP22 3XG.

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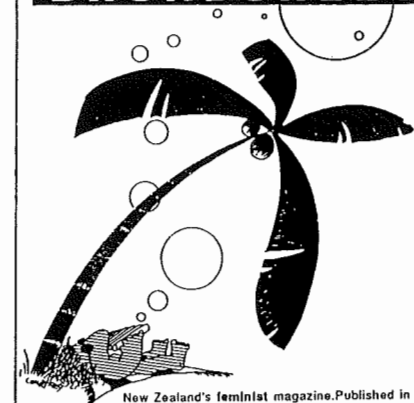
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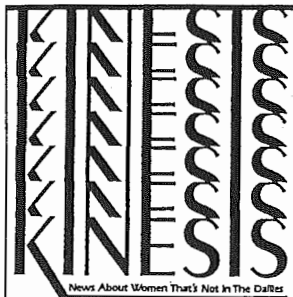
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# Letters



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## Focusing our anger

Dear *Trouble and Strife*,

Congratulations to Liz Kelly for her courageous, well thought-out article on women who abuse. As she says, honesty and facing the 'facts' (if these can be defined helpfully!) could open the way to a dialogue about power-over relationships amongst women, and women and children.

Silence is certainly damaging, and leaves us with little to offer against 'women do it too' defences for male violence.

Louise Armstrong's article, too, on "Surviving the Incest Industry", was particularly timely. It's reassuring to know that other lesbians/feminists are concerned to refocus women survivors' anger back onto challenging and changing male power systems which allow abuse to continue unchallenged.

I am concerned at how many women, including lesbian feminists, are caught up in 'personal healing', woman blaming ("mother didn't protect me") clientisation ("I'm dependent on my therapist" for example!) situations. I am frustrated at having my rage redefined, blocked or rerouted away from the primary issue — breaking silence in order to challenge the 'right' of men to abuse, and to focus the blame squarely on them.

How can we, as feminists, support women and make our rage effective? Certainly some of the survivors groups I have visited recently leave a bad taste in the mouth and further anger in the head.  
In sisterhood,  
Carol Murray  
Herts.

## Liberation

Dear *T&S*,

*Issue 21* fell open at "Why Laura Palmer died". I skimmed through it and couldn't believe what I was reading. Is this PSEUDO-INTELLECTUAL GARBAGE feminism? Diana Hume George is "not Andrea", so what is she doing in a "radical feminist" magazine?

I'm getting fed up of reading feminist theory. How much more analysis do we need?

How many more books do we need? Can someone please tell me what feminists are DOING?

I was on the June 8th march against Manchester Medical School. Five hundred people shouted and chanted all the way from Platt Fields to Boots in Market Street.

"What do we want? ANIMAL LIBERATION. When do we want it? NOW. Are we going to get it? YES. Are we going to fight for it? YES. Are we going to die for it? YES." And WE MEANT IT. How many feminists these days really believe that women's liberation is worth fighting for, worth dying for?

As a result of the ALF's firebombing campaign against department stores, the fur trade in this country has been decimated. Pornography is just as soft a target as fur — men in general are ashamed to admit they use it, and women in general loathe it. The time has come for the WLF.

Kathy  
Manchester

## Right to be angry

Dearest *T&S*

It's great to have found you again, on such good form. *Issue 21* was jam-packed with great stuff.

I'd like to comment on the article "Unspeakable Acts" by Liz Kelly about women and violence. After I'd finally had enough, and told all my friends about the violence within my own lesbian relationship, gay, straight, bi, men and women, their reaction was always the same: total disbelief. "But we know Melissa, she would never do that to you. She loves you."

Not only do we ourselves try to uphold the lesbian relationship in some sort of magical, rose-tinted perfectionism, but the rest of our surrounding community try to do so as well. And when the shit hits the fan, no-one wants to know. You're on your own.

Being passive and peaceful is not feminine: that has been forced on us. Women are powerful, aggressive and angry, and we have every right to be.

Jel Jacobs  
Leamington Spa

# After Margaret

*Beatrix Campbell celebrates the ambiguities in feminist politics which have allowed the women's liberation movement to survive a decade of Thatcherism when other, more rigid political movements have ossified and died. This is an edited version of a speech given at the Women's Studies Network Conference; London, June 1991.*

A key perspective in thinking about feminism in the post-Thatcher period and feminism as we move towards the end of the century is the notion of ambiguity, of things which are both positive and negative — of moving backwards and forwards. I want that notion to infuse what I'm saying here, partly because it helps counteract the hopelessness of political pessimism.

This notion of ambiguity helps us to deal with the things that have been difficult — absolutely awful, actually — about the last ten years and which will become very difficult for the rest of the century. But it is important to hold on to some of those difficult things because they can have an important message for us: that the last ten years have not just been terrible; that we didn't go away, we didn't die; that our politics didn't disintegrate and disappear. We were not defeated; we're here today.

I'll start with the oddness of the disappearance of Thatcherism itself. That oddness tells us something about changes in our political culture. Then I want to talk about the politics we've created for ourselves and the us that we've created through those politics.

Thatcherism: the disappearance of the woman, the end of the regular afternoon circus on the TV at parliamentary question time, was devastating for some of us; a kind of sport went out of parliamentary politics.

One of the things that is interesting about

***Thatcher was only able to establish a kinship with women in her moment of defeat . . . as if feminism only became useful to her once she had lost and once she had to own up to the pain of being defeated.***

her reign is that Thatcher was only able to speak truthfully about her experience as a woman at the end of her time in power. She was only able to establish a kinship with women in her moment of defeat. It was as if feminism only became useful to her once she had lost and once she had to own up to the pain of being defeated by what seemed to her — and was described by all our national newspapers — as a coup by men.

Even though there was shock horror when she was elected as the leader of the Conserva-

tive Party, there was also a belief among Conservatives that they had pulled off a consummate political coup. They knew themselves very well; they knew that they had done something consummate when they put her into the position of supreme power in the Conservative Party because they also knew that her presence was contingent and conditional.

This was at a crucial moment in history: the second wave of modern feminism; a time when women's insurgency, women's presence, women's nerve and audacity was palpable. The Conservatives couldn't ignore it; they had to do something about it and what they did was very brilliant. They put in power someone who would give women's politics no endorsement at all but who would, in her own way, express

***The open market has enabled British feminists to hold on to fortresses of scholarship, initiative, energy and service to each other which ten, twelve years ago we probably would have been utterly pessimistic about our capacity to sustain.***

something of the audacity of the moment – Thatcher was nothing if not audacious – and who would lend to the regressive, patriarchal politics of traditional Conservatism the *endorsement of the feminine*. Not the *feminist*: she only endorsed the feminist import of her election as leader of the Conservatives when she was ousted and then she called up a feminist language, a kind of feminist grief to explain the pain of her deposition.

The way Thatcher wielded power is a good example of the conditions under which women are or are not allowed to exercise power. She clearly enjoyed power and wielded it with a panache and an audacity unrivalled by any of her contemporaries. But she also exercised it in a way which demanded that she banish, dismiss, disown her sense of connection to the real world of women. That world had, for Conservative politics, become impossibly contradictory; but the Thatcher project could not be seen to endorse the experience of women, the needs of women, the power of women. Their ploy was to produce instead a spectacular example of a woman in power.

So she gets kicked out in the end and the *Times* – even the *Times* – scripted her demise

in a language of gender consciousness. It described it as “the march of the men”. When she was first elected that just would not have been thinkable. In those days the world was ruled by men: men of a certain colour, a certain age, a certain girth. It wasn't seen as a problem then; now it is and it's significant that they didn't celebrate the march of the men when they booted her out.

### ***Uncertain future***

It is now not really clear what the ambience of British politics will be in the future. Nor is it clear what our part in that is going to be. But we will be there. The problem for us is to define what the terms of feminism's dialogue with other political institutions could be. Because the second half of the 80s was very different from the first. Even if it was awful in the first half, there were sanctuaries – Greenham, for instance, where you could find a re-invigorating politics of spectacle and theatre, a robust kind of energy, a politics of opposition which reminded you that you belonged to something called the Women's Liberation Movement – and which you thought a few years' earlier wasn't there any more.

That kind of politics of spectacle in the public domain hasn't been around for a long time now and we have a problem when it's not there because movements think they don't exist if it's not there.

But we need to think about the ambiguities of the global situation as well as our own domestic situation. 1989 changed the world and it's very important – and especially important for people like you, whose job it is to think and help other people to think – to address what was so extraordinarily dramatic, for women as well as for men and humankind, about the demise of the existing socialist regimes, so-called, in 1989. It is particularly salient when we are thinking about the people involved in ‘women's studies’ and the spaces women have created in the institutions that survived the 1980s.

One of the contradictions of Thatcherism is that it enabled the survival of something like women's studies. The introduction of a market principle, which is, of course, appalling in many ways, nonetheless meant that there was room for manoeuvre for some women's initiatives because those initiatives were popular, were consumer-led, consumer-defined, were in

dialogue with consumers – and the consumers of education are very demanding.

So one of the contradictions in the 1980s was that we discovered that terms like ‘the market’ are much more ambiguous than we had thought. We'd banished them to the swamps of capitalism, forgetting that of course feminists and socialists have a long tradition of creating initiatives within the market place. The co-operative movement, for instance, operated in the market; it was all about the market. A moralism surrounds the notion of the market but we only need to look towards eastern Europe to discover the consequences of the abolition of those kinds of spaces. It's going to be very difficult for women to secure their place in the new, apparently pluralistic, post-socialist economies precisely because the old orders abolished or undermined open markets and civil society and with them disappeared a certain degree of flexibility and capacity. The open market has enabled British feminists to hold on to fortresses of scholarship, initiative, energy and service to each other which ten, twelve years ago we probably would have been utterly pessimistic about our capacity to sustain.

But in the allegedly egalitarian ‘socialist’ east the absence of democracy, of markets, of civil society, conspired to produce patriarchal, conservative and atavistic gender politics amidst the movements for renewal.

This is not to say that the survival of feminist politics in Britain is thanks solely to Margaret Thatcher and the open market. But the fact is that women's movement politics, feminist politics, indeed many feminisms, have survived and continue to thrive in all sorts of ways and in all sorts of spaces – institutional and other – to which we had no access 15 or 20 years ago.

### ***Letting go***

Clearly we no longer have a women's liberation movement in the old form of the 60s and 70s. So what does our feminism look like now? What kind of room has it created for itself? Why is it different from other political forms? What makes it flexible, rather than dead?

It's very important for us not to get paralysed by comparing our politics to other traditions. For instance, I remember a long time ago reading and feeling moderately inspired by the Communist Manifesto. The end is horrible, very butch language about dictatorship, but there's some nice things in it about the creation

***When we found ourselves ritually slaughtering each other, sensibly we stopped . . . we let go and relaxed and turned our energies instead to things that were useful.***

of popular people's politics. And I can remember thinking very fondly of a particular phrase which was about this: the need to protect the movements of the future in the movements of the present. I remember thinking at the time, “That's lovely”.

You know the way you search these texts for little homilies to help define the kind of politics you think you are trying to make and preferably get it down to three words?

There is an implication in this particular little homily that you can control the future – and you can't; the last fifteen years have shown us that. But there is some generosity in it still, once you deal with the notion of control, because it helps us to review the way feminism aligned itself to political traditions which were not helpful. Our way of going about our business is quite different from some of those traditions, particularly of the left, which represented a controlling and a bullying megalomania; a sense of impregnable isolation that dared not be contaminated by negotiation, by networking, by allowing a conversation with the rest of society because it felt dangerous.

What comes to mind is the title which the Irish republican movement has taken: “Sinn Féin”, meaning “We ourselves alone”. It's a deadly notion, absolutely deadly, because what it produces is a notion that we cannot actually exist in the society which we inhabit.

Everything that the Women's Studies Network is about testifies to the opposite. It is about trying to create forms and spaces that enable people to do exactly that thing that feminism was always about. It isn't about creating political forms that celebrate women, ourselves, in completed form, in heroic isolation.

***“We ourselves alone”. It's a deadly notion, absolutely deadly because it produces a notion that we cannot actually exist in the society which we inhabit.***



It is about creating a political form that allows women to become something else.

In our society access to education has become absolutely critical as part of people's – particularly oppressed people's – access to the society in which they live but from which they feel exiled. And that is what also happens inside institutions, even those that apparently have a quite different project. So what you do is utterly subversive.

We don't have a women's liberation movement with a mailing address and an annual conference and march and all that. We stopped having national conferences when they got so horrible that no-one would organise them any more. But that didn't mean we committed suicide. Unlike the trade union movement – people like Arthur Scargill and Eric Hammond who go to the TUC every year for their annual joust and ritual slaughter – we don't need a formal national structure to survive. When we found ourselves ritually slaughtering each other, sensibly we stopped. We abandoned a political form that produced a compulsion, a controllingness; we let go and relaxed and turned our energies instead to things that were useful.

#### Ambiguities

What we have learned about feminism's ability to survive into the rest of the century is that it is ephemeral and enduring; that it's critical – because it's critical of everything around us, ourselves included – and self-critical. It's a politics

which is about being anti-authoritarian while at the same time attaching authority to women's experience. It's a politics which rests upon autonomy and alliances: the necessary autonomy of all those who feel the need to gather, find recognition, find each other, discover difference, discover that difference is survivable, discover the mechanisms of negotiation that, for example, enable black women and white women to be in the same room and share a project; that enable women to negotiate with men.

It's a politics that moves from autonomy to alliances: things break up and re-form all the time. It's a politics which is about mobility, crossing boundaries; it's transgressive; it adopts multiple forms.

So if we can hang on to all the contradictions and ambiguities that are embedded in that, then what we discover is a kind of strength that is supple, not brittle. We should not be frightened of the destruction of some of our own traditions because we are inherently about recreating ourselves constantly; ours is a politics that is always critical, a politics of becoming.

So we should be confident about holding on to the ambiguities in our own history. So long as we hang on to the fundamental and generous principles of modern feminism – principles of commitment, contemplation, discovery and service to each other – we will not disappear. □



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## CHANGE THE LAW (1)

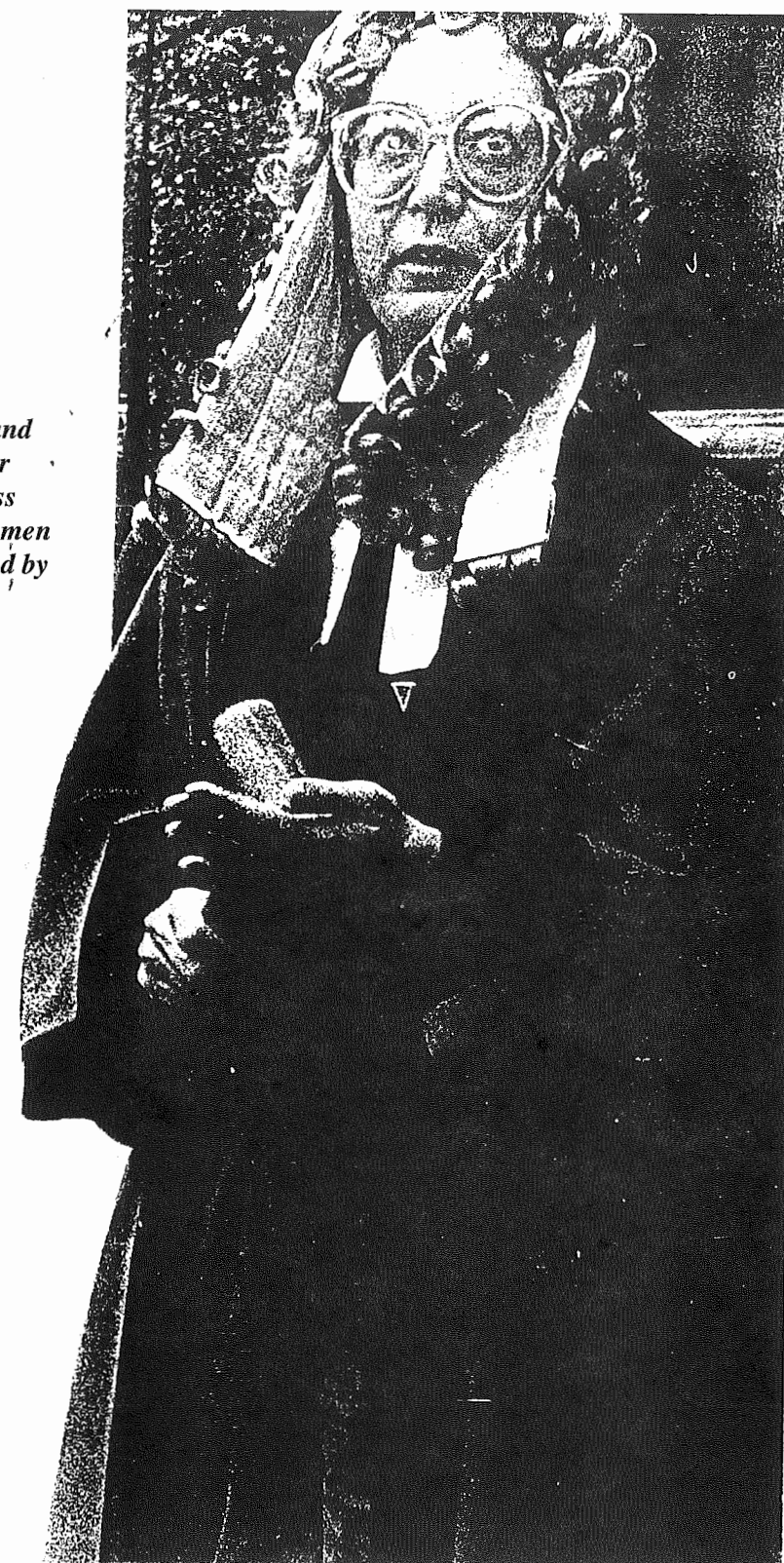
*Sara Thornton was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment for killing her violent husband. Her case has prompted mass campaigns against the difference in the way men and women who kill their partners are treated by the courts. Sandra MacNeill reports on the campaign and the issues at stake.*

On 29th July 1991 the Appeal Court judges turned down Sara Thornton's appeal to have her conviction for murder reduced to manslaughter on grounds of provocation. They did so in spite of legal arguments about provocation, about the travesty of justice at her first trial, and in spite of a feminist campaign which had ensured publicity for the appeal court hearing.

On 31st July 1991, in Birmingham Crown Court, where Sara was originally sentenced, Joseph McGrail, who killed his common law wife Marion Kennedy, had his plea to not guilty of murder but guilty of manslaughter on grounds of provocation accepted by the judge. He walked free without a trial.

Sara immediately went on hunger strike in protest at the inequality in the law. Sara's hunger strike, which lasted 20 days, and the similarity of the cases and the timing, ensured massive media debate. This debate included the views of feminist campaigners critical of the law. (Up to Sara's appeal we had expressed concern and support but had not been openly critical of the law in case this would prejudice the case).

Sara ended her hunger strike after a visit from her daughter and after receiving hundreds of letters of support. The letters, said Sara, begged her not to die and promised to fight on. One way to do that is to change the law.



Photographs by Jill Radford

### Interpretations of killing

Every year more than 70 women and about 15 men die at the hands of their partners. According to the Crown Prosecution Service 40% of women but only 25% of men are convicted of murder. Murder carries an obligatory life sentence. Manslaughter is the crime which currently gives English judges the greatest power over sentences. It can carry any sentence from an unconditional discharge to life. In addition judges can either accept a plea to manslaughter or let a jury decide.

The two main grounds for pleas to manslaughter are diminished responsibility, which most women plead, or provocation, which most men plead.

There is also a plea of self-defence, a total defence, but very narrowly defined: for example, if someone attacks you with their fists you may not pick up a weapon and plead self-defence; only if you were attacked with a knife would you be 'entitled' to defend yourself with a knife.

Diminished responsibility, which lawyers urge women to plead, means you have to 'prove' you were temporarily insane at the time, but not now, or you could land up in Broadmoor.

The current interpretation of provocation is that it can only apply to a killing committed in the heat of the moment. Thus a person (the law is neutral) who is able to kill another person by lashing out with fists or kicks or by strangling them can argue, "They did this", or "They did that" and "I suddenly snapped", and have their plea of not guilty to murder accepted by the courts. Who then is protected by this definition? Not women who are killed; note how many die each year and how many men escape the murder verdict. And not women who kill. How many of us are capable of strangling a man? The law, made by the stronger sex is weighted in favour of the stronger sex, with a pretence at neutrality.

We say that a woman should be permitted to go for a weapon to defend herself. We say that years of being beaten should be taken into account. Many women live in fear; men say they will kill them if they leave and many do so. As the beatings get worse and women fear for their lives, some find that to kill the man while he is not actually attacking is the only way to save their lives. We say the law should acknowledge this reality of women's lives. They reply that what we want is such a loose in-

terpretation of provocation that it would excuse premeditated murder.

Under the current interpretation of provocation it already does – for men.

### Getting away with murder

It wasn't only the cases of Sara Thornton and Joseph McGrail which focused feminists' minds on the double standard built into the law on provocation. In 1980 Annette Maw killed her brutal drunken father with a knife passed to her by her sister Charlene. Their plea of manslaughter on the grounds of provocation was accepted: Tommy Maw was beating Annette with his fists. They were sentenced to three years (Charlene's sentence was reduced to one year on appeal, but not Annette's). The day before, in Leeds Crown Court, Douglas Coles pleaded guilty to the manslaughter of his wife Ethel. "She was neurotic and nagged and he snapped." He got two years' probation.

In a footnote to her 1984 play *Masterpieces*, which refers to this case, Sara Daniels notes: "In future productions more up-to-date examples can be substituted for these".

In Leeds there has been a long campaign to raise awareness of how easy it is for men to have pleas to manslaughter accepted. Normally they receive a prison sentence.

In 1983 Keith Ward of Bradford was sentenced to only four years for the manslaughter of his girlfriend Julie Stead. Following protests from her family and women's groups including Women Against Violence Against Women, West Yorkshire police eventually admitted to faults in their investigation of the case. That he had been violent to her on many occasions and she had an injunction out against him was hidden from the judge and jury who convicted him of manslaughter not murder. In 1990 Keith Ward was convicted of murdering Valerie Middleton, while on a home leave from prison where he was serving a sentence for wounding her.

This case has had far reaching effects involving on-going, if as yet limited, co-operation between feminists, victims' families, statutory authorities and the police in this and other cases. Two demands raised by feminists involved in these campaigns have been, first that words alone should never be enough to constitute provocation for a killing and reduce it to manslaughter; second, that neither alleged nor actual infidelity should ever constitute provocation for killing and reduce it to manslaughter.

It is incredible that, in law, a man can use any old rubbish about "she taunted me" without it being challenged by, for example, having friends or relatives of the murdered woman give evidence as to its likelihood; to the fact that the woman had injunctions out against him, to the fact that he may have been convicted of beating her before. Such information can, and frequently is, excluded from the evidence.

This is plain ridiculous. If the accused man pleads, for example, that he wasn't there at the time, this might be prejudicial evidence. But if he admits killing her and then tells the court some cock and bull story about how wonderful their relationship was, as Keith Ward did about Julie Stead, then surely evidence which contradicts that should be allowed?

The group that formed in Leeds after Julie died has been pressing for changes in the law to make it harder for men to get away with murder.

### Common ground

Earlier this year women from this group in Leeds met with members of Southall Black Sisters who have been campaigning for changes in the interpretation of provocation and for the release of Kiranjit Ahluwalia (see *T & S* 20). Kiranjit was convicted of murder in 1989. She had endured brutal violence for ten years, had twice obtained injunctions against her husband but he continued to beat, torture and threaten to kill her. She was petrified of staying with him; she was also petrified of leaving him. In May 1989 she set fire to the bed where he slept.

Southall Black Sisters argue that in cases like Kiranjit's:

When some women finally react, they are in fact defending themselves; or are driven by their fear and their pain, rather than committing a pre-meditated act of murder.

So, are these two feminist campaigns at odds with each other: one wanting to tighten up the law and the other wishing to broaden it? Far from it. We agree that the law has been defined so that those strong enough to kill simply by lashing out – men – walk free or get short sentences, whereas those not strong enough – women – who do resort to a weapon or who kill while the man sleeps, go to jail for life.

We share other common ground. The murder trial typically only examines the short period of time (half an hour or one minute)

before the killing. It does not look at the whole background to the event. Men who kill usually have been beating the woman for years: women who kill have been beaten for years. But this is not taken into account.

It would seem from comments about cases like Sara's and Kiranjit's that men in fact are terrified that if the law were altered the thousands of women beaten each year would all suddenly rise up and kill their husbands.

They are not in the least concerned to protect women from men.

They say women should leave; they never suggest a man 'being nagged' should leave. Yet they call our campaigns 'biased'.

In the USA and Canada a number of women who killed their husbands have gone free after "expert witnesses" have given evidence about so-called battered wives syndrome: the witnesses are usually psychiatrists or

Women protest outside the Royal Courts of Justice, August 1991.





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Road, Southall, Middlesex

Since 1974, violent crimes committed by men against women in the United States have increased 50% . . . on the other hand, violent crimes committed by women against men have declined by 12%. Most dramatic is the decline in homicides (25%). In fact, murder of men by women is the only kind of homicide that is not on the increase in violence-prone America. This decline is especially marked in localities that provide shelters and services for abused women . . . Like many women in the battered women's movement Sue Osthoff (Director of the National Clearing House for the Defense of Battered Women) is appalled at the rising tide of violence against women in the United States. "I went into this work to help women," she says. "Now it seems like we have all been working very hard all these years to save the lives of men. It's not what I had in mind." Extract from *Women Who Kill* by Ann Jones, USA

psychologists who explain that victims of battering become paralysed by learned helplessness, and this can end with them losing control.

This is not the same as arguing that what the woman did was a reasonable and justifiable act, which any sane person in that situation might do. It is merely another way of arguing for diminished responsibility.

This was what Sara's defence persuaded her to do at her first trial. But it is a risky defence: not only could you land up certified; there is also a risk that you won't quite fit the pattern of "battered wives syndrome". In Sara's first trial, one of the witnesses called by the prosecution to prove she wasn't in a state of diminished responsibility was a taxi driver who had driven her home and testified that she was "right stropic". This was taken as serious evidence against her and referred to by the lead Appeal Court judge, Justice Beldam, in his summing up.

### Changing the law

Last year the House of Lords introduced an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill, which the House of Commons rejected. That amendment would have abolished the mandatory life sentence for murder. Many judges favour it as, of course, it gives them greater powers. Not only could they continue to set down (often secret) minimum terms to be served before a person sentenced to life can get parole; they would be able to set maximum sentences.

The campaign to abolish mandatory life sentences, pursued by, among others, *The Guardian*, has attempted to hi-jack the campaigns around Sara Thornton which are also seeking this end.

*The Guardian* says that abolishing the mandatory life sentence would be the best way to help women like Sara.

*The Guardian* editorial of 27th August 1991, under the heading "Too Narrow a Campaign", criticised campaigns to free Sara Thornton for not focusing on the issue of abolition of the mandatory life sentence for murder.

We replied to the criticism and gave our disagreements with *The Guardian's* campaign. The letter was not published. Instead one from an individual supporting *The Guardian's* position was.

*The Guardian* supposedly supports the media campaign for right of reply. I find it difficult to believe *The Guardian* would have given nearly half an editorial to criticising a

male or mixed campaign or group and not printed their reply. *The Guardian* said we were wrong to focus on "sex discrimination".

It's enough to make a cat laugh. After all the prejudice Sara and others have encountered from judges, it seems ridiculous to say the solution is simply to give more powers to the judges to sentence different murderers to different terms of imprisonment.

To do this without altering the interpretation of provocation would mean judges would be bound, as they would point out, to give murderers longer sentences than those convicted of manslaughter. Women who fight back would still be classified as murderers.

In the immediate short term, in response to Sara's case, Jack Ashley MP has said he will introduce a Private Member's Bill on the issue of provocation. He has not yet considered the wording of it.

The Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, set up following the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four cases, has agreed to hear evidence on any aspect of the system. They have asked for criticism of the current system, for evidence of its shortcomings and for proposals for change. The deadline is the end of November.

We can certainly make criticisms and point to shortcomings. But the onus is then on us to come up with, for example, a new interpretation of provocation — one that top legal brains will not immediately shoot down in flames, and all our criticisms with it.

### Feminist campaigns

Before Sara's appeal a few women's groups had come together to work on the issues:

Southall Black Sisters' campaign to free Kiranjit Ahluwalia had raised awareness all over the country; the Women's Campaign for Justice for Women was formed in Leeds, comprising women from earlier campaigns and existing groups and women motivated by the campaign for Kiranjit; the group of women in London who organised for Sara's appeal, putting in masses of work developing contacts in the media to ensure coverage of the appeal, are also veterans of many campaigns. Most recently they have been involved in a network of Jewish feminists and women who are incest survivors, who organised around another case concerning the treatment meted out by the courts and the media to a mother in a child sexual abuse case.

Fifty women came to the first day of the protest for Sara at the Appeal Court on 19th July this year and the court was packed. (The police co-operated on this occasion by setting up wee barricades, though they did not, in fact, confine us behind them). Many interviews were given to TV, radio and newspapers, then and after the rejection of the appeal on 29th July. When the appeal failed, the media immediately lost interest. The reporters and crews there included some really good women who managed to get extended spots on Channel 4 news and BBC2. But they were then told that their editors had cancelled them and the failure of the appeal was relegated to a quick mention on the national news. Two days later the McGrail case suddenly made news again, as did Sara's hunger strike.

In spite of some of the media personalising the case, even attacking Sara, and the attempts to marginalise feminist campaigns, the publicity has helped. Women have been mobilising all over the country, building on existing networks and bringing in women who have never been active in anything before. Southend Women's Aid collected petitions, picketed the prison in Essex where Sara then was, and handed in a petition at the Home Office, all with maximum publicity. Women in London held a demonstration outside the Appeal Court a week later where they re-enacted the trial — and put the judges in the dock. This

was also filmed for television.

Women's groups from all over — mainly Women's Aid, Rape Crisis groups and some women's committees — began to write letters and petition. It is not surprising that actions should be mainly coming from those existing groups and structures. Although, as with campaigns in the past, many women came to join who had never been active before, or not for a long time, because this issue touches women deeply. Just when people thought the Women's Liberation Movement had gone away dispirited, here we are again.

Sara was moved to Holloway Prison and Women's Action for Sara Thornton set up a daily picket. Southall Black Sisters held pickets of the Home Office, attended by 200 women. Petitions were handed in with thousands of names on them — most of which were collected after Sara ended her hunger strike and women pledged to fight on!

As well as writing to local MPs and the Home Secretary and lobbying generally, other actions included a demonstration at the Law Courts in the Strand on 7th October and a national demonstration on 23rd November. Other actions are planned.

Sara has said that women's campaigns have been a great source of strength to her. So let's not get swept under the carpet; let's keep the pressure up. □

### Contact addresses

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*Scottish Women's Aid:* 13/19 North Bank Street, Edinburgh, EH1 2LP.  
*Northern Ireland Women's Aid:* 129 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1HP.  
*The Home Secretary, The Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT.*  
*The Royal Commission on Criminal Justice:* Whittington House, 19 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7LU.

*Sara Thornton:* Bullwood Hall, Hockley, Essex, SS5 4TE.  
*Sara would like to thank everyone who has sent her cards, letters of support and flowers.*

*Protesting outside the Royal Courts of Justice August 1991.*



## CHANGE

## THE LAW (2)

*The Women's Campaign for Justice for Women is seeking to amend the legal definition of "provocation" to acknowledge women's experience of domestic violence. These excerpts from a discussion paper by Jill Radford and Liz Kelly explore a number of other options for legal reform of significance to women and children brought before the courts.*

We want to argue that the campaign should work on all possible options for reform, both amending provocation and self-defence, redefining "reasonable" in a way which makes sense for women as well as for the "reasonable man". In addition to these reforms, we are proposing a new defence we're calling "self-preservation".

Together, such changes will give women and children options and cover a wider range of possible cases where a shift from murder to manslaughter is appropriate as well as providing more women with a total defence through amending the grounds for pleading self-defence. Covering more eventualities, we can argue, this approach makes for stronger law and reduces the discretion of the judges.

In formulating this proposal, we have tried to address the need to ensure that proposed law reform acknowledges the specificity of women's experiences, without doing anything to reinforce the ease with which men have often got away with killing women.

### Self defence

In the law of England and Wales at present there are several major problems in the rules of self defence. These are the requirements of "imminence" and "proportionality of force", the use of a male standard to determine reasonableness and the assumptions made about the nature and possibilities of escape. All are rooted in the history of this law in the English common law tradition, i.e. law made by white, male judges in specific cases, and as such they are unaccountable, pragmatic decisions made by a non elected male elite. Most rested on cases of a man defending himself against an unknown male assailant in a public place. They are not relevant to women's experience.

Imminence is similar to the 'sudden' aspect in provocation, i.e. it requires that the response is immediate within an assault situation. However, imminence can have a broader

meaning, as when the weather forecast tells us "rain is imminent" or economists speak of "imminent mergers". So it might be possible to challenge the traditional legal interpretation in trials or appeals.

The rationale behind the narrow interpretation was that self defence should only be permitted when there is no possibility of resorting to law enforcement or the police for protection. This rule, which assumes an attack by a stranger in public, excludes the situation of a woman experiencing continuing violence from a partner in her own home. As we know, the police offer limited protection to women in situations of domestic violence, so even if she were able to call the police, and if they arrived in time, without further action their presence does not provide her with ongoing protection.

Recommendation: "Imminence" in the defence of self defence should be relaxed.

"Proportionality of force" holds that a person cannot use a deadly weapon in self defence unless one is being used against him/her. This rule assumes a man defending himself against another man, a rough equality of fighting skills and strength. Neither of these apply to women and even less to children.

Recommendation: The proportionality of force rule should be dropped. Instead whether or not the amount of force used was appropriate to the circumstances should be considered as part of the question of the reasonableness of the action.

"Reasonableness" will remain an obstacle for women while it is defined in terms of the "reasonable man" or "the man on the Clapham bus". We argue that this be dropped as evident sex discrimination. We also reject criteria based on what a judge or jury might consider reasonable. Instead we would require the court to consider reasonableness from the perspective of the person who has been abused. This would enable the woman's or child's entire history of violence and abuse from the man in question to



be admitted as evidence of the reasonableness of their action. Similarly this more specific criterion would also enable particular characteristics of a person's background to be considered in deciding whether or not an action was reasonable. This would allow for differences in culture or class, for example, to be relevant issues in decisions about whether an action was reasonable or not.

There is a precedent for this in the USA. In a potentially far reaching decision the Washington Supreme Court ruled "the defendant's actions are to be judged against her own subjective impressions and not those of a detached jury might determine objectively reasonable". This was in the case of Yvonne Wanrow, a Colville Indian woman, who shot and killed a known child-abuser who had broken into her house at night and made advances towards her child. She had been originally convicted of "second degree murder", but after an activist campaign by feminists in Washington this conviction was overturned. Because the ruling is potentially far reaching we have quoted a large extract:

The impression created – that a 5' 4" woman with a cast on her leg and using a crutch must, under law, somehow repel an assault by a 6' 2" intoxicated man without employing a weapon in her defence, unless the jury finds her determination of the degree of danger to be objectively reasonable – constitutes a separate and distinct misstatement of the law and, in the context of this case, violates the respondent's right to equal protection of the law. The respondent (Wanrow) was entitled to have the jury consider her actions in the light of her own perception of the situation, including those perceptions which were the product of a nation's long and unfortunate history of sex discrimination... Until such time as the effects of that history are eradicated, care must be taken to be sure that our self-defence instructions afford women the right to have their conduct judged in the light of the individual physical handicaps which are the product of sex discrimination. To fail to do this is to deny the right of the individual woman involved to trial by the same rules which are applicable to male defendants.

Recommendation: That reasonableness be redefined to allow for history of relationship to be considered.

Escape is often taken into consideration in assessments of the "reasonableness" of behaviour in pleas of self defence and provocation. It was an issue raised in the trials of Sara Thornton and Kiranjit Ahluwalia. The expectation is that a reasonable man should escape if there is any possibility, rather than striking back, which is the last resort. But again it is rooted in men's experience of public violence and the belief that 'a man's home is his castle' and therefore a safe place. This is not the experience of women and children who are experiencing domestic violence and sexual abuse. Nor is there safety for women in public places.

Recommendation: That the specificity of a woman's/child's circumstances are acknowledged whenever the possibility of escaping the violence is considered.

### Provocation

The campaign advocates reform of the defence of "provocation" by removing "sudden" from the existing definition of "sudden and temporary loss of control" and redefining the "cooling off period" as one which could equally be a "boiling over period". This, as Lord Gifford argued at Sara Thornton's appeal, would allow a legal recognition of the fact that women's and men's responses to violence and abuse can be different.

We do not think, however, that the suggested amendments are enough. Removing "sudden" and re-defining "cooling off" are important and crucial, and would widen the defence to include Sara's case; we are less certain about Kiranjit's.

First, the provocation defence specifies "a reasonable man" (twice, in fact!). The problems with this were discussed above. This allows no space for arguing that women's experiences and situations are different from men's. This is necessary in order to look at women's choice of method/use of weapons, or their needing to plan in order not to be physically overwhelmed by a stronger, and already abusive, man.

Second, the term "loss of self-control" remains central to a provocation defence. This will be a major hurdle for women where they







\*"Continuing" would need to be defined; our suggestion is "several assaults on different occasions" and an honest belief it will continue into the future.



did take time, plan their actions – as some aspects of Kiranjit's actions could be interpreted. It is yet again based on a 'man's eye view' where traditionally men act spontaneously and in rage, using methods such as choking and strangling. We're not sure what concept could replace it, or even if it is possible to – hence the need to introduce an entirely new defence.

### Self-preservation

Our reason for suggesting this is an awareness of the limited and contradictory ways in which legal reform of current defences have been used in other countries. As far as we know in most other countries reforms have been limited to amending current defences, so attempting something new could be exciting and open up other possibilities elsewhere. It seems to us that it would be an important victory to have the unequal position of women and children in families/households recognised in law – such that the very fact of having to endure a history of sexual/physical abuse is the basis of the defence. Whilst not worded in gender-specific ways, the reality is that the vast majority of cases would involve women and children abused by male members of the household.

Our starting point in thinking about a new defence is all the research on, and personal testimony by, women who have killed abusive men. The common theme which emerges is reaching a point where they feel it's his life or theirs. Both the history of the violence and the many attempts they have made to avoid/escape it result in a sense of hopelessness and despair.

Although this amendment, like all law, needs to be universal in its application, we feel it should also acknowledge the ways in which differences in women's cultural background specifically shape their situation and perception of courses of action open to them. For example we are aware of how the "izzat" code of honour was one of the several circumstantial factors which served to trap Kiranjit in her marriage. However we do not want law to problematise minority ethnic cultural groups in ways which could feed into racist stereotypes.

Further we are aware that other women can be trapped and isolated by dominant ideologies or beliefs of their communities. For example we have learned how women from Christian fundamentalist groups may be punished by their communities for leaving violent relationships – for example ROW has been contacted by women from faiths like Jehovah's Witnesses who have lost custody of their children and been forced out of their community when they left violent husbands. Knowledge of the power of community response can be part of the complex web of factors binding women in dangerous situations.

While we need the assistance of lawyers in the drafting of this defence, we see it as containing the following elements:

- It is a defence open to a person who kills a partner or someone in a familial or intimate relationship who
- has subjected them to continuing\* sexual and/or physical abuse and intimidation combined with psychological abuse to the extent that they
- have an honest belief that there was no alternative available.

We would include subsections to allow for the following situations:

- a person acting in the protection of a child being subjected to abuse;
- a child or adolescent acting in the protection of a parent or sibling being abused;
- in the case of a child or young person victimised by sexual abuse acting to prevent the abuse being carried on to a sibling;
- household or family members acting together against a household/family member who is abusing all of them.

The defence would require the woman to provide evidence to demonstrate the history of violence and abuse. This would take the form of the woman's/child's own testimony with or without other corroboration, which might take the form of testimony from, for example, other members of the household, including children, friends, family, neighbours, doctor's or police reports, legal statements, court orders or evidence from other agencies. □

# Thelma and Louise Go Shooting

*Empowerment, anger, rage; 'Thelma and Louise' is much more than a simple Hollywood road movie, writes Sue Botcherby.*

In one of the earliest scenes in *Thelma and Louise* a guy is attempting to rape Thelma. He hits her several times and has her face down over the boot of a car. She is hurt and terrified. Louise finds them and makes him stop by pointing a .38, at his head. As they are about to get away Louise growls at him: 'When a woman is crying like that she is not having fun.' This was a powerful, early statement of the feminism that pervades the film. At this point I sat up in my seat. This film was showing potential and I wanted to hear more.

The next part of this scene tied in to the statement that Louise made. Not willing to give up so easily, a trait of all the main male characters in the film, this guy snarls, 'I should have fucked her'. We know exactly what he means. To him it is immaterial whether a woman is enjoying herself, whether she says no, and it is obvious that he will do the same again. With this realisation and with hatred and disgust in her eyes, Louise shoots him with a single bullet. She doesn't fill him full of lead in a scene that could have easily been gratuitously violent. She shoots him so that he won't speak like that, or act like that, towards a woman again.

I was pleased. I'd bet that every woman in the audience was pleased, along with his wife,

his countless affairs and numerous other women he'd violated. This wasn't simply revenge but a political act against male violence. It reminded me of the scene in *A Question of Silence* (1984), where three women, who hadn't previously met, beat, kick and stab a boutique owner to death. The bouti-



que owner was not overtly violent towards the women. The guy in *Thelma and Louise* did not rape either of them; but he wanted to. Both men symbolised and represented everything oppressive towards women and paid for it.

The scene was a power struggle between women and men. If *Thelma and Louise* had let him get away after that comment, women in the audience would have felt vulnerable and powerless. Instead you felt hopeful and avenged, although the inevitable next question was, could they get away with it?

### Stirring

Not surprisingly, *Thelma and Louise* has caused quite a stir. It stirred me that the film was made at all. It seems that Hollywood is not only reflecting the ambitions and ambiguities of American society, but is also representing the challenges to it. Joan Smith, a reviewer for *The Guardian* wrote a scathing critique of the film. In reference to the scene mentioned previously she writes:

Louise blowing away the rapist with a .38, even though he has released *Thelma*, his intended victim, is something of an over-reaction. It is also unjustifiable, both in law and morality...

Joan Smith has missed the point. It is the unjustifiably patriarchal nature of law and morality that this film challenges. *Thelma* was drunk and had been seen dancing with her attacker. Louise is only too aware of how unsympathetic the courts would be to their situation. Incredibly, Joan Smith writes "Thelma was no longer in danger when the gun was fired, the would-be rapist was unarmed..." Although the 'would-be rapist' did not have a gun he was definitely 'armed' and then 'disarmed'.

The film 'dis-arms' men in a variety of ways which have earned it the labels 'controversial' and 'radical'. It made the front cover of *Time* magazine and Richard Johnson of the *New York Daily News* called it "degrading men". Director Ridley Scott, who previously directed *Aliens*, starring Sigourney Weaver, has been proclaiming the feminist messages of the film, or, as Joan Smith scathingly states "has begun to talk like someone who's just discovered the SCUM manifesto". Ridley Scott is a little over zealous when he claims that *Thelma and Louise* "takes apart the whole male species". Callie Khouri, the writer of the screen play, is much more cautious. She maintains that: "The issues surrounding the film are

feminist. But the film itself is not". The film has been deemed to be radical and reactionary. Feminist viewers have proclaimed it as the best feminist film to come out of Hollywood; others have seen it as the archetypal road movie, with female instead of male characters. For me, the controversy lies in the fight back nature of the film. It teaches men a thing or two and has the facility to raise the consciousness of women. It challenges, but it is the way in which it challenges that provokes the variety of heated responses.

### Violence

Joan Smith disliked the violent elements of the film and Sheila Benson of the *Los Angeles Times* saw it as a denial of everything feminism stands for. The issue of women as perpetrators of violence is a complex one and concerns us as feminists. On the one hand there is the equation of violence with masculinity and male power; on the other, femininity is seen as essentially non-violent, so violent behaviours by women are not only undesirable, but unimaginable. *Thelma and Louise* is not a film full of bloody reprisal perpetrated by heroic women who act just like male vigilantes. The worst act of violence in the film comes from the 'would-be' rapist.

This is a film about rape and sexual politics. To undermine the radical exploration of these issues by attacking the supposedly 'violent' behaviours of the female protagonists only serves to blame women for not being 'good girls'. It was through holding a gun in her hand that Louise was armed against this sort of male power. She won a small battle in the face of a much larger power struggle, in the course of a film narrative. Taken on the level of ideology as opposed to realism, we are justified in enjoying women fighting back and winning once in a while.

### Defiance

I loved the film for all sorts of reasons. Susan Sarandon, who plays Louise, is an accomplished and politicised actress. In role, she is a tough, sparky working class woman in her 40s, complete with amazing 'crow's feet'. Geena Davis, who plays *Thelma*, is younger and a housewife, bullied by her unbelievably revolting husband, Darrell. It is *Thelma* who goes through a marked journey of consciousness-raising as the film progresses. At first she is stereotyped as the 'bimbo', running off for a

'wild weekend' with her best friend, Louise. She doesn't tell Darrell that she is going, she couldn't — he wouldn't let her go, but she goes anyway. This marks the first act of defiance which is to become her trade mark later in this rebellious film.

From this act onwards the two characters are in Scott's words, "Two women moving through a landscape where they encounter men, all kinds of men". As fugitives from the law, after the shooting of the would-be rapist, they become changed characters. *Thelma* learns about men the hard way and very quickly. She is seduced by a cutey boy named JD and naively leaves him alone in her room while she swaggers off to tell Louise about "finally getting laid properly". Meanwhile, Louise is getting rid of the only man in her life, Jimmy, who has traced her to Oklahoma. He has realised his mistakes, and is willing to reform, but not even his Elvis pout can save him.

It is at this point that the film really takes off. JD steals all of their money and *Thelma* begins her transformation from 'passive bimbo' to tough, assertive woman. The two women join forces in a powerful partnership and head for Mexico in an attempt to escape the FBI agents who are hunting them down.

The audience is willing these two women to escape and survive. The film becomes a kind of elemental power struggle between *Thelma*,

Louise and the forces of patriarchy. In a bid to survive, *Thelma* commits armed robbery; they lock a policeman in the boot of his car and blow up a tanker driven by a guy who sexually harasses them on the road. In the end they are surrounded by hundreds of armed police who have stalked them to the edge of the Grand Canyon. They don't survive, but neither are they conventionally punished. They kiss, join hands and drive off the edge of the Grand Canyon. They choose their fate with a certain knowledge of the alternative: death or sustained public humiliation and imprisonment by the law.

### Empowered

On leaving the cinema I felt empowered and angry. Numerous other women felt exactly the same. This film stirs up our rage at the continuum of sexual violence towards women; we can identify with the women's on-screen fightback. It gives an injection of fury and, ultimately, through this identification with *Thelma and Louise*, brings us to the raw edge where 'enough is enough'; where law, morality and 'appropriate' behaviours are insufficient. In the words of Geena Davis herself, recorded in a recent article in *Cosmopolitan*, "The guys in this movie get what they deserve".

One of the most powerful scenes in the film sums this up. The driver of a petrol tanker





subjects them on the road to a barrage of obscene comments and sexual gestures. They make him pull over and ask him to apologise. Again, as in the rape scene, they are risking their lives and their ability to escape by doing this. Why? Because this man's behaviour is unacceptable and oppressive to women. The message is loud and clear and undeniable. The guy is incredulous. He thought they were succumbing to his charms and wanted a 'good time'. They have a great time. Louise reprimands him for his appalling behaviour and asks, "How would you feel if someone did that to your wife, or sister or mother?" He won't apologise and stubbornly shouts "Fuck you!". He doesn't get what he wants; remarkably, none of the men in the film get what they want. Furthermore, they have to endure challenges to their masculinity and attitudes towards women as well. Thelma and Louise shoot out his tyres and blow his petrol tanker sky-high. A whole bunch of women in the cinema spontaneously cheered. We've seen screen pyrotechnics of this sort before, in countless thrillers of the masculine-revenge-fantasy genre, but this time the 'baddy' is masculinity itself.

#### Road movie

Thelma and Louise belongs to the genre of the road movie, using the narrative structures of Hollywood. Both structure and genre are associated with a dominant ideology that consistently stereotypes women and this is problematic. As in all mainstream films, there were elements that are difficult to accept. Both women are conventionally attractive, slim and therefore play to the 'male gaze'. But, interestingly, as the women symbolically drive further and further away from conventional lives, their appearance changes; they discard a lot of the external manifestations of femininity. The friendship between the two women develops too. The role of Louise could be construed as simply gender reversal; she is the protector who is strong, competent, able to look after her weak, defenceless friend whose vulnerability gets them into trouble. But the awakening of Thelma and her transition in the course of the film narrative surprises the audience and Louise, and provides many of the elements of comic relief.

Some feminists found Thelma's raised consciousness unconvincing and superficial. This was largely due to the trappings of the

road movie genre. The events in a road movie take place unrealistically quickly in order to sustain tension and drama. But when Thelma says "Something's crossed over in me. I can't go back—I just couldn't live", her words strike a chord in the feminist viewer. If this film doesn't represent realistic processes of consciousness raising for women, it does say that it is possible. Thelma's character is developed to further reinforce the feminist ethos of the film, undermining criticism that it is merely a road movie with reversed roles. She begins to allow herself to recognise the painful experience she suffered in a powerful and clever scene which simultaneously shows flashes of the FBI reading pornography: "He was hurting me. He would have hurt me a lot worse. My life could have been ruined a lot more than it is now". This film has been compared to Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. The only connection is that the characters are outlaws, only Thelma and Louise become outlaws just like any other woman who dares to challenge the established order.

#### Hollywood feminism

Feminist issues and themes are increasingly attracting Hollywood studio treatment. Should we be taking this as an indicator of the influence of feminism? Are mainstream filmmakers showing commitment to feminism, given that their interests are predominantly commercial?

Hollywood's contribution to the exploitation of women within its own industry does not go unchallenged. According to Geena Davis, actresses are speaking out about the shortage of good, powerful roles for women in film. She maintains that "People should go and see Thelma and Louise as a political act of support for women in film". The concept of an entire movie about two women finding their power was appealing to me," says Davis, "because it's so incredibly rare."

This film has the potential to enable other women to find their power, or at least to feel less powerless, if only for its duration. I believe that *Thelma and Louise* has the ability to change women's lives, somewhat like the novel *The Women's Room*, by Marilyn French ten years ago. It is an example of a feminist in-road to a powerful, popular culture and an entertaining one at that. □

# Angst and Academia

*Is there a feminism in academia? Betsy Stanko examines the conflicts for both students and staff involved in women's studies in search of a space for passionate politics in the academy.*

When I took my first academic job, my sister accused me of selling out. Fifteen years later, I still have feelings of angst and bouts of dislocation. I sometimes forget where I am going and dress 'incorrectly'. Like the time I attended the meeting about rape called by the Towns-women's Guild. I showed up in my lime green jumpsuit with the pink polkadots; I should have worn demure black. I mistakenly believed that I was going to a feminist gathering and not a 'professional' meeting.

For 15 years now, I have attempted to be an academic whilst at the same time keeping rooted in the knowledge about sexual violence that stems from radical feminist activism. My academic speciality includes men's violence against women; policing, and 'fear of crime'.

When asked, I call myself a feminist criminologist. I now teach in a law department and have a number of administrative commitments. Yesterday, for example, I had to attend a meeting about institutional matters when I should have participated in the demonstration to free Sara Thornton. I felt as if I was letting my sisters down for not visibly showing my outrage about how, once again, women like Sara Thornton, Kiranjit Ahluwalia and Amelia Rossiter are criminalised for surviving men's violence (see *T&S* 20).

So I thought that it was time that I took stock of my past 15 years in academia, and spoke about the difficulties, the anxieties, and the highs of teaching in a university setting. I also want to show how I rely on a radical

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# POWER KEPT POWERLESS

*In 1989 the people of Burma defied both military dictatorship and cultural and religious tradition to elect a woman – Aung San Suu Kyi – prime minister. In October 1991 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She is still under house arrest. Maureen Aung-Thwin here describes how a woman came to lead the fight for democracy in a country where to be female is still to be considered ‘unclean’.*

One hot July day in 1989, Burma's tortuous quest for democratic change was abruptly halted, and a scene as dramatic as that in Tiananmen Square was played out – without benefit of network television. Burma's experience with democracy had begun with independence from Britain in 1948; it lasted only until 1962, when the army abolished the country's first and only civilian government, and installed 'socialist' military rule. Then, in 1988, Burmese took to the streets in a call to end junta rule. The nervous generals were quick to denounce their past and, to prove it 'changed' the country's name to Myanmar (another way of saying Burma in Burmese). But the people would not cease their demonstrations, showing preference for upstart opposition leaders – especially one who embodied everything the military did not: freedom, openness, hope for the future. That would-be prime minister also happened to be a woman.

Hardly the average Burmese woman, Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of the army's own founder, General Aung San. Considered Burma's George Washington for helping to end British colonial rule, General Aung San was machine-gunned down in 1947 at age 32 by a jealous political rival; assassinated with him was what would have been most of Burma's first independent cabinet. It's poetic

justice that the general's daughter, now 46, leads Burma's second struggle for independence. Aung San Suu Kyi was thrust into the political limelight during the summer of 1988 when she came home to visit her ailing mother, the widow of General Aung San. (She had left Burma in 1960 at age 15 when her mother was appointed ambassador to India, studied abroad, and eventually moved to Britain.) A short time earlier the police had quelled a scuffle that killed a student and triggered the nationwide anti-government protests. Aung San Suu Kyi witnessed the country rise up against the military, whose brutal clampdown and massacre of thousands of civilians propelled her to become involved.

The protests were joined by large numbers of women – Buddhist nuns, students and housewives who, banging pots and pans, demonstrated as noisily as men and monks. Most of the political parties challenging the military were headed by men, but a few independent women's parties were coalescing: the National Politics Women Force and the All Burma Liberated Women's Organization announced feminist agendas. The latter group resolved "to get rid of narrow-minded thinking that women should spend their time in the kitchen to be responsible only for household duties"; "to oppose capitalism that monopolizes

home cottage industries of women and to work through family-based businesses and cooperatives"; and "to establish friendship with international women's organizations with the aim of fostering good Burmese women leaders."

## *Election triumph*

When the junta agreed to Burma's first free elections in 30 years (which it expected to control), Aung San Suu Kyi decided to run as a leader of what became the major opposition party. Her name alone drew great crowds, but it was her candid remarks that kept them mesmerized. Articulating the repressed dreams of a nation, she has said: "The people of Burma really want freedom, [but] first of all they want freedom from fear." Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), attracted many young women followers – but they were often overshadowed by men. Yuzana Khin, a pop singer turned political activist, tells how she managed to speak out at public rallies but in a smaller strategy meeting with the leaders of the NLD a young man physically pulled her back down to her seat when she rose to speak.

Although lacking a defined political platform and advocating nonviolence, Aung San Suu Kyi soon became the single greatest threat to military rule. Months before the elections the junta put her in solitary detention in her home and barred her from running. Nevertheless, the NLD won an astounding victory, securing 81% of the vote. The junta responded by throwing most of the NLD officers and supporters in jail or driving them into exile in neighbouring Thailand and elsewhere. (According to Amnesty International, Thai local commanders repeatedly threaten to deport Burmese refugees, many of whom would face imprisonment and possibly execution.) The many local offices of the NLD are closed, although the party is still officially 'registered'.

Even as a prisoner, Aung San Suu Kyi challenges the army's legitimacy. She went on a 12-day hunger strike in 1989 and she refuses to leave the country voluntarily; the junta has cut her telephone lines and prohibited visitors. The Burmese passports of her two young sons have been cancelled, and her husband, a British scholar, is denied visits with her. Recently the junta is reported to have sent a senior Buddhist abbot to plead with her to leave the country. She agreed, under four rather creative condi-



*Aung San Suu Kyi addressing a Rangoon rally before her arrest.*

tions: transfer of power to civilians; release of all political prisoners; 50 minutes of broadcast time on government-run TV and radio stations; and last – that she be allowed to walk to the airport. Needless to say, her conditions have not been met, and she remains under house arrest. In front of her home is a large white sign, one of many posted around the country, that reads CRUSH EVERY DISRUPTIVE ELEMENT! (in English and Burmese).

The junta's smear campaign of Aung San Suu Kyi (including obscene sexual caricatures of her with her foreign husband) has only gained sympathy for her and heightened her

**BURMA** (Note: accurate statistics are extremely limited; no complete census has been taken since before 1948)  
**POPULATION** (1991): 40 million; women 52% (1983)  
**LITERACY** (1990): 79% overall, 69% of women, 88% of men; growing primary and secondary school dropout rates in the 1980s  
**HIGHER ED.** (1991): women 50% of enrolled; universities closed from 1988 protests to May 1991  
**SUFFRAGE:** granted to both women and men by British in 1922  
**EQUAL RIGHTS:** revised 1947. Constitution guarantees equal pay for equal work  
**GOVERNMENT** (1991): currently in transition; under socialist military dictatorship women were 15% of Burma Socialist Programme Party, but none in leadership  
**EMPLOYMENT** (1990): 34% of women in formal sector; over 45% in informal sector  
**CONTRACEPTION** (1991): illegal except for health reasons; inexpensive condoms and other forms found on black market  
**ABORTION** (1991): illegal, unless the woman's life is in danger; available illegally in some private clinics; high rate of systemic septic infections from common attempts to self-abortion  
**HOMOSEXUALITY** (1991): not specifically prohibited by law  
**PARENTAL LEAVE:** three months maternal leave with full pay

stature in a country that is itself being held hostage: schools remained closed until last May, a curfew is enforced, and public assembly of more than five persons is prohibited. The first woman in Burma to aspire to high office, she evokes a cult-like reverence in some followers. While sceptics question her ability to manage a country, to others she is a reincarnation of her father, whom she physically resembles. For many young women she is a role model; a certain local weaving pattern, because it was seen on an outfit worn by Aung San Suu Kyi, is now named after her and enjoys tremendous sales.

In July 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi begins her third year of detention – out of sight, but on everybody's mind. She has been declared an Amnesty International "prisoner of conscience", and Vaclav Havel, the president of Czechoslovakia, has nominated her for the Nobel peace prize.

### Women's place

Her unique position – as a power kept powerless – illustrates the ambiguous status of all women in Burmese society. (The term "Burmese" includes such ethnic minority groups as the Shan, Mon, and Karen, whose behaviour is influenced considerably by the traditions of the dominant Burman ethnic group.) The country Aung San Suu Kyi could eventually lead were she to come into power (as some Burmese astrologers have predicted) is rich in natural and human resources – in particular, capable women.

It has been claimed that Burmese women don't need a liberation movement in the western sense, since civil rights have long been protected by customary laws that even today seem progressive. The late Daw Mya Sein, a woman educator, once commented:

In Burma we have been singularly fortunate in possessing this equality [in marriage, divorce, and inheritance] before we knew it was a problem.

But for all the fanfare about the great status of Burmese women – who, usually because of their better grades, make up almost half the student population in universities and medical schools – none are in true positions of command in politics, the civil service, the armed forces, or the diplomatic corps. Women do have access to education and a "legal guarantee" of equal pay for equal work, which ensures some representation of females in most

professions, but discrimination in hiring and pay disparities remain.

Large extended families obviate the need for day care, as does the availability of domestic help. Most – but not all – of this 'help' is female and from the lowest economic brackets. Many domestic workers in urban areas never earn more than a subsistence income and spend most of their lives in poverty.

Eighty per cent of Burma's work force is in the agricultural sector where women share with men all non-household duties, even construction work – this of course means the double-job burden, since men don't share the household work. Burma's best known export, heroin, which originates in the infamous Golden Triangle as opium poppies, is cultivated primarily by poor hill-tribeswomen who receive – in comparison to the price of the narcotic on western city streets – a minuscule amount for their hard work. (Heroin use is up in Burma, as in the rest of the world, and more young women are experimenting with it, though men are the majority in the addict population.) The days are also long for factory workers: a journalist who visited the Red Star factory in Taunggyi observed 60 women working from morning until night rolling cigars; each woman received less than a dollar for her daily quota of 1,000 cigars, and many brought their children to help.

For all the claims of equality, Burmese consider their men innately superior. Men, everyone believes, possess a glorified essence or power known as *pon* (rhymes with phone). The biggest threat to this *pon*, of course, is woman. Her polluting powers to diminish or destroy *pon* is much feared. The noted Burmese woman writer Daw Khin Myo Chit put it this way:

I have a feeling that there is an undercurrent of male chauvinism in the relationship between men and women in society . . . that [is] damaging to women as much as any written law.

Casual observers rarely detect this national obsession with protecting *pon*. But Burmese women, supremely self-confident, still practise daily deference to males in a myriad of ways. For example, a wife may run the family business and administer the household, but she will wait on her husband hand and foot.

### Buddhist influence

The society's ambivalence toward women is due partly to Buddhism, the religion of almost

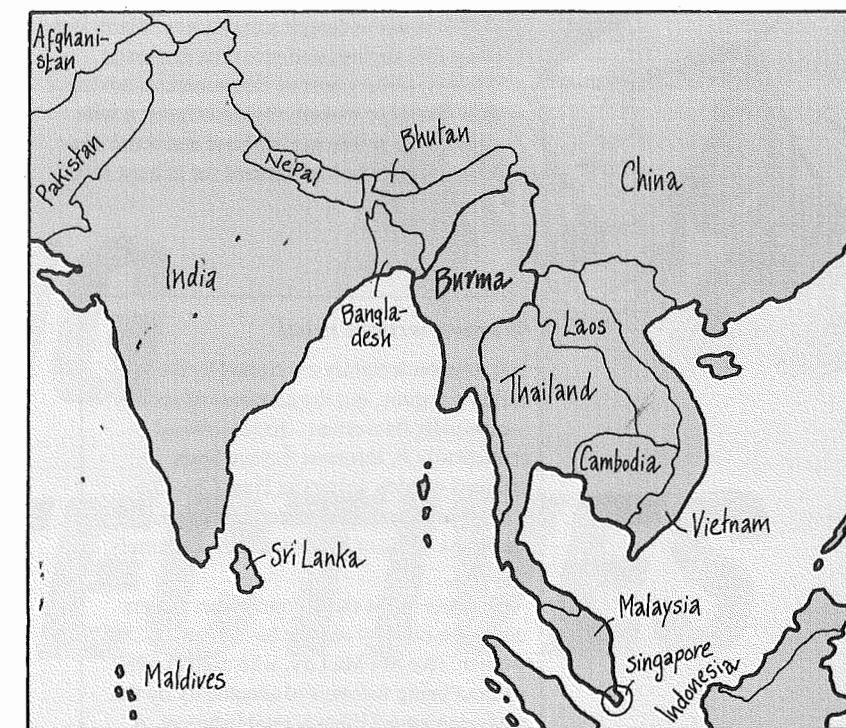
90% of the country. Influenced by a belief that stresses individual enlightenment without sacraments and rituals, Burmese society considers marriage, for instance, a social contract or economic partnership, albeit one with culturally determined obligations. According to a compilation of ancient laws called the Dhammathats, a marriage is valid by "consensual consent" to set up house together. Burmese marriages are often love matches, but parents and relatives do arrange marriages for the overshy or "difficult to place". No ritual or registration is necessary, but couples like ceremonies at which elders can bless the union.

Divorce, too, is easy to obtain in Burma, yet polygamy is legal. The low incidence of both, however, is not for lack of demand but because society disapproves. When it comes to division of property in a divorce, Burmese customary law is so specific as to suggest that divorce might once have been more prevalent: you get to keep not only what you bring into the marriage, but also the profits generated by that property or earned by your own talent. There are no written wills. Inheritance laws are specific on the rights of all children, even those from a previous marriage. There is no overt preference for male children. Indeed, a daughter – having been raised to wait on the family, especially the males – is regarded as indispensable. The bond forged in early years between a girl and her parents guarantees her family a share of whatever capital she earns or has access to through marriage.

Burmese women's image is boosted by the tradition of not using surnames, neither father's nor husband's. Every Burmese has a particular name that she or he keeps from birth to death. Hence, in a typical Burmese family, mother, father and children all have individual names that indicate not lineage but the actual day of birth in the Burmese astrological calendar. Gender is indicated by honorifics: "U" for men, "Daw" for women, and "Ma" for young women. These days, it's quite the fad for 'modern' Burmese to use part of the father's name as a surname, which is easier for westerners and, in the case of such well-known families as Aung San's or U Thant's, provides an instant pedigree.

### Unclean

Being raised a Christian of an ethnic minority (my maternal grandmother is of the Karen



tribal group) in a traditional Buddhist country made me conscious how much a dominant culture – well, dominates. Traditional Burman Buddhist customs are ingrained in all of us. A scientist friend who has lived in the west for decades confessed how she still considers "unclean" the *tamein* (pronounced tah-main), the Burmese women's version of the sarong-type national dress, something she rarely even wore. My friend keeps her *tameins* folded separately in a lower drawer, where they won't come in contact with her husband, endangering his *pon*. I know a young Burmese student who, on arrival in the US, was shocked that his clothes were washed in the same machine as his sister's "unclean" garments. I did an extremely un-Burmese thing recently by trying to present a nearly new pair of unisex jeans to a needy Burmese male student my size. He visibly paled when I admitted they belonged to me; he told me he could only accept my husband's clothes.

Traditional notions that women, female garments and, by extension, sex, are unclean and therefore dangerous to men are not peculiarly Burmese or Buddhist. Such attitudes help rationalise rules of acceptable female behaviour – which in Burma is almost anything



that does not endanger a man's *pon*. Many Burmese folk sayings and proverbs disparage women, while a host of Dhammathats advise how Burmese women should behave: a wife should rise before her husband and retire after him, eat after he has finished (or at least save

### Women writers rebel

Information is tightly controlled by the military regime, but the concerns of society – especially its women – have surfaced realistically in Burmese fiction. Such talented women writers as Daw Cho Cho Tin (an architect who writes as a hobby under the name of Ma Sanda) are extremely popular.

Some of the more courageous writers under the military regime have been women, like Ma Ma Lay, who died in 1982 without being recognised adequately by the male-dominated literary establishment. A leftist herself, Ma Ma Lay was nonetheless too honest to follow the hard line set by the regime to "write about peasants for the peasants", although a large number of her male colleagues complied. She ended up in jail, as did another outstanding woman writer, "Tharrawaddy" San San Nwe (who came from the town of Tharrawaddy). In one story she used her prison experience to portray a woman who was released from jail – only to find herself captive again in a confining household.

Burmese women writers overall have produced a lot of 'anti-romantic' fiction. Anna Allott, a scholar of Burmese literature at the University of London, did a study of story themes and discovered that the themes of contemporary women writers in Burma are:

strikingly realistic [in] their description of the feelings of mothers tied down by small children, sickened by the smell of urine-soaked bedclothes [of older family members whose care falls on female relatives], fed up with being pregnant for the fourth and fifth time, wishing that their husbands would take on more of the burden of looking after the children, wondering why they bothered to take a university degree.

him the best part of the meal), provide "against the inclemencies of the weather for [his] comfort", and never look at men "with eyes as restless as those of a crow".

Burmese attitudes and anxieties about sex inform more of how we act and think than I usually care to admit. As physically demonstrative as I am with westerners of both sexes, I still find it unthinkable to touch, much less hug, a Burmese male other than my brothers. Renunciation of sex, even midway through life, brings great kudos. A *pongyi*, or Buddhist monk (literally, "one with great *pon*"), a *thilashin*, or Buddhist nun (who must show deference to the monk), and virgins of any age are revered because of the great sexual drive they are thought to be suppressing. Although marriage is considered desirable, unmarried women do not lack status. A middle-aged single woman friend proudly exclaimed to me: "People think we are from heaven, you know", referring to the venerated sexless celestial beings in Buddhist cosmology, freed from base, earthbound desires.

### Heaven and hell

Changing attitudes toward sexuality may bring more positive views toward women as well. The change is greatest among urban students, but includes those from the countryside who have come far from familial authority to study in the cities. Many young couples in Rangoon now date like westerners – spending evenings necking in parked cars. But shifting mores may also have a negative effect. Burmese sometimes refer to their country as "heaven" and neighbouring Thailand as "hell", because of the enormous and visible Thai sex industry. However Burma is slowly and tragically catching up. With high unemployment and a disastrous economy, a significant number of young Burmese women – some of them students – are turning to prostitution.

The problems that face Burma are more than those of *tameins* and *pon* – or are they? Some Burmese note the dilemma of a woman in high office: men will find it difficult to show the respect required by her position. To the major issues plaguing Burma today – divisions in class, ethnicity, politics, and economic stagnation – must be added the country's resistance to letting the other half of its citizens, the ones who wear the *tameins*, realise their full potential. Perhaps it is an issue for *pon*, after all. □

# DYKING THE DETECTIVES

*Is the popularity of lesbian detective novels sheer escapism – or is something more complex at work? Magda Devas investigates . . .*

My trenchcoat is dripping in the hall, and I'm too tough to wear a hat. My hair is clinging to my skull, nevertheless a few curls corkscrew their way skywards and, if I were to look, I would note that my hands are wrinkled from the rain. But I notice nothing, for there is work to be done.

I am not alone. Even Gertrude Stein found it impossible to emulate the clipped, shorn language of detective fiction, though she tried a lot harder, attempting a whole book, not just a first paragraph.

I am investigating neither murder nor the way murder is written about. Getting closer to home, I'm not looking at lesbian detective fiction and its literary implications. I am not amateur sleuth but amateur academic, idling with clues and riddles to a problem that's neither earth shattering nor awe-inspiring, but persistent nevertheless.

### Kitties, biccies and sleuths

Why, oh why do lesbians curl up so often with kitties, biccies and the latest lesbian detective novel? The cat and the biscuits have been dealt

with, but not the crime novel.

I have a theory, and like all good theorists I will present the evidence that suits me best. It is a double-edged theory, so don't feel surprised if at the beginning things seem a little contradictory. One side concerns the kind of image lesbians hanker after; the other side is about the lesbian times we live in.

There has been an ongoing difficulty, at least for lesbians who are also feminists, in reconciling style with politics. We often hanker after personal qualities, attitudes and lifestyles which at best sit rather uneasily with each other, and at worst are highly contradictory.

For instance, we all agree that male violence towards women is a bad thing, but we recognise we need outlets for our own, awesome, desire for violence. We despise men and their belief in their own abilities to get things done single-handedly. But we, too, want some of that see-it-all, know-it-all confidence. We loath the heterosexual swaggering that men use to try to gain sexual favour with women, but at the same time we could do with a few tricks up our sleeves to tempt potential partners



into bed. And we know we're all against the superstar ethic, but it can't be all bad if the limelight turns in our direction just once in a while. It's my belief that lesbian detective fiction helps us to reconcile some of these opposites.

The politics of the community are even more difficult. We are expected to believe in collective working, even though one faction has run off to drink up the week's profits while the other lot never make it to meetings to check on the first lot because they are too caught up with their lovers in bed. Then there's the ism-schism, where problems of race, class, disability and age stare us in the face and threaten to do much more. As for sisterhood, it can have us turning our weapons as much against each other as against men.

Over-riding all this is the vision thing. One more picket to go before the revolution is ushered cheerily in. Meanwhile, the ghetto surrounds us with its grim reality.

Do we cut ourselves off from the mainstream and lose out on educational and job opportunities? Or do we attempt to join in and get accused of selling out?

This is a horrible and harsh summary. Of course wonderful, amazing, incredible, amazonian things happen; we are allowed to report them ad nauseam. But it's too painful and too threatening to look and talk and write about the underside. Of course there's the odd joke about all these anti-butch feminists doing their shopping at Top Man, but generally a self-imposed hush-hush prevails.

It is these gaps that lesbian detective fiction steps in to fill.

### Fitting the bill

There are a number of reasons why detective fiction is filling this particular vacuum. First, murder is a very obvious crime; it jolts us out of the prescriptive, feminist framework of judging the world and its contents. There is nothing like a corpse to give a different perspective on life and on the lesbian community.

Second, however lightly it is worn, the very act of donning the raincoat of such a male genre is itself an admission ticket to the mainstream. Even if the plot were avowedly separatist, the style itself is an open confession of connection with the wider culture. That acknowledgement is important; it rejects the isolation of the ghetto, and it is isolation that

reinforces fearfulness, and fearfulness produces silence.

Thirdly, it is the very nature of the detective hero/ine to contravene lesbian-feminist principles. In agreeing to let such a character walk onto the page, both writer and reader are giving up all pretence of lesbian-feminist authority. The lesbian detective gets her cred in much the same way as her male colleague: by performing astonishing feats of courage and deductive reasoning, and by simply being the Goodie. The lesbian heroine need only add a commitment to women, feminism, and/or lesbianism, and she is off and away.

Last, but not least, we have the see-saw effect. There is an ambiguity in lesbian detective fiction: does the fiction take the piss out of the male authority, as represented by the lesbian sleuth jumping into the shoes of the patriarchal detective character? Or could it be that the detective is undermining the fiction; a figure out of a different world coming to laugh at our foibles? Is it straight culture or the lesbian scene that is being mocked? This ambivalence gives criticism a cushioning of humour, which is sorely needed.

Now to the novels themselves. To go back to the original query, what are the contradictions of feminist dictat and lesbian fantasy that these books iron out? How do they help to close the gap between vision and reality? And can they solve the riddle of entering the mainstream in order to fight it?

But first, a small diversion. I need to mention why I chose some novels and not others. Some lesbian detective fiction is social-realist in its style, so it does not provide the necessary distance, because ultimately it is literary style that creates that effect.

I count Rebecca O'Rourke's *Sydney* in this category. Others, by Mary Wings and Claire McNab, do not concern themselves with the lesbian community. Barbara Wilson's *The Dog Collar Murders* proves the point in reverse; that we are now almost ready to move on; that it is no longer necessary to have the protective disguise of the lesbian detective format. Reading that book after other lesbian detective novels is like watching a snake shed a skin. She talks about the issues of pornography and S&M so openly that the detective genre becomes almost redundant.

I've chosen Eve Zaremba's *Beyond Hope* because it illustrates many of the points I want

to make. It reads like a feminist narrative cut up and pasted into a piece of detective fiction. Precisely because of this slightly unsubtle mix, it provides us with an almost see-through fabric through which we can put our magnifying glass on the issues.

### Super-dyke

Helen Keromos is the sleuth and she establishes herself as a toughie through the usual detective fiction clichés; taking the unexpected in her stride, not getting frightened. She establishes her lesbian/human/womanly cred by almost the exact opposite: showing she does have feelings after all. "My kind of tough doesn't mean unfeeling" she says, after getting a little emotional help from her friends.

The process by which HK convinces the lesbians in the novel that she is legit is the same process by which she convinces us, the readers. She wants to interrogate the female terrorist while she's on drugs, but knows she can't:

I was on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, here was the perfect opportunity to get things out of Carol Latimer . . . On the other hand, if I took advantage of her vulnerable condition (and) of the absence of the other women, on their return they would be on me like a ton of bricks. I would lose any credibility I had gained here.

Having established her identity, HK is free to run off and do wild and dangerous things.

Because of her role as mythical lesbian sleuth, HK can have her values and eat them. She is so tough, so brave, and so intelligent that she can out-manoeuvre the out-manoeuvrings of Mossad and the Canadian secret police combined and take on a bunch of terrorists in a James Bond set-piece extravaganza. Plot is unimportant, and credibility only just maintained at the level of internal coherence. Beyond that there is no attempt to bring down to earth some of the more unbelievable exploits of police, terrorists and HK herself. It's as though the fantastical doings of these half-drawn people are mere backdrop to show off HK super-dyke at her best. In her right-on lesbian persona, HK has to be acutely aware of the feelings of others and of interpersonal dynamics. But in her hard-nut persona she can be coldly, ruthlessly violent. This is HK dealing with a Baddy:

What happened next . . . was relatively easy to accomplish. I took a deep breath and smacked down with the butt of my old faithful

Remington at the menacing rifle barrel. Caught unawares, the man dropped his rifle. Not that it mattered. My next swing with the butt hit him square on the left ear. He staggered, fell and lay still . . . In the middle of action like this the probability of death does not penetrate. That comes later. For now there was only the next moment, the pressure to action, the drive to survive.

In *Magic and the Millennium*, Brian Wilson argues that detective heroes function as magical figures.

In daydreams, fantasy and dreams men (sic) accept magical solutions to personal and perhaps social problems. Modern societies institutionalise such fantasies . . . in the synthetic characters of film and television, of which James Bond is the most visible contemporary representative.

HK is merely the lesbian equivalent. Neither society in its condemnation of strong women, nor the women's community in its abhorrence of the macho ethic allow us the freedom to be big and butch. But HK, as a fantasy figure in a book, can have it all. The impossible gap between feminist ethic and lesbian fantasy is bridged by a mythical structure, over which walks the magical super-sleuth heroine.

*Beyond Hope* is also an examination of separatism, communalism, and country living. Sketched in the pages of a book that is otherwise dedicated to high intrigue and low-life violence, the women's commune at "Shady Acres" comes over as realistic and very cosy.

I sat surrounded by pleasant chaos as five women went about their business of feeding cats, clearing up, opening mail, cutting bread, rolling a joint, stirring soup.

HK's first impression might be glowing but she soon spots practical flaws in this particular way of life. On her first visit into the yard, she notices the well-organised outbuildings and junkyard. But, sadly, she also spots

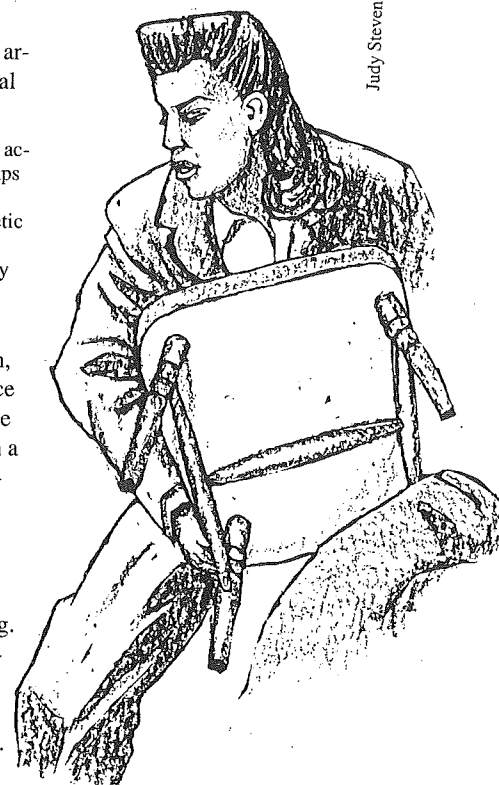
a steel rule, then a can of rusty nails and a hammer. Other good tools. Couple of hundred dollars worth of them, deteriorating, uncared for.

This is nothing to what has still to be said about the ideological state of "Shady Acres", and by implication lesbian separatism. But it's not through intellectual slanging matches that the issues are explored: HK action-woman plus her political opposite Carol Latimer combine to put the spotlight on "Shady Acres".

Carol Latimer is a fugitive terrorist, the arch-criminal woman. Within the genre of lesbian detective fiction such a figure provides the



Judy Stevens



Judy Stevens



same safety as a corpse. Both are out-of-the-ordinary figures whose actions have already suspended the political values of lesbianism and feminism. But the tensions their past or present activity reflect are those of ordinary lesbians in mundane settings. Ultra-dangerous within the plot, the character of Carol Latimer has a literary power to create a wall of safety behind which the reader can hide.

Latimer believes in world revolution and the attendant sacrifices. She is not against cold-blooded murder, if it can be justified in her own ultra-left terms. She despises the women from "Shady Acres", who nevertheless protect her simply because her gender makes her a sister.

HK has strong views on the subject.

Carol the terrorist had manipulated them, conned them. Loyally, they had closed ranks to protect her even against their own better judgement. All in the name of a solidarity she obviously didn't share.

She wants the "Shady Acres" lot to be less naive, but it's not as though she's out to destroy their vision.

It was a hard lesson to learn; and they were learning it reluctantly. I hoped they wouldn't react and turn back on their principles. I needn't have worried.

Superwomen, it appears, aren't averse to taking on the male trait of patronising pedantry.

In a final twist, a buddy of Latimer is also brought to the commune to hide out. Unlike Latimer, this woman has actually done the deed and committed murder. However, HK refuses to reveal this fact to the women from the commune. She checks out that the new fugitive isn't about to tell them either.

"Who knows about you? About the murder? They don't, do they?" I gestured towards the group of women outside. "No. You going to tell them?". "They don't want to know", I stated. "No."

We are not to know whether HK decides against telling because she knows the shared vision of the women from "Shady Acres" will not stand the enormous strain placed on it by this revelation, even though the victim was a man. There again, she might be withholding this info so that by refusing to turn in the woman she shares in their vision of protecting all women.

This ambiguity means that HK in her role as narrator, and we the reader through iden-

tification with HK, can accept the vision in its strengths and its limitations.

If you or I were to turn up at a women's commune and criticise its naivety, we wouldn't get very far.

It would be hard even to write about such matters in a more realistic novel because we would identify with the heroine's dilemma about blowing the whistle on some of the absurdities of the feminist utopia. But good old HK, with the protection of Latimer's antics and her own persona, can blow in, make a few wry comments, hitch up her egg-shaped travel trailer, and blow out again, all fresh and ready to go bash up a few more men.

Throughout the novel, the political aspirations of the commune lesbians are brought down to earth. But once, just once, the vision of a strong, united, organised and omnipotent women's community is allowed to take off. This happens when the "Shady Acres" brigade, headed by no other than HK, has a shoot-out with a bunch of male terrorists and gets the better of them – all with the help of only one man, who is disabled by a wound and plays a minor role.

Even Spacy Artemis, who it turns out was the one who used to leave tools lying outside to rot in the elements, comes into her own and manages to keep a trained weapons expert holed up in the cellar.

But it's interesting that even in this situation of sisterhood in action, there's tension between the communalism of the women's brigade and the individualism and professionalism of HK. Once again, it's her patronising tone that shows some are more equal than others in the sisterhood.

I had two very impatient amateurs on my hands . . . Better all three do something useful, if dangerous, than get killed on some hair-brained scheme. So I came up with my own foolhardy scheme.

HK pays a high price for her role. As readers we may identify with her, fall in love with her, glorify her, but to her co-characters in the narrative she is nothing but trouble: the bearer of bad news and painful realities. Her situation is compared with that of Alice, HK's soulmate who turns up at the end of the book and who easily integrates into commune life.

There was a hard edge of experience which I brought with me which they mistrusted. Alice was different. She, like the other women there, was still becoming.

## Lesbian cops

Katherine Forrest puts her police detective Kate Delafield to slightly different use. *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* is not a criticism of the philosophy of lesbian feminism, but about dealing with the pressures of a pre-existing set of lesbian values. What better way than to use a lesbian cop, who by the very nature of her profession has forfeited all right to be considered right-on? Nevertheless, one of Delafield's first missions is to gain the trust and respect of the lesbian community at the Nightwood Bar, where the murder happened.

Kate is not overconfident when she makes her debut at the bar.

"Which of you", Kate said in the most commanding tone she could muster, "is Magda Schaeffer?" She was braced and ready, expecting the murmuring wave of amusement at the low tones of her voice.

She gets her answer and gets on with it. But her next ploy doesn't work so well.

When Delafield brings another woman into the bar, the tactic is seen through immediately by Patton, the most vocal and political of the women at the bar.

"You think bringing a sister in here makes some kind of difference to us?" she barked. "She's sold out to her own oppressors."

Delafield eventually wins her much-needed authority by actively confronting a group of the Nightwood lesbians who are about to beat up some harassing straight men. In a nervous over-reaction she ends up breaking the nose of one of the men. But her prize is a symbolic badge of approval from Patton: "Even I will concede the woman's got ovaries".

The effort it takes Delafield to win the lesbians' acceptance isn't due to childish surliness on their part but because they are giving up a very real slice of autonomy by letting this woman into their confidence. They are shocked and confused by the murder, but even so it takes them some time to adjust to having the forces of patriarchy, even if it is in the form of a lesbian cop, invade their lives.

You don't have to be a cop to identify with Kate Delafield. Whether it's dealing with her homophobic male cop partner, trying to impress a bunch of dykes whose politics and lifestyle are more radical than one's own, or dealing with harassment on the street – we all know those situations. Likewise with the bar dykes; we don't all have to experience a mur-

der in our midst to appreciate the difficulties in which the women find themselves.

But just as with other lesbian detective novels, the genre provides a protection; it allows us to be more even-handed in our judgement of ourselves when we, like Kate Delafield, have to make compromises when we go out to work in straight jobs. Likewise, we can have more sympathy for the women at the Nightwood bar who have to let go of some of their independence in exchange for protection from the state police.

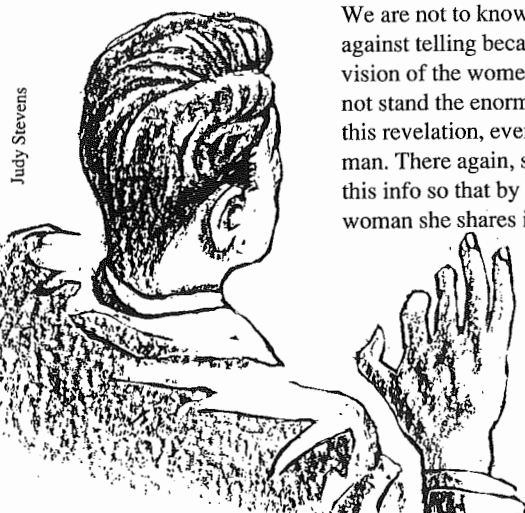
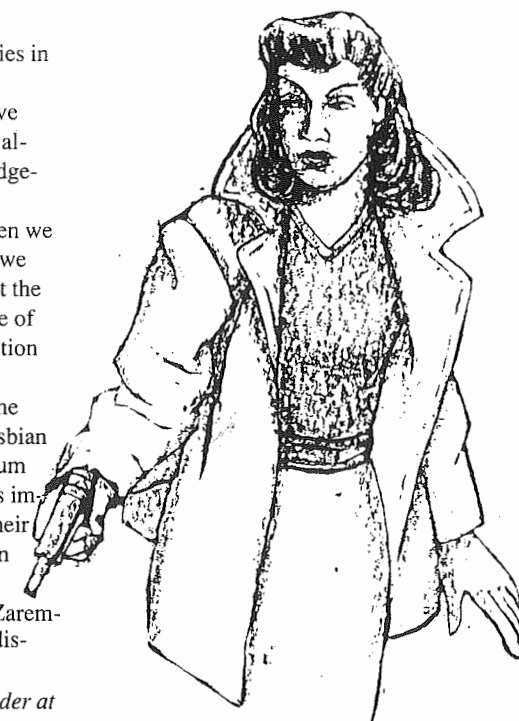
This kind of novel is an allegory of the day-to-day lives we try to lead within a lesbian and feminist vision. Cop Kate is the medium through which we can understand that it is impossible to live those dreams through to their logical conclusion: the sad fact is that even separatists have to make compromises.

It's not all bad news. Unlike in Eve Zaremba's *Beyond Hope* where HK is eternally distanced from the community to which she spiritually belongs, Kate Delafield in *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* actually comes closer to the community, by participating in her first Pride march. And the women, too, become closer as a unit because of the tragedy in their midst.

In both these novels a lot of sweat pours out before the solutions and compromises are found. It is certainly not like that in all lesbian detective novels. In Val McDermid's *Report for Murder*, hack Lindsay Gordon constantly anguishes over being a socialist and working for the tabloids. Asked to do a feature on a posh girls' private school gives her more grist to the guilt mill. But as soon as there's a murder, hey presto, Gordon turns in one easy ideological leap into an avid sleuth and defender of the school's reputation. From cynical socialist to saviour of womankind with one change of hat. The mind boggles.

## Going mainstream

To the extent that characters like HK, Kate Delafield and Lindsay Gordon play the role of superwomen, they act as the lesbian equivalent of the magical figures of the straight male media. But in exposing tensions in the lesbian vision, they act as prophets of a new realism, which is the exact opposite of providing magical solutions. It's this interplay between the real and the magical, the propagating and the destroying of the vision that gives lesbian detective fiction its grip and keeps us reading.



Judy Stevens

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Last, but not least, we should take a look at *The Sophie Horowitz Story*. Sarah Schulman's novel is different from others on the lesbian detective shelf. It is not so much criticising or putting in perspective any particular lesbian way of doing or thinking about things as sending up the lesbian scene in general. Mockery is her line, and she sure stretches it out a long, long way.

Sophie is a terrible detective. It's actually her girlfriend and her neighbour who solve the whole thing. Who is she mocking: the un-together lesbian or the myth of the super-hero detective with brain and brawn in equally vast quantities?

At one point Sophie comes into contact with a group called "Women Against Bad Things". Here at least there can be no doubt who's providing fuel for the laughter machine. And after a particularly heavy incident, Sophie says: "Maybe I needed to take the day off. Play some chess, look at my stamp collection". It's a pastiche of Dashiell Hammett; a lesbian send-up of a macho-man send-up of the little things we little people do in our spare time. But not a lot of lesbians I know collect stamps. So the laughter comes round full circle.

There's a serious intention behind all this light-hearted humour. I interviewed Sarah Schulman once and she told me:

I could take these really plain events between lesbians and put them in a language of detective or hero, and women love it because it's a secret private fantasy right there on the page. It's just taking our place in Americana.

Given the ease with which American culture transports itself east, we can include ourselves in Sarah Schulman's statement. If it is true though, it means a fundamental depoliticisation of lesbian culture. It means exchanging the shared vision of a lesbian counter-culture for

one that is more mainstream.

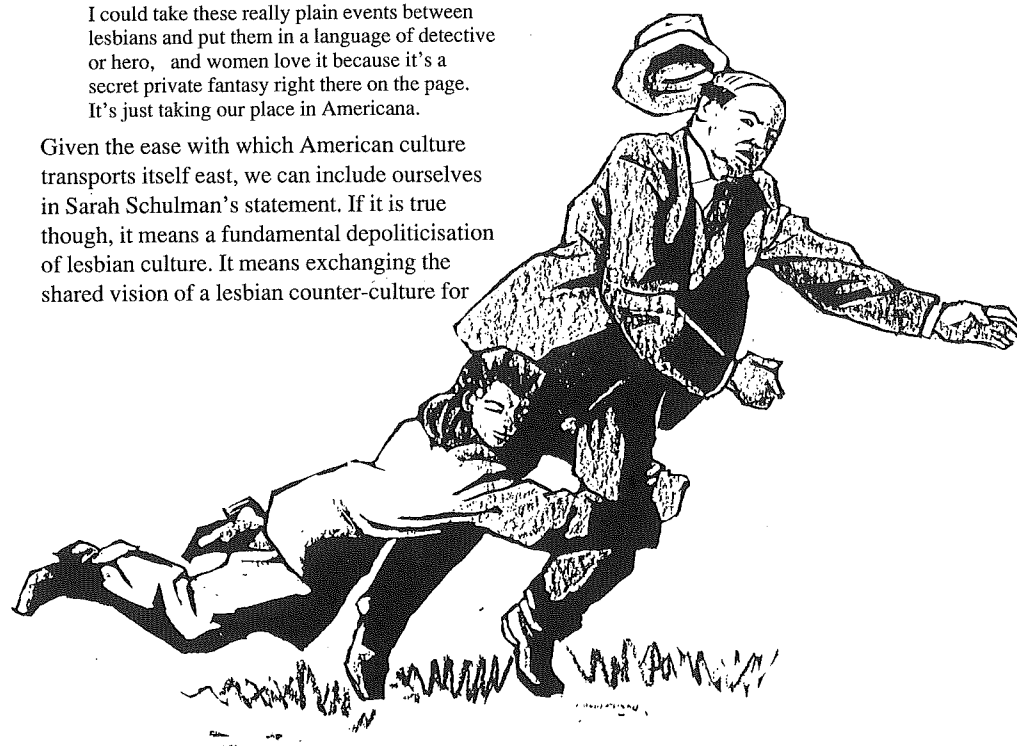
The achievement of the genre, the popularity of lesbian detective fiction lies in its recognition that our idealised heroines and role models were never so vastly different from those of the culture surrounding us. Our fantasy was their fantasy, albeit a lesbian version.

### Taking off the disguises

It is in aiding this shift of vision, so strong yet so imperceptible, that makes lesbian detective fiction part of a historical moment. But way, way back at the beginning of this piece I made a distinction between feminist ethic and lesbian longing (that is, tensions at an individual level) and vision and reality at the community level.

At the individual level, given that society is going to take quite a few more years to accept strong women and open lesbians, there is going to be a long-term need for literature that lets lesbians indulge in amazonian fantasies.

At the collective level, it is a different picture. As we as a movement get more confident, it becomes easier to speak openly about differences of vision, politics and lifestyle. But it's when we become confident enough to take off the disguises and read about plain ordinary dykes with their plain extraordinary problems that we will truly be surpassing the love of the lesbian detective novel. □



# DEMONS, DEVILS AND DENIAL

*Ritual and satanic sexual abuse is terrifying in its effects and defies our rational minds as we try to come to grips with what it means. It demands the best of our feminist courage to take the lead in asserting the right of the children and women escaping it to be heard, believed and supported. Liz Kelly and Sara Scott take up the challenge.*

In the struggles of women and children to speak their pain, name their violation, women's groups and individual feminists have been strong allies and advocates. Disbelief and denial were what we had to contend with in others; it was inconceivable that they might divide us internally. But this is precisely what has occurred, from the 'Cleveland crisis' onwards: the catalogue of horror is too gross for many to bear. We are probably at our most divided currently around the issue of ritual/satanic abuse.

This short reflection is the outcome of our own journey through denial and minimising. We, like many of the feminists we knew and worked with, responded crossly to the media hype around ritual abuse in 1990. Why was so much being made of this issue; wasn't it simply a distraction from the reality of 'ordinary' sexual abuse? There is a critical question which needs to be answered about the ease with which the media and experts in the 'incest industry' (see Louise Armstrong in *T&S 21*) have shifted to the 'new' issue; but this position allows us to avoid thinking too deeply about the reality of what children are saying. Getting stuck in arguments about the relative prevalence of different forms of sexual abuse, and where our priorities should be, very effectively prevents discussion of the deeper questions, confusions and fears that ritual/satanic abuse raises.

### Power and truth

As with all aspects of feminist consciousness once our view of the world shifts, what we

notice and what it means changes in disturbing yet revealing ways. In late 1990 two very different events coincided: the Gulf war and the intervention by social workers in Orkney, where nine children were removed from their families on suspicion that they had experienced ritual/satanic abuse. The ease with which Saddam Hussein was 'demonised' contrasted sharply with the certainty in the news media and



For women interested in exploring these questions a conference *Towards a Feminist Understanding of Organised Abuse* has been organised for December 13th 1991 in London. Details from CASU, Ladbroke House, 62-66 Highbury Grove, London, N5 2AD.

### Commentaries

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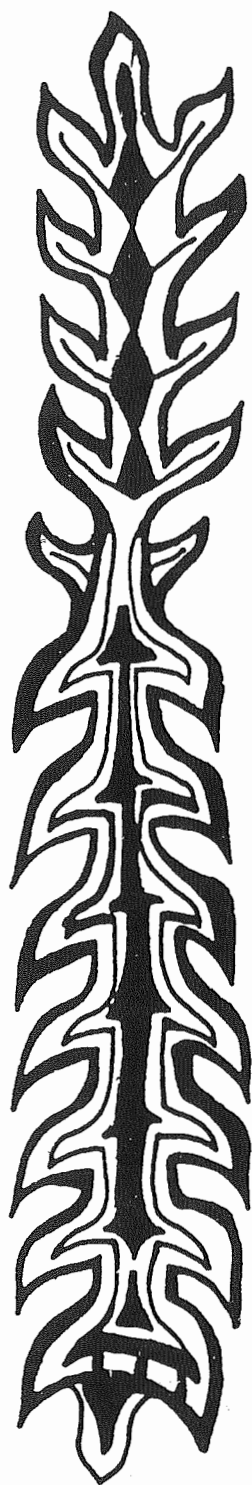
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amongst the majority of the population that the Orkney children had not been subjected to extreme, organised satanic sexual abuse. Some may feel that events in Orkney are parochial, irrelevant in comparison to watching US imperialism in action. But there are connections: the meaning and impact of terrorism; who has the power to define the issue; what counts as 'truth' and 'proof'; who has the power to refuse to allow certain questions to be asked, let alone answered; who has the power to orchestrate perception and opinion.

In both cases what is now emerging about what actually took place looks very different from what we were allowed to know at the time and has surprised even those of us who resisted dominant interpretations from the outset. As we write the Orkney enquiry is still taking place, although reporting in the media has declined sharply. There was no hint in late 1990 that the children who had been removed were telling similar stories to those of three other children in Orkney who had first alerted social work concern, and whose abusive father is serving a jail sentence for sexual abuse. Nor were we told that at least one of the children expressed strong wishes not to return home. What is different about this enquiry, compared to Cleveland for example, is that Social Services and the police are not at odds, and management is supporting its front line workers.

What we are able to know about current reported cases of child abuse is circumscribed by legal restrictions on professionals involved in cases, which appear not to apply to parents and their advocates. Management have also frequently placed further restrictions on workers; social workers involved in the Nottingham case are still prevented from discussing it, even with colleagues beginning a network abuse investigation. This silence is all too often interpreted as arrogant and chosen secrecy. This, combined with social denial, produces an atmosphere in which secrecy becomes the order of the day in ways which tragically parallel those of sex rings themselves.

#### **Knowledge gap**

This self-perpetuating process is broken only by the few incredibly brave adult survivors who refuse the secrecy and speak out, often to hostile and disbelieving audiences. But by participating in maintaining the knowledge gap, well-meaning professionals leave the public space to those whose 'mission' is to convince

us that either there is no such thing as ritual abuse, or who argue that whilst ritual abuse may take place 'satanic ritual abuse' is a fiction.

The lack of alternative voices and interpretations gives these voices a spurious credibility. Amongst this seemingly unco-ordinated grouping are individual psychologists, sociologists, police officers and organised groups such as SAFF (Safeguarding the Right to Freedom of Belief against Cultural Ignorance).

The power of these refutations and disputations stems not just from the absence of strong support for children abused in this way, but also from our desire not to know. Our initial response to stories of torture, mind-control, animal and human sacrifice and cannibalism is similar to that of mothers when told their partner has abused their children: it can't be true; I cannot bear to believe this. To believe is too painful, too awful, too threatening to our constructions of safety and security. Not only are the forms of abuse horrific, but they demand we think about, and perhaps even within, Judeo-Christian belief systems. The central polarities of good and evil, light and dark, have not been a major focus outside feminist theology, although tracking the history of the symbolic meaning of 'white' and 'black' has informed our understanding of racism. Yet making sense of what children are saying requires that we know much more than many of us are comfortable with about the so called 'Black Arts', makes necessary a different way of exploring the connections between 'religious' belief and power. For many of us feminism offered a refuge and alternative from such belief systems and forms of control – and we may understandably resist having to shift back into their internal logic.

#### **Stretching credulity**

The first shift away from denial is usually to a position where we accept that children believe that these things happened, but that they didn't really. Given that organised abusers tend to use drugs and other ways of altering perception, this argument has a surface validity. But children and adults continue to insist that what they are telling us is real.

Our credulity is further stretched because those involved are often socially powerful men; women are in powerful positions within satanist groups; it seems impossible successfully to prosecute such group members. Con-

spiracy theories seem a throw back to an earlier era, no longer acceptable, let alone credible in sophisticated 90s feminism. But perhaps we are dealing with big power: how many of the biographies of rich and powerful men, for example, contain references to an interest in the 'occult'? Isn't it possible that it offers a route to more power over, either through control of believers (as in many 'religious' cults) and/or through a belief that other forms of power exist if only one can find the point of access. This is a recurring theme in human cultures, and its connection to the occult a rich source of plot in popular film, music and novels, not to mention in 'alternative' culture through astrology, tarot cards etc. We need to begin asking different questions about the meanings of such things, and noticing how what women and children are saying about their experiences of ritual/satanic abuse echoes everyday aspects of western capitalist patriarchies.

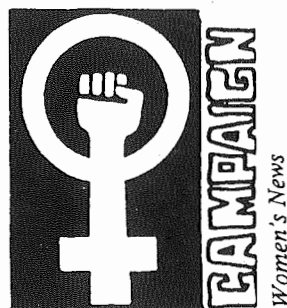
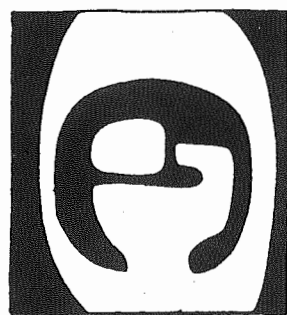
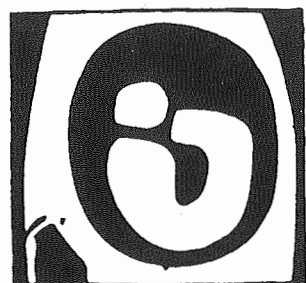
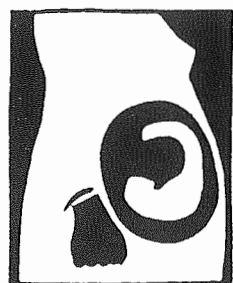
Our resistance also stems from having to hear and know and face what has been endured and what that means for us. Some of the stories are nothing less than the distillation of the most extreme and sophisticated uses of power over and violence against children and women. We find that anyone can have survived this level of terrorisation and degradation almost unbelievable. Here we need to make connections with other survivors of inhumanity – of concentration camps, of systematic torture by despotic regimes, and what we have discovered about the sex industry – whilst remembering that we are talking about children. In each case sophisticated understandings of power are used to win apparent compliance and to reduce organised resistance. The distinction between victim and abuser is blurred; the forced participation in sexual abuse and rituals parallels the protection offered to prison camp internees in return for informing on others and/or participating in the camp/prison administration system and/or prostitution. In each case horrific forms of torture and abuse have been used, and justified by reference to higher ideals/powers or the worthlessness of the person. We have faced what seemed like the 'ultimate horror' before and developed feminist understandings which connected these so-called 'extremes' with the mundane, everyday aspects of women and children's oppression, without losing our anger and willingness to act.

Extreme experiences require and produce desperate survival strategies – ranging from identification with one's oppressor to intense forms of cutting off and disassociation. Children and adults who have survived ritual abuse seem to develop an exaggerated form of the disassociation we know is a common reaction to sexual assault: they split off parts of themselves, aspects of their experience. These fragments of self frequently develop in separation, producing what is called 'multiple personalities' – different 'selves' which may or may not be aware of the others, may or may not know the same things. One interesting discovery we have made recently is that this was recognised in the nineteenth century, named and attributed to severe trauma in childhood. The knowledge disappears with both the emergence of the diagnosis of schizophrenia and the Freudian definition of sexual abuse as fantasy. Multiple personality comes back into psychological discourse once sexual abuse is again recognised as reality – opening up yet another frightening spectre of decades of 'misdiagnosis'.

But how do we move beyond denial and disbelief? On a practical level, feminists – especially those providing support to women and children who have been abused – must urgently discuss what support is needed and whether we can offer/begin to build it. But we also need a feminist framework in which to make sense of what we now know. There are a number of questions to which we need feminist answers:

- What are we afraid of and how do we cope with that fear?
- What does safety mean when the apparent power of the ring and the internal pressure to return is so great. How can we provide the required degree of safety?
- How do we support women when we are dealing with experiences we don't fully understand, and where multiple personality is a strong probability? What would a feminist understanding of multiple personality look like?
- How do we make sense of women's involvement as abusers and persecutors? How do we work with young and adult women where they are both victim and abuser?
- How do we deal with the seeming impossibility of successfully prosecuting adult members of such groups? □





# A feminist population policy?

*The world cannot sustain an unlimited number of people; women's bodies cannot sustain unlimited pregnancies. Feminists should be entering the debate about population control with an agenda which puts women's health and freedom of choice first, argues Marge Berer. Here she outlines what a feminist population policy might be.*

In the past, the dominant feminist response to population planning was "Population Control – No; Women Decide". The international women's health movement has consistently drawn attention to the abuses of women's rights that have gone hand-in-hand with many existing population policies and have formed the main opposition to those policies. Liberal governments took a stand for development and against population policies in 1974 at the international population conference in Bucharest. Most of those governments now have different politics and today's economic and political realities have led almost all these governments to implement or accept the need for population policies in their countries.

Mass opposition movements on this issue have been practically non-existent, with the exception of the resistance to Indira Gandhi's sterilisation programme in India in the late 1970s. However, there has been a great deal of individual resistance to population policies – both pro-natalist and anti-natalist – which people do not see as being in their own interests. One example is the widespread resistance to the one-child policy in China, from a people who widely accepted a sharp and rapid decrease in the average number of children

from six to two or three. Another example is the failure of governments like Nicolae Ceausescu's in Romania to increase their country's population growth rate by making contraception unavailable and abortion illegal. Some developed countries, like France and West Germany, have tried to increase their birth rates more humanely by offering positive incentives and social benefits to women to have more children. But wherever these have been tried, they have also failed.

Until recently, because women's own needs and interests have not been taken into account – neither in official justifications for the population policies, nor in the formation of such policies, nor in their implementation – the women's health movement could not afford to step back and ask whether there is a population problem at the global level. This was complicated by the contradiction that pro-natalist and anti-natalist policies exist side-by-side between countries and even within countries, where they are promoted by conflicting forces.

In my opinion, the continuing failure to address this question will serve to isolate the women's health movement internationally and prevent us from making necessary interventions in this area on behalf of women's needs

and interests. I would therefore like to indicate issues I think feminists should be taking up regarding population policy at all levels.

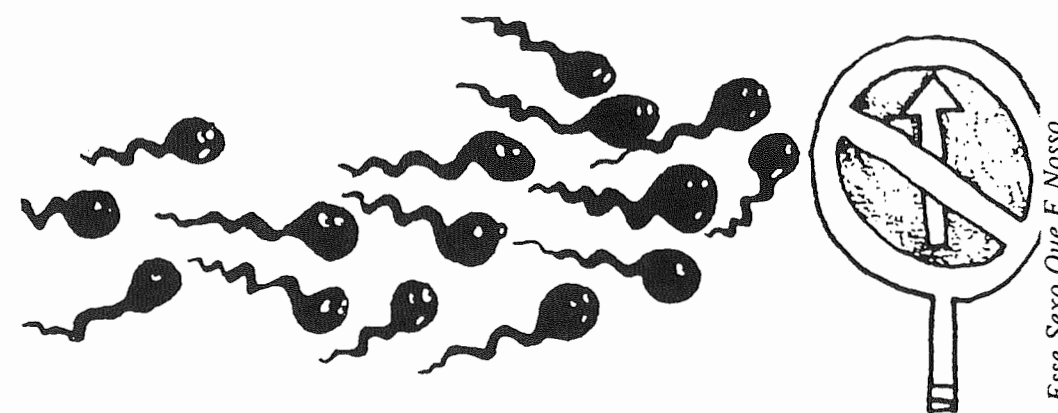
I believe we must acknowledge that the world cannot sustain an unlimited number of people, just as women's bodies cannot sustain unlimited pregnancies. We find ourselves at a historical moment when births and deaths are out of balance, an indication that our development is out of balance. Our task is to find ways of setting this right, at a macro level, on the basis of reproductive rights for women, without contradiction.

## Zero growth

Most developed countries currently have a zero population growth rate. Many are facing imbalances in the age structure, with too few children compared to older people, which creates complex economic and social problems. I believe feminists must actively oppose any

tion, citing environmental and development justifications. And this is only the beginning.

Most developing countries are, or are becoming, anti-natalist in practice. No matter whether such policies are justified on grounds of economic development, international debt, protection for the environment or other high-sounding reasons, those who espouse them return to the same point: the number of children women have is one of the main keys to the policy's success or failure. This is true. Hence, I would argue that women have a right to decide if population policies are acceptable or not, according to whether or not they meet women's needs and promote women's interests. From a feminist viewpoint, there is no justification possible for a population programme that is discriminatory or violates women's dignity or rights. Feminists continue to have a central role to play in opposing such policies.



moves to solve this problem through pressure on women to have more children. Canada is one of the countries that has had at least some intelligent debate on this question, in which it has been acknowledged that women are not interested in having more children than they have. Finland is one of the few countries that does not have this demographic problem. Its development and population policy is worth examining for lessons for other developed countries.

Because the concept of population policy as such has become legitimised, despite feminists' efforts to prevent this, it will increasingly become an issue in developed countries. The Green Party in Britain, for example, has called for a 20% reduction in the British popula-

At the same time, we have a responsibility to define what a good population policy is. Women's needs differ from nation to nation; these differences must be taken into account.

## Fertility control

The first factor to consider is the tremendous level of unwanted pregnancies and the corresponding desire by women to control their fertility. This is shown in the high rates of abortion, in the high rates of sterilisation to prevent further pregnancies, in the high rates of use of whatever method of contraception is available wherever women have this option. It is also shown, more negatively, in infanticide, in the enormous numbers of abandoned children in the streets of many cities and in the number of children being put up for adoption.



Second, few women in the world have ever been free to decide not to have children at all, let alone admit to themselves that this may be their preference. It would make a tremendous difference if women actually had that choice and were not made to feel incomplete without children.

On the other hand, there is a large minority of women who are unable to have the children they want because of infertility. Other women would like to have children but are prevented from doing so because of the threat of social punishment or lack of social support. This includes single women and lesbians. It also includes women who are too poor to have a choice at all. All these needs exist side by side and must be taken into account.

Finally, when women are pregnant their lives and health are at risk, whether their pregnancies are wanted or unwanted, if they are not in good health and lack access to adequate services for pregnancy, childbirth and abortion. This is evidenced by the high rate of maternal morbidity internationally.

Based on these points, I believe there is a strong argument for a feminist 'population policy'. It must be recognised from the start, however, that as long as women live in poverty, with unequal and inadequate access to food,



housing, education, a source of income and good health care, no population policy will be of any benefit to their needs and must be rejected. Such on-the-cheap programmes are the source of most of the abuses criticised by the women's health movement. Moreover, such policies do not work.

It is unacceptable to tell women who have few alternatives, for whom children are the only source of their value as people, for whom infant mortality is a daily reality, that having fewer children will make their lives better.

### Creating alternatives

An acceptable population policy must make care for the children, the sick and the elderly a social responsibility, not only a women's responsibility.

It must raise the age of marriage until alternatives of education and work are available to the young women who otherwise have nothing to do except marry and start a family.

It must provide universal sex education and the whole range of birth control methods including safe abortion; access to infertility treatment, and care during pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period. These should be an integral part of education and health care services and should be a priority for these services. We have many models for such services, particularly those run by women for women, in many countries. We need to campaign for these to become the rule and not the exception.

The lack of responsibility taken by men for starting pregnancies which are unwanted by women and the power of men or families to decide how many children a woman has and to prevent the use of birth control is also unacceptable and should be a major issue in all sex education and family planning programmes.

However we as a movement still have some serious thinking to do. We need a serious re-thinking of our priorities internationally about birth control methods, taking into account the fact that women increasingly do not wish to be pregnant more than a few times in the 25 to 30 years they are fertile; taking into account the need to delay a first pregnancy until a woman is ready for it; the need for birth spacing, and the need to stop getting pregnant after the last wanted child; taking into account that we want access to the safest possible methods, but that we have an inadequate defini-

tion of what is safe from most women's point of view. We need to understand why women are using birth control in ways many feminists do not support – for example, choosing long-acting methods like implants and sterilisation. Otherwise, we will also contribute to the oppression of women.

We need to reconsider at all levels what we mean by safe and effective methods, not as idealists demanding perfection from a technology that will never provide it, but on the basis of what is possible. We need to expose the real reasons why contraceptives are still not an option for so many people in every continent, despite high levels of unwanted pregnancy.

Then there is the need to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases – an issue we have barely begun to address. This is an issue which should be affecting our entire discussion of contraceptive benefit and risk, yet it is hardly mentioned. How many more deaths from AIDS are needed before we start? Above all, we need to discuss sexuality in this context. As a friend keeps reminding me, this is not just an issue of condoms, condoms and more condoms.

### Subjects, not objects

We must stress that no population policy is acceptable if it treats women (or men) as a target or object of its policies and services rather than the subject of them. For example, no person should be seen as the 'acceptor' of a contraceptive, to cite terminology widespread in population and family planning policy sectors.

No incentive or any other form of coercion should be necessary to convince women of what is in their own interests. Rather than argue over whether some forms of incentives are ethical and others not – a growing debate which serves to legitimise the concept of incentives in itself – we should be examining with people themselves, in a way they can understand, why they say they have more children than they want and still do not use birth control. Incentives are an unacceptable way of bypassing what Paulo Freire called "conscientisation"; that is, working with people to improve the conditions of their lives through self-education and self-awareness.

Lastly, we must stress that we have no reason to believe that any government that oppresses part or all of its population and violates the rights of its people will be the source of a

beneficial population policy. The politics of those who will implement population policies must never be absent from this discussion, because this is a political issue. Where dictatorship, right-wing and repressive policies exist, where corruption is the rule, where the people's welfare is not high on the list of priorities of those in power, there is no chance that any population policy will benefit women's needs or improve their lives. We must fight to ensure that the politics behind the policies are exposed.

We must expose and condemn the practice of donor governments and international aid agencies and foundations willing to pour money into the hands of such governments for population programmes; they are responsible for supporting existing abuse of women and women's rights.

Donor governments and agencies must be more vigilant in monitoring for abuses. Where these exist, surface pretences of change should not be accepted and funding should not be offered or continued. Human rights violations in the name of population policies remain human rights violations. Such funding ought to be used instead to set up non-governmental programmes to protect women's rights and provide women with the quality of services they deserve.

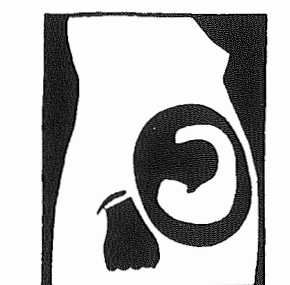
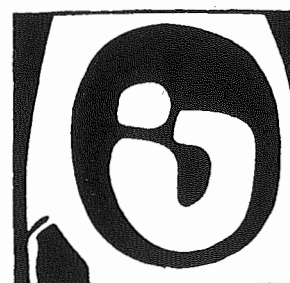
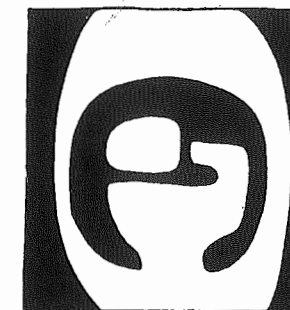
Lastly, we should examine the policies of our countries and of international organisations and agencies. This is not only to criticise and reject their policies but to influence and change them, in order to turn the growing lipservice paid to reproductive rights into programmes to benefit women. We need feminist demographers to work with us in this task.

Acknowledging that population growth on a global level is a problem does not mean we believe that women breed mindlessly. It does not mean we have to throw away a reproductive rights perspective based on women's right to decide as individuals. It means that if women are to be asked to take responsibility for the world by having fewer children, then we in turn have the right to demand that society makes our lives and health a priority, so that we are in a position to do so.

I believe that reproductive rights thinking should and can become the basis of population policy, and not just an outsiders' opposing point of view. I firmly believe that if women did have a real choice, there would be no population problem. □

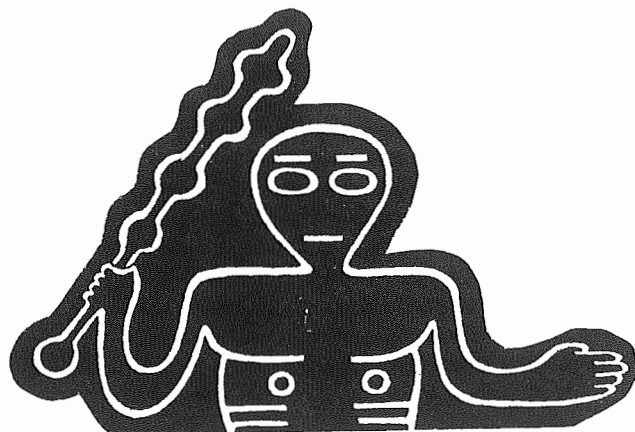


Women's News



First published in 'Women's Health Journal' April/June 1990, from a speech to the 4th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women; New York, June 1990.

# Men of Tin



*Masculinism has taken off in the US where the publication of Robert Bly's 'Iron John' has given this new men's movement a philosophy and a bible. Sigrid Rausing examines the phallacies behind Bly's theories of myth, manhood and heroic masculinity.*

The death of the Sacred King, and the disappearance of the Group King means that the father shortage becomes still more acute. When a father now sits down at the table, he seems weak and insignificant, and we all sense that fathers no longer fill as large a space in the room as nineteenth-century fathers did. Some welcome this, but without understanding all its implications. These events have worked to hedge the father around with his own paltriness. D. H. Lawrence said: 'Men have been depressed now for many years in their male and resplendent selves, depressed into dejection and almost abjection. Is that not evil?' (Robert Bly p. 98)

If you are a man and you agree with Robert Bly that men have become weak, insignificant, paltry, depressed into dejection and (almost) abjection, you are probably a masculinist. This newish phenomenon is the latest manifestation of American identity politics, fused with a New Age veneration of mythology and (it has to be said) a lack of interest in social and historical realities. After two decades of the most recent feminist wave, men are writing books about their oppression; not about having to repress their more tender feelings, but about how men are forced to repress their 'natural' masculinity; about emasculation. They use the language of essentialist feminism to express this oppression; they like talking about the mystical differences between men and women. They don't, of course, have to rely on nebulous matriarchies in the distant past: the not-so-distant past, as they like to point out, was a state of glorious and healthy patriarchy.

A year ago in the US the poet Robert Bly published *Iron John: a book about men*. This book has since become one of the fundamental

texts of the masculinist movement. It is immensely popular – it has been around the top of the New York Times best-selling list for over 40 weeks now. Bly derived his authority on the subject from his workshops for men, where a lot of drumming, brandishing of swords and mock-fighting goes on to promote male affirmation, and where the existential pain of American men became apparent to him. *Iron John* was published in Britain by Element Books on 16 September.

Bly's argument with industrial societies in general, and with New Age circles in particular, is that men have become emasculated: no longer 'real men'. He uses one of the fairy-tales collected by the Grimm brothers, "Iron John", to indicate stage by stage precisely what is wrong with American men and, by extension, American mothers who have let them grow up that way. The hero of the story is a little prince who helps Iron John, a kind of hairy, monstrous giant to escape from the castle where he is imprisoned. He goes with him into the forest, where various significant events happen; leaves and becomes a kitchen boy in the castle of another king; rescues the land from the enemy with the help of Iron John, and is given the king's daughter in marriage as a reward. Iron John is thereby freed from his enchantment and returns to his former identity as a king. Bly analyses these stages in some detail from a Jungian-poetic-mythical point of view.

American men, according to Bly, are in a bad way. Industrialisation tore the father away from the home, leaving the son to the mercies of the mother who is then free to 'indoctrinate'

the boy to believe that the father, and by extension masculinity, is bad. Without the father's protection, this can lead to a form of 'psychic incest' between mother and son: "Much sexual energy", Bly reveals, "can be exchanged when the mother looks the son directly in the eyes and says, 'here is your new T-shirt, all washed'." (p. 185)

## Strangled manhood

Industrialisation and popular culture have destroyed the "heart connections" men had with each other, as well as undermined the respect they deserve from the rest of the community. "Zeus energy", "male authority accepted for the sake of the community" is (regrettably) in decline. This, according to Bly, is not exactly "what people want".

Bly blames the Hollywood industry:

Many young Hollywood writers, rather than confront their fathers in Kansas, take revenge on the remote father by making all adult men look like fools. They attack the respect for masculine integrity that every father, underneath, wants to pass on to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. (p. 23)

"Eventually", however, "a man needs to throw off all indoctrination and begin to discover for himself what the father is and what masculinity is." It takes a long time to come to that stage:

Somewhere around 40 or 45 a movement towards the father takes place naturally – a desire to see him more clearly and to draw closer to him. This happens unexplainably, almost as if on a biological timescale. (p. 25)

Jung and D. H. Lawrence provide much of the intellectual basis of the book and the theory of men's loss of manliness. Bly describes Lawrence's analysis of what happened to men's values after the introduction of compulsory education where, significantly, "the teachers are mostly women":

The children of his generation deduced that their fathers had been doing something wrong all along, that men's physical work is wrong and that those sensitive mothers who prefer white curtains and an elevated life are right and always have been. (p. 20)

The industrial revolution, then, destroyed the patriarchal mode of being and produced soft men, "sanitised, hairless and shallow"; men who were not only indoctrinated by women but who also in some senses became like women. These men, apparently, are becoming increasingly passive and naive, endanger-

ing their masculinity (with its inherent qualities of activity and wisdom):

The naive man feels a pride in being attacked by women. If this wife or girlfriend, furious, shouts that he is 'chauvinist', a 'sexist', a 'man', he doesn't fight back, but just takes it. He opens his shirt so that she can see more clearly where to put the lances. (p. 63)

He can't fight back because he lacks "natural brutality". Instead of fighting he sulks:

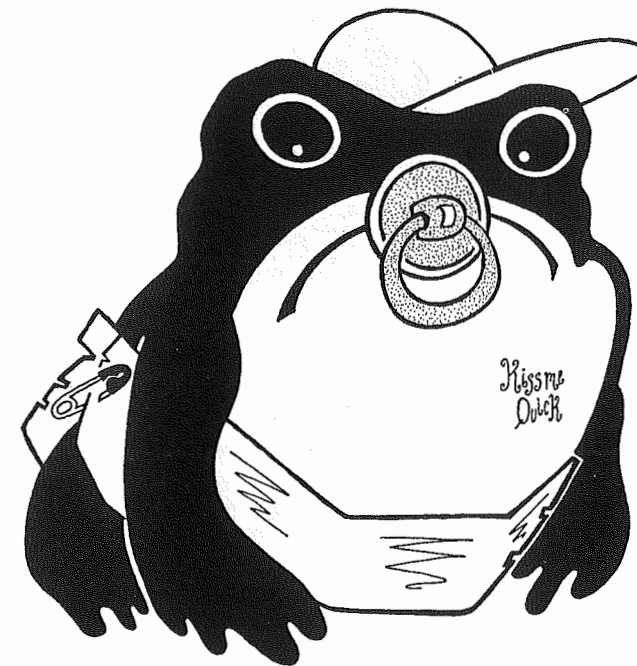
How often every adult man has felt himself, when baffled by a woman's peculiar interpretation of his behaviour – so different from his own – go into a sulk. (p. 61)

The "active man", then, has been strangled by industrial society:

During the last 30 years men have been asked to follow rather than lead, how to live in a non-hierarchical way, how to be vulnerable, how to adopt consensus decision-making. (p. 61)

Bly is no admirer of consensus. He tells of a young man at one of his audiences who was disturbed by the important point in the myth of Iron John that a key had to be stolen from under the mother's pillow:

"Robert, I am disturbed by this idea of stealing the key. Stealing isn't right. Couldn't a group of us just go to the mother and say, 'Mom, could I have the key back?'. His model was probably consensus, the way the staff at the health food store settles things. I felt the souls of all the women in the room rise up in the air to kill him. Men like that are as dangerous to women as they are to men. (p. 12)





### Myth and instinct

Myths, Bly theorises, are vehicles for instinctual knowledge stored outside the instinctual system. Human beings, sensing (instinctively?) that they needed flexibility in their instincts, invented myths to remind them how to mate and build nests and so on. Expressing "nature" rather than "culture", myths are, so to speak, transcendently true: a truth to which "primitive" people have a live and organic connection. "Modern people", on the other hand, are alienated from these myths, and the initiations which punctuate the process of becoming a real man, or a real woman. "Primitive" men, in Bly's view, still live in a kind of innocent harmony:

To judge by men's lives in New Guinea, Kenya, North Africa, the pygmy territories, Zulu lands, and the Arab and Persian culture favoured by the Sufi communities, men have lived together in heart unions and soul connections for hundreds of thousands of years. (p. 32)

Myths can still help modern people, however. For example, when a man gets to the point when his biological timetable tells him he needs to throw off his mother's indoctrination about masculinity, the reading of myths will encourage his budding sense of manhood:



Cath Jackson

For that task, ancient stories are a good help, because they are free of modern psychological prejudices, because they have endured the scrutiny of generations of women and men, and because they give both the light and dark sides of manhood, the admirable and the dangerous. (p. 25)

The mythical/mystical movement to which Bly's theories belong has had a certain amount of bad press by association with Nazi ideology, but it's now being resurrected in the New Age movement. This is also where Bly is coming from. With the help of Jung and Frazer he elevates myths to the level of holy texts, expressing meanings which transcend individual cultures. They are external to history, belonging to the realm of the collective unconscious or, in Bly's vocabulary, the instinctual. This movement is, of course, inevitably reductionist, but also, and perhaps more importantly, it excludes the possibility of making a critical analysis of the texts. The archaic power structures in the myths are seen as part of a natural and given pattern from which we have deviated. Any criticisms in terms of power are easily dismissed as neurotic anxiety: an inability to come to terms with yourself as a "real woman", or a "real man".

This bizarre advocacy of myths as guides to life opens up the question of what myths actually are. In my view, they are simply stories which have gained a certain amount of charisma by having been around for a long time. The reasons for their longevity are complex and connected with the development of the 19th century antiquarian movement, in which Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm were the most important figures. To simplify somewhat: the urban bourgeoisie developed a sense of apartness from the rural peasantry, which could then, to a degree, be objectified by being investigated in various ways. The collection of myths by the Grimm brothers was very much part of that process, as was the development of ethnography and the establishment of ethnographic museums towards the end of the 19th century. The origins of the myths became controversial, but it is by no means clear that they actually are particularly ancient. The psycho-analytical approach, invented by Freud, regards fairy-tales and myths as racial dreams externalising unfulfilled wishes and unconscious guilt and desires. Jung took this a step further, with the theory of cultural transcendent archetypes which constitute our psychological-biological make-up. This, more or less, is the

approach that Bly follows, with the added veneer of "masculinism" – feminism turned upside down.

### Oppressed men

Masculinists, like the feminists before them, are trying to find a voice to express their feelings of oppression. Less intellectual, with a conscious adherence to rough-and-ready manspeak, they tend to blame their women, as Mark Lawson reported guru Bly stating recently:

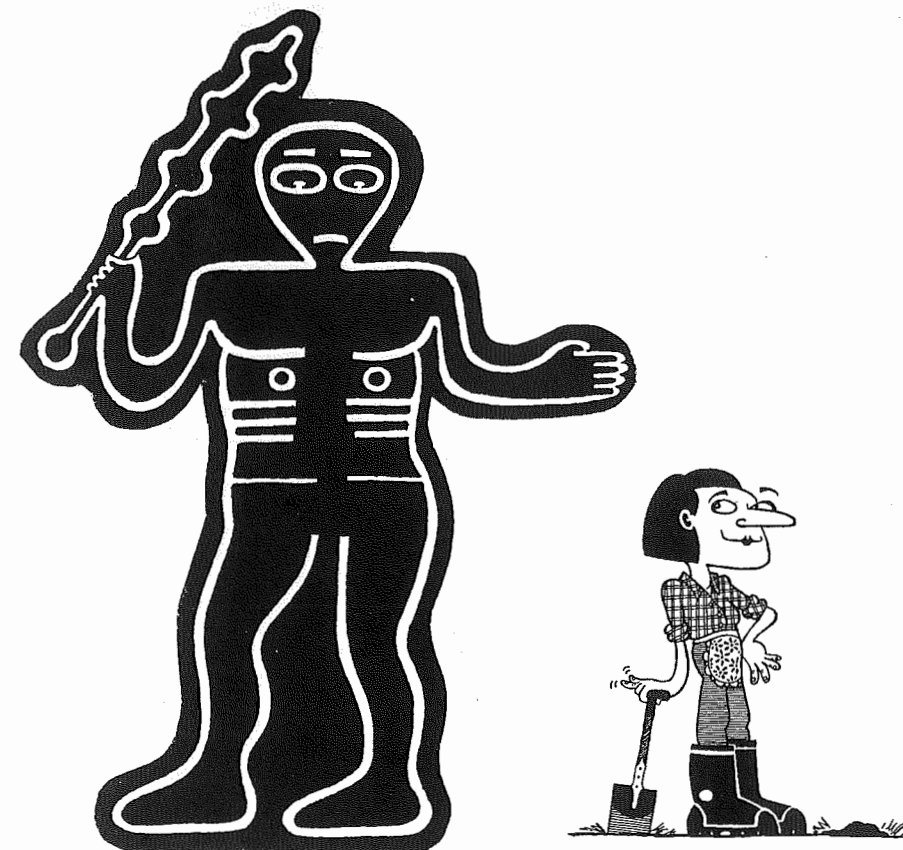
'They don't want it to end', says the guru (talking about his workshop. 'They are saying, "Hell, this kind of happiness between men is wonderful, and I'm going home again and my wife's gonna get on my ass . . . my mom's gonna get on my ass . . ."' (The Independent Magazine, August 1991, p. 24)

There is, however, a difference between *feeling* oppressed and *being* oppressed. Arguably, within the parameters of the ideology of western individualism, we must all be oppressed to a degree. The development of psychology in conjunction with individualism has led to a situation where, theoretically, there are no limits to oppression, if that oppression is defined as the obstruction to individual self-fulfilment. In the discourse on power and oppression, therefore, it is important to refer to objective measurements, and to distinguish between *feeling* oppressed and *being* oppressed. Bly confuses oppression with loss of power: men, in his view are oppressed by the system of industrialism because that system has dismantled the patriarchal modes of being, and the expressions of a "natural" male domination.

Beyond the book's unintentional humour; beyond the rather distasteful veneration of a Germanic myth where the hero is recognised as a prince by the golden colour of his hair; beyond the disturbing fantasies of pastoral harmony where the genders were (appropriately) distinct, where does *Iron John* take us? Bly has become a kind of high priest of the myth-oriented men's movement, and it's a movement which is spreading fast. In the US the television personality Bill Moyers has done much to popularise the movement, initially with his six-hour long interview with Joseph Campbell, 'The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers', and later with interviews with Bly, 'A Gathering of Men', and Sam Keen, author of *Fire in the Belly: on Being a Man*. These shows are some of the most popular ones Bill Moyers has ever done: according to the *New Republic* newspaper, viewership of the interview with Joseph Campbell topped 30 million.

The men's movement, however, also has a more sinister edge. The US National Coalition of Free Men publish a journal called *Transitions*; four months after the Canadian student Marc Lepine shot 14 women students dead, screaming, "You're all a bunch of feminists! I hate feminists!", they published an article stating that Lepine had been misunderstood and that "in their relentless pursuit of 'emancipation', perhaps many women *did* make life more difficult for him". About 40,000 American men are believed to be active in organisations such as this, which purport to defend "men's rights".

As a movement it is post-New Age, coming from a philosophy of extreme relativism where external realities, and particularly external political realities, are seen as unimportant compared to one's "Inner Journey". The "inner life" is also the arena on which the oppression of men is supposedly played out. Bly's notion of "psychic incest" is matched by Sam Keen in the second chapter of *Fire in the Belly*, "It's a WOMAN's world". Subheadings are: "Man's Unconscious Bondage to WOMAN/ WOMAN as GODDESS and Creatrix/ Woman as Mother and Matrix/ WOMAN as Erotic- Spiritual Power/ Saying Good-bye to WOMAN".



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## Conquering man

Feminists write about oppression particular to women. Masculinists, on the other hand, tend to follow the time-honoured male tradition of confusing men and Man, and writing about human difficulties in western societies as if they were specific to men. Likewise, in an easy flip of essentialist feminist claims of the absolute dominance of men and rationalist male values in the west, the masculinists proudly claim that history is, literally, man-made. Sam Keen, in Chapter 8 of his book, 'A Brief History of Manhood', goes through the various stages of men: Man as Hunter, Man as Planter, Man as Warrior, Homo Sapiens, Dionysian Man, Prophetic Man, Man as image of God, Man as Power, Scientific-Technological Man, the Self-made Man, Psychological Man and Post-Modern Man. In the 'History of Mankind', women feature merely as part of the nature that men triumphantly conquered:

without the historical introduction of the notion of a transcendent God who ordered his subjects to name the animals and to have dominion over the earth, neither individualism nor empirical science and technology would have developed. Life in the garden of the goddess was harmonious but the spirit of history called for man to stand up and take charge. Now, centuries later, after we have been inundated by the tragedy of warfare and sickened by the side effects of irresponsible science and runaway technology, it is easy to forget the triumph of that moment when men rebelled against their fate, threw off their passivity, and declared: Thank you, Mother, but I can do it myself. (p. 96)

Yes, indeed.

The feminist version of the same story, which laments rather than celebrates that moment of triumph, is rather contemptuously dismissed:

The mythology of ideological feminism (sic) goes something like this: Once upon a gentle time we all dwelt harmoniously within the garden of the goddess. In those days life was organised around feminine values – co-operation, sensitivity, nurturance, sharing. Power flowed along matriarchal lines, and reverence for all things living was celebrated in worship of the goddess whose body was Mother Earth. And there was peace and goodwill and partnership among people. Then, beginning some time between 4000 and 2000 BC, from the North came the barbarian hordes of horsemen armed with swords sweeping into the peaceful agrarian, matrifocal cultures of India, Old Europe, Asia. They brought with them fierce and vengeful male gods – Zeus, Yahweh and Allah (sic) – a warrior ethic, the habit of holy war, and a masculine mind that was henceforth to divide and

conquer everything in its path – empires, women and the atom. And the most disastrous of masculine inventions was technology itself, which gradually allowed men to conquer and destroy nature herself. In short, recorded history has been one long tale of decline, until the rebirth of feminism, which remains our only hope for salvation. (pp. 198-199)

"This type of demonic theory of history", he sums up, "renders men responsible for all of the ills of society, and women innocent."

Masculinism, then, is very much the flip-side of essentialist feminism. They like to point to the "mysterious" differences between the genders, and the "natural" leadership of men. Despite the fact that men apparently singlehandedly created western civilisation, women mustn't blame them for the less attractive attributes of that civilisation, such as pollution. This is an "existential and moral fallacy", fuelled by "simplistic sexist moralism", says Keen.

There is an element of fundamentalism in all this; a supreme disregard of facts, social and historical, leading to a grossly simplistic explanation of the world and what went wrong with it. For the masculinists it's the psychological rather than the personal which is political; the logic that, ultimately, we are all victims. The pop-psychological-spiritual view sees humankind as an endless queue of individuals, painfully working through perhaps ostensibly quite trivial wounds on the path to feel-good perfection.

It is within this logic that men are regarded as oppressed: the logic of the oppression of self-repression. It is an irony of history that this repression is expressed in the vocabulary of essentialist feminism. These two movements could now fuse, in fact are now fusing, in a blissful New Age union, where the men happily learn again to be Men, strong and wise, and the women to be Women, loving and nurturing. I'm sure the men, at least, will love it. □



## CRYSTAL BALLS

*Let go your anger; put your politics behind you; focus on the positive and join the New Age. Political protest is out; we are victims of our own negativity. Daphne Francis detonates the doublespeak of the New Age movement.*

For many years now I have been an observer of the New Age scene, having been a naive and miserable member of the Findhorn community – a commune in Scotland – in the early 80s. My experience has prompted me to write this article focusing on New Age jargon and how it is cleverly used to depoliticise.

Many purported spiritual groups hold that the last twenty years of this century mark the culmination of a time of critical change in human consciousness. Some schools of thought hold that this will be heralded by some massive upheaval, either natural or politically induced disaster on a global scale. These changes are to clear the way for a transformation of consciousness and way of life among the survivors. Equally vociferous, however, are those New Agers who believe that the necessary changes can be effected non-traumatically, if only humanity can attune itself to new, powerful vibrations and thought-forms of love, co-operation and harmony. Both schools of belief look to astrology for support: one astrological age, the Age of Pisces, is in the process of ending and we are moving towards the start of another, the Age of Aquarius.

People involved in New Age philosophies may embrace all sorts of lifestyles, from Jungian-based paganism to ecologically-sound yuppie entrepreneurship. All, however, tend to be united by a common ideology whose language can best be described as Doublespeak. Alleged to be the tongue of the more advanced souls of today, this lingo has pretty reactionary implications, rarely stated explicitly. This is an attempt to bring the hidden meaning of Doublespeak out into the open.

## Delivery

Firstly on style of delivery: Doublespeak is pronounced in a soft but firmly confident, usually middle-class, voice, sometimes honeyed with vague nuances of American influence. It is usually spoken by materially privileged people but is at its most difficult to deal with when it is spoken with utter conviction by women unfortunate enough to have been brainwashed into thinking that patriarchy is the creation of their own thoughts. The glib phrases are accompanied by open and trust-establishing eye-contact. The eyes meeting yours emanate beams of love and light. However, the end-result of your interaction is that you feel ill-at-ease but unable to put your finger on just why; or not heard on a very basic level; or put down and unable to answer back as you have been made well aware that a show of strong feeling would be deemed 'inappropriate'; in extreme cases, your blood begins to boil and you feel like murder.

When dealing with a New Age attack, remember your assailant (and make no mistake about it, you are dealing with a psychic assault) is heavily armed with a stack of dualistic clichés with which to readily and smugly deflect any of your protests back at you. However, one warning is in order here – if you persist with your challenge, the veneer of sincere warmth and love drops and you are likely to meet with a degree of mental malevolence the like of which you have probably not come across often before in your life. This is my bitter experience of the true bedrock of the New Age vibe of love's light and healing: it is nearly

*Never mind my judgement – feel my condemnation.*



Angela Martin

*If it feels good.... if it's right for you....*







always based on a highly intellectualised, repressed and repressive animosity, especially to those experiencing pain. To parade themselves as into healing lifestyles, as many New Agers do, is at best misguided complacency or flattering self-deception; at its worst, the complete reversal of the ominous truth: that the whole New Age package is a mind-bending and soul-destroying enterprise; its main aim the upholding of present power-relations, particularly between the sexes.

### Tyranny of tolerance

Just suppose that you are a woman confronting an issue with a New Ager, particularly one connected with oppressive situations. Even though you may talk pleasantly, you can expect to be tarred with the label "judgmental" as a first attempt to silence you. To be termed judgmental is meant to be very heavy indeed, almost as heavy as one of its variants – that you are being "negative", are "stuck in negative thought patterns" or, worse still, wait-for-it, "stuck at the form level" (ie. obsessed with mere material concerns, like whether you are receiving enough maintenance money to feed your kids). To deal with this, we need to remember that Janice Raymond, feminist author, has described this position as the tyranny of tolerance. She points out that feminism is all about making judgments and acting on them. Janet McCrickard in a short but trenchant critique of New Age-ism ("Ungrounded Glastonbury", *Glastonbury Communicator*, October 1985), wrote that: "Tolerance and respect can never be built on this cheap basis of moral indifference". She notes that New Agers use the word "judgmental" as a built-in block against internal and external criticism, and that underpinning much New Age thought is a favourite dogma: "There is no such thing as right and wrong". From my experience, indifference is indeed the dominant response of New Agers to social issues, except those that affect them personally and adversely when, significantly, they are not slow to push their own self-interested judgments.

Faced with problems, oppression or hostility, New Agers advise us to "Just let go, let go of your anger, of your thought patterns" (you have got to be running a negative programme to attract such a bummer); "Let go of your emotional attachments to your cause"; "release your position" (and, ultimately, of

course, your struggle for freedom); "Work on the inner to transmute your negative emotions" (ie. meditate and reflect). Nothing is said, of course, of transmuting cold intellectuality of the New Age vintage.

"You must own your own feelings." To most ordinary people, this would mean that, if you get your foot deliberately stamped on, you speak out your pain and anger. To New Agers, the phrase "owning one's feelings" is used to suggest that the pain you experienced in your stamped-on foot was your own creation and anger would not be appropriate. This phrase is invariably used when you are angry at some outrage by one of them towards you. Your pain is suddenly your responsibility, nothing to do with external agents. How convenient for our oppressors.

One possible response would be to say, "I do own my own feelings and I am acting on them now" – followed by assertive self-expression aimed to protect you from future violation. The "just let go, release yourself from anger" position is presented as a hang-loose, stay cool (like us) prescription for all social ills. Its intention is to distance you from your own views of social reality and can be translated as "Do not, for God's sake, stay with your feelings of anger, distress or whatever; do not recognise their source and act on them, including fighting for social change".

Why not? Well, the New Age line on this is as strong and sure of itself as concrete and about as thick. Change, we are told, can only come from within. "You must work from inner to outer; you must leave all your political involvement behind now because you should work on a higher level." Such New Age psychobabble is typical of the mindbending that separates the spiritual quest for a better life for all from the political struggle required to achieve it. New Agers can be countered on this point by a basic reminder that nature can effect a huge change in his life – a storm could blow down his house without the least involvements of his thoughts in the process. Such is the arrogant presumption of Goddess power by some New Agers however, that I suspect some hardliners would suggest that in fact it had indeed been their unconscious thoughts, either in this life or in past ones, that conjured up the storm. And if we aren't spiritual enough to see the connection, it hardly behoves them to converse with

us further on the topic. This can only be seen as arrogance or regression to infantile fantasies of omnipotence, plus a refusal to acknowledge natural and other powers beyond human control and manipulation.

### Blame the victim

Now, it may be that you are an extreme case of "pronounced negativity" (ie. have confirmed feminist tendencies). The New Ager, in extremis, has at hand strong and salutary doses of "prosperity consciousness" and such doctrines. In essence, these half-baked pseudo-philosophies dogmatically state that "only thought creates reality. What you think creates your whole world". Thus, if you are experiencing problems in life, then alter your mindset, and change your thoughts. The "real reality" to New Agers, is "boundless love and prosperity" and anything you may experience that suggests otherwise is just an illusion or the result of humanity's negative thought patterns.

If you are suffering from crippling poverty, the solution is simple, because you, and you alone, are responsible for creating your total reality. All you need to do is repeat endless affirmations that you are in touch with limitless prosperity, process any negative feelings that come up, and hey presto. Such half-truths would be considered harmless eccentricities if it were not for their implications. If you complain of oppression (like being raped) then it is your own thought processes that have created that reality for you; you are probably suffering from the dreaded "victim-consciousness" (note: I have never, ever, significantly, heard the word "persecutor-consciousness" used by New Agers, nor anything about "redistributing-wealth consciousness"). You must concentrate on "changing your belief system" about yourself and your world. It is your "victim consciousness" that has created the illusion of poverty, disease, rape and genocide. For yes, we are told, ultimately – the Jews were responsible for their own genocide.

To help hammer home these downright vicious blame-the-victim philosophies, strange distortions of the concept of karma are wheeled on. For New Agers, there is no mystery about life and death and the problem of human suffering. This is how it goes: if you were bad, naughty in a past life, you pay in a later life by a really bad time this time round. The horrific implications of this notion (significantly popularised to quell discontent at the introduc-

tion of the caste-system in India) is that there is an explanation for mass poverty, oppression and suffering; nay, not only an explanation, but a justification. Being raped was not only due to your negative thoughts; you brought it on yourself by nasty actions in some previous life – and you chose to be born this lifetime to experience rape to atone for past misdeeds and to purify your vibrations. Your having been raped is never, never laid at the door of the rapist or the system that produces pornography, child-abuse and woman-battering.

There is no compassion and respect for those dealing with misery, illness and oppression. Most importantly, anger is deflected from the drive for social change, from action to prevent socially unnecessary outrages for our daughters and our daughters' daughters.

### New Age politics

When you have finally had enough trying to discuss philosophy with a New Ager (and you will probably reach your tolerance level pretty quickly because your average disciple seems blocked to reason or logical thinking as well as true intuitive thought), you could try to pin them down on their actual political allegiances. On this score, New Agers will assure you that they have "gone beyond old, outmoded and socially irrelevant categories, like left and right". They claim to be "synthesising opposing views" to achieve a "harmonious, balanced political agenda". One might think this a rather protracted, tormented and, finally, impossible task. However, the real test is observation of New Agers in their actual political choices and behaviour to others. In practice, my observation is that radical politics are denounced as the distressed product of victim-consciousness; conservative ideology and practice are accepted without much question. Ultimately theirs is the path of an individual solution. Thus they may set up havens for themselves, friends and the paying public for home-style births but they do not in general campaign for a woman's right to choose, for free public provision of necessary welfare services or for anything which would involve a confrontation with the system.

The exception to this is their willingness to take issue over the environment. This I see as their political response to a situation that even they have to admit is not open to an individual solution. Moreover such green campaigns are now socially popular and the campaigner would be seen as involved in a wor-



For in essence New Age philosophies fit very comfortably with laissez faire individualistic Thatcherite economics. New Age seminars are being conducted for the employees of big business and in the UK by one public organisation. These seminars are highly compatible with the go-getting capitalist culture. Moreover, evidence already collected by feminists points to big sums of money being made by the biggies in the New Age market.

To return to the painful subject of a political discussion with a New Ager. If they condescend to put their energy into such "form-level" matters, the conversation would be conducted on their terms only, described as "focusing only on the positive aspects" of issues. Bonhomie and humour are *de rigueur*. Anyone bringing up heavy political issues or extremely distressing subjects is accused of bringing the group energy down. Essentially this is true, but to feminists New Age needs to be brought down to earth from their reality-avoiding headtrips and confronted with nitty-gritty social issues. At the moment, New Ager regard social problems, if they have to regard them at all, as the unfortunate illusions of those of underdeveloped consciousness.

You'd sell your Granny wouldn't you?

If it felt right for her...

Adapted from an article in *From the Flames*, a new British women's spirituality journal.

So to sum up, however plausible it may seem and however well-meaning a New Ager may present him or herself to be, do not be deflected from your feminism by New Age psychobabble. There are undoubtedly good times to be had circle dancing, growth to be found through rebirthing and similar therapies, and healing through dietary change, crystals and other practices. It is, however, the utterly patriarchal context in which much, but not all, of these in themselves valuable practices are embedded which is extremely dangerous. For in reaching out for a good time or for healing, one also usually has to swallow with it a whole load of noxious philosophies which are not only reactionary, but also a travesty of spirituality. What is at all spiritual about mental philosophies which make cancer-sufferers, women who have been raped and Jewish people carry an additional load of pain? It seems that once Christianity began to lose its 2,000-year stranglehold, the New Age "culture" emerged to siphon off women's energy from transforming patriarchy. I have heard a New Age chant, sung in breathless Californian monotone, in which a woman forgives herself for causing (the illusion of) patriarchy: "I forgive myself for all apparent injustice, And my part in starting it".

So, sisters, not only does patriarchy not exist, but in any case, it is our own fault that it appears to exist, and we in fact started it. The reality is that these chants do not make women in any way grandly forgiving and divine, more spiritually advanced than their sisters in struggle – they have been merely made the sad dupes of the New Age psychic manipulators. □

# shocking pink

**OK** you've heard the wild hype and saturation media coverage, but what is Shocking Pink really??

## THE TRUTH ABOUT SHOCKING PINK

Shocking Pink is the alternative to the insulting dross usually churned out for young women in the shape of **scummy rags** like *Jackie*, *Just 17*, *Oh Boy*, *My Guy* etc. The main aim of these magazines is **advertising**—make-up, clothes, tampons, mainstream music industry pop. This means that even if you're not reading direct advertising, the whole content is about the most basic Look Pretty—Get a Boy Friend lifestyle because advertisers believe this to be the best way of getting young women to buy their products.

So you have a relentless diet of photo-love stories, fashion spreads, beauty tips (undisguised plugs for new products) and problem pages encouraging young women to be ashamed and neurotic about our bodies—yes the problem is US! Girls are supposed to wear make-up years before they even have their first period.

**SP is everything this mind-numbing drivel isn't**—in fact I can't even write a list because there's so much in it.

But one thing I wanted to say is that this is why SP has such a strong **lesbian** content (though it is for ALL young women of all sexualities—we need **unity!!!**). It's partly because it's one obvious antidote to the ultra-straight identity promoted by *MyJackie17Guy*. Also there is practically NOTHING else around for young dykes, bisexual womens. If you're young and a dyke you can be very isolated and in danger of considering yourself a freak. You can be stuck in an oppressive family home with no way of **escaping** to a town with some sort of lesbian & gay scene. We get letters from young dykes saying how important SP is to them, a light in their life etc, and phonecalls from irate horrible mothers saying their daughter has bought SP and we're filth and they're going to take us to court! (No one's actually tried it yet).

## Shocking Pink 1

**T**he first ever **Shocking Pink** was started in the early 1980s. The Shocking Pink that's around now is really **Shocking Pink 2** started up again in the late 80s by a group of **amazing** women after a break of some years after the first one stopped.

SPI handed on their inspiration and their bank account.

A few months ago I met a woman in a pub who was involved in starting up Shocking Pink 1. We had a nice chat and this is roughly what she told me, though I can't remember too well because I'd had a drop of beer and it was very noisy—so sorry if I've got any of this wrong.

**She said...**the idea for an alternative young women's magazine first came about at a *national girls' conference* (apparently they had things like that then in those radical days). It was observed that the existing magazines for young women were without exception **totally crap**.

So a group of young women somehow got together and had lots of meetings to decide what this new magazine should be like. She said it was tough going because nothing like Shocking Pink had ever existed, so there was no clear picture of what this brand new thing should be like. There were enormously different ideas about what should go into it...should it be radical politics or horse riding for girls?? Some of the people involved were quite conservative, so they killed them off and hid them in dustbins.

I can't really remember much else, except that she said they had a lot of **snogs** with each other.

I met another old SPI member on a typesetting course. What a lovely woman she is. She told me that SPI only came out once a year because they had loads of serious political discussions about what should go in it and that took ages. We like to skip those as much as possible now in SP2 so we're able to produce it more often. Also they used to take all their own photos for their photostories

shocking pink is a radical young women's magazine produced entirely by young women in an unpaid collective. it's distributed nationally & even internationally a bit

because they were scared of being  
 sued, whereas now we are just reckless  
 and rip them all off from other  
 magazines.

OK I'm sorry but that's all I can think  
 of. Bye!

well, I'm not bloody paying



# SHOCKING PINK CHANGED MY LIFE!!!

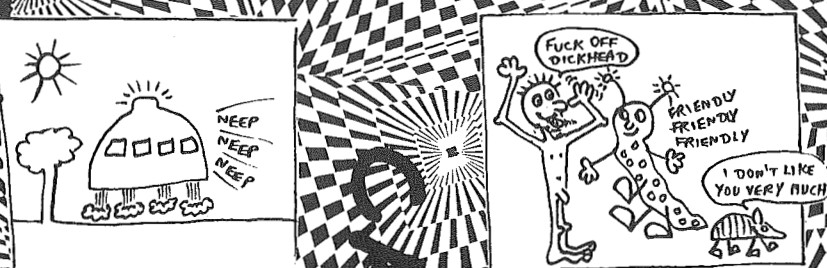
For 2 years I'd been passionately involved with a teacher at school—a completely closeted relationship unsurprisingly! I was 16, and had become withdrawn & secretive & felt completely isolated—sex was cool—but life was shitty! Non-communication settled in—I couldn't talk to my family, my friends or anyone. **Was I the only lesbian on the planet?** Was this all so wrong & dispicable? Would nobody understand? In desperation I quit school, dropped my friends & closed out my family—pissed off and alone I slowly settled into one of those good ol' 'adolescent depressions!' I decided to seek my refuge in solitude (as one does!)—and it was on rejoining the human race a month later that I received the **plain brown envelope** that was to change my life!

It was a Goddess-send! Or as close as a letter from one of the S.P. collective and a copy of issue 7!! I have my mum to thank for the contact—the daughter of a friend's sister's friend (you know the kind of thing) who (my mum, I mean) was completely unaware of what S.P. was all about, but to whom I will be eternally grateful—CHEERS mum!

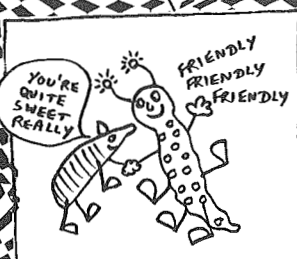
The mag was completely brilliant and cheered me up instantly, and the letter was all about wimmins' bars, and wimmins' issues and wimmins' clubs and wimmin, wimmin, wimmin!! I couldn't believe it! **who was this woman? And what was this magazine?** Only one way to find out

We met—talked, laughed, ate, and ofcourse—fell in love! And so off to my first S.P. collective meeting—6pm, Sunday May 13th 1990—a night to remember! In the office sat a bunch of the most lovely people I'd ever met—6 smily, friendly, beautiful (how true—typesetter) wimmin all beaver-ing away—chatting, joking, laughing, writing, drawing and typing. The atmosphere was wonderful—thay made me feel so at home, all these amazing wimmin—so different but so together—united ! I know this sounds like a bunch of hippy shit, but you won't beleive the feeling of warmth, releif and happiness that it filled me with. I wasn't alone and that meant so much to me. As I said, 'it changed my life'—CORNEY BUT TRUE! I found a gorgeous new lover, loads of new girlfriends, came out to my parents and friends and became involved in the all time best ever utterly fabest wimmings mag on the market—what more can a girl ask for ?!

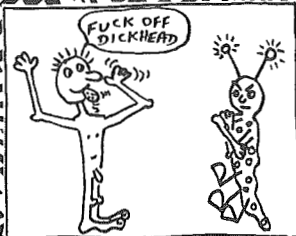
★ THE END ★



One day some aliens came to visit the Earth in a Space Breast.



But after a while they managed to come to an amicable compromise with the annadilloes so that just left the men.



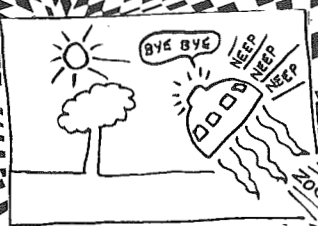
But the men carried on being as rude as they could to the aliens at every opportunity. This really pissed the aliens off.



They sat around burping and farting and making silly jokes, wondering how they could teach the men a lesson



Wow, this is fun, they said to each other. We could make silly jokes about men and piss them off. Then they wouldn't be such a nuisance to the other earthlings



Then they went home.



And to this day there are still those who believe that SHOCKING PINK is the product of an alien conspiracy, but of course we know better, don't we girls ...? neep

**A Shocking Pink Fact**  
There have been 12 issues of Shocking Pink 2 (there were 3 issues of SPI) and it comes out trimenstrually.

## How to make a Shocking Pink

**E**very copy of S.P. you see, buy, steal, proves that anyone, any woman, any young woman, can make a magazine, all of it: writing it, running it, putting it together & selling it. What's more, it can be done without getting precious or snotty, in a way that's a good experience for the o involved. So what follows is a quick run through of what goes in to get S.P. together & also a how-to guide to magazine-making.

Apart from a magazine, S.P. is also a good place to meet other radical young o—there aren't so many places you can do that these days, what with the 80's waves of commercialism knocking over the 70's sandcastles of radicalism...so, before each copy gets out, there's a fair bit of **chatting & tea-drinking** goes on at our Wednesday & Sunday meetings. This is where we get alot of our crappiest jokes—a vital part of S.P.

There's always admin. things to do before, after & around each issue. Our office was set up to be pretty user-friendly by the wise old members of the initial collective, so, theoretically, new o can come in & get to work; answering letters, sorting out news we've been sent, chasing up invoices (for ads. etc) & dealing with finances (bill-paying etc.). Drawers are clearly marked with instructions pasted onto ledgers & filing cabinets. The computer has a basic guide stuck on the wall above it. At the moment a manual with a step-by-step recipe to producing the magazine is being worked on.(!)

Though we're nationally(-ish) distributed in newsagents & bookstores, alot of our sales are done on a person to person basis, so the next, incredibly important, part of S.P. is selling & raising funds. We go around pubs, clubs & hang-outs of **anarchic, revolutionary fun-lovers** & basically bully people into buying copies; intimidating the faint-hearted with our lunatic & enthusiastic presence until they give in. This is an important point of contact with readers & potential new collective members & when people are **positive, friendly & insanely flattering**, it's an infusion of brilliant feeling that can last for weeks too. Being a member of the collective you also get to travel the country—attending events as a representative of the thinking girl's Class War/Woman's Own/Just 17/Smash Hits/toilet paper (delete as appropriate).

So all this, along with other miscellaneous such as T-shirt making, takes up about 2 months & then someone remembers it must be about time for another issue. We then all worry a great deal & eventually set a print date (arranging a date with the printers to squeeze S.P. into their enormously busy schedule, which they will then ignore—only joking ho ho). This officially designates a time forward from which to panic & rush to do things that should have been done, strangely always by someone else...

Advertising must be persuaded for & received about 10 days before the print date. Once again, we

by the way, we have readers of all ages, so you can get it for yourself no matter what age you are & you don't have to pretend it's a present for someone else

are **incredibly** organized with an advertising firm bursting with information, encouragement & potential advertisers. From time to time you get involved in chats with S.P. fans who've reached surprising positions of power & influence, with control over vast sums of advertising budget...& other times you don't. We don't allow just anyone to advertise with us, oh no! We are very choosy: Evil scions of capitalist culture, touters & peddlers of mass poison & destruction & the smiling face of the multi-nationals shall find no harbour between our sheets. (funny, I hadn't really noticed them asking—typesetter) In this we share the advertising policy of many feminist magazines.

Around about now, there's a bit of a lull in the computer

Around about now, there's a bit of a struggle, as the computer gets roused from its semi-slumber & the pile of hand-written articles/rants/incomprehensible ramblings that has been slowly growing beside it gets typed in & everyone moans about why wasn't it done before. We sit & gaze at the list of computer files & worry that we're not going to fill the next issue & so try to think of jokes.

Then, about 2 weeks before the deadline, we start typesetting. This is done (in theory) by everyone who wants to. The first time I did it was a bit of a nightmare—sitting in front of professional typesetting computers (a lovely firm let us borrow their equipment) with the ever-present S.P. Guide to D.I.Y. Typesetting & another S.Per who'd been only once before. But we managed & this convinces me anyone can do it. (The other S.Per has since become a bit of a sad case; she took a D.T.P. course & now wanders around accosting strangers & ranting on about the beautiful mystery that is typeface.) We collect together all the floppy strips of paper that spew, wet & glistening, from the typesetting thingey & peg them on a washing-line to dry. When they're all done, it's time to stick it all together & make a magazine.

This bit is fun & can make a girl realise artistic skills she never knew she had. Everyone takes a lay-out board & begins sticking bits of paper & writing & drawings all over it... as the days/nights wear on & the lay-out boards get full & things get lost beneath mounds of gluey scrap-paper, we worry about space...will it all fit in?

Unlike alot of magazines/papers, we're purposely low-technology, so handwritten & typewritten articles are accepted & sometimes pasted in as they are. This is because a) it looks less **bland** & b) that homogenised 'house-style' some mags/papers have (both in look, politics & tone) is achieved by limiting contributors, laying down a political line to stifle dissent & taking the production out of the hands of the many & placing it firmly in the hands of a professional elite. **Even when the surface politics are 'left', that 'look' says its a sell-out to capitalist production & ethics.** It really is true, with S.P, the crossover between reader & producer is large & not confined to some pathetic letters page.

it goes on.....

Question  
authority

what a terrible lie

→ ..... 4  
 10 shocking pink



Don't forget, girls — NEVER accept lifts from strangers!

## EDITORIAL POLICY

Our format reflects this too. We don't pretend to have a political consensus; around alot of issues that would be impossible & we don't have an editor, so there's no editorial. So, if someone doesn't agree with something someone else has written, she writes it, & it goes in too, if she can be bothered. If something really pisses people off, we vote & 60% against means it doesn't go in. That rarely happens & it's not perfect. (What? S.P. not perfect? O goddess!)

We also have a policy of anonymity: so that we can go to parties & not be harangued/get big-headed, so individuals don't get sued or jailed & because it's a good, feminist way of working; the all is greater than the one.

Lastly, we keep away from big words. In a country with an education system dedicated to keeping people ignorant, information must be accessible. We don't seek validation by practising exclusion at the level of language i.e. we don't use little-known buzzwords just to prove we can be elitist dick-heads too. Shit, there are so many others who can do it so much better anyway.

### So much for that rant.

Anyway, we finally finish sticking things on the lay-out boards & we all crawl home. Finally some poor sod/brave volunteer has to take the lay-out boards to the printers at some unreal hour of the morning... and then, theoretically (there's many a theoretical in S.P. & many a bracket too) it arrives back, all crisp & pink & black & lovely. & we start all over again.

Well, I'm sorry that was so long, no doubt many of you will have skipped to see what the ending is & it certainly wouldn't get into S.P. but anyway, now you know & now

**YOU CAN DO IT TOO!!**

**AND ANOTHER THING**—we are entirely financially independent and get grants from no one at all. It's funded purely by sales and advertising (and the odd T-shirt) and we're extremely proud of this.

## SHOCKING PINK'S SPELLING POLICY

We think correct spelling is a pile of KRAPP. "Proper" spelling and grammar is a ploy of the ruling classes to try to say that their particular dialect is the only legitimate one and to dismiss what everyone else has to say. (One of my colleagues has just wisely remarked that Proper English is just a dialect with an army behind it.) We think spelling is needed only so far as to make things comprehensible. We LOVE creative spelling and language.



**Shocking Pink is radical and unique in so many ways...**

★ **it's radical in its content**—all sorts of subjects: health, music, news, lots of personal politics & all sorts of viewpoints as long as they're roughly feminist & leftwing)  
★ **radical in how it's produced**—an open collective working on consensus, lots of mutual support, sharing skills & information, everyone learning to do everything & no experience needed  
★ **radical in its format**. Sometimes when I'm musing about the amazingness of SP I think its format is one of the most incredibly unique things about it. There's absolutely nothing else so varied and flexible. It manages to include writing (serious and funny), cartoons, doodles, photostories, pictures, notes, scraps of information, scribbles in the margins—Because of this the variety of material it can include is incredible—heavy rants next to wild & loopy cartoon jokes. I have never come across any other publication or anything at all that can do this. It's AMAZING.

Tragically all this wondrousness will be lost and you will never have anything nearly half as nice to read anymore if some enthusiastic young women (under 25) don't come along to work on the collective.

The present collective is **tired** and a bit **shrunk** because some wonderful members have gone away (to college and suchlike) and I personally am leaving because I am old and fed up of having too much responsibility. (Like most collectives we haven't been good at sharing work and responsibility). So we need new blood! Please! This is an **appeal**! If you or anyone you know could possibly want to get involved please do—you don't need to have done anything like it before. Phone or write & we'll tell you when meetings are and we'll be really nice to you too.

There's so little around that's good to read that I'm going to cry if SP closes.

**No doubt having heard all this you'll want to get your own Shocking Pink to read. So here's how (it's a real bargain)...**

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