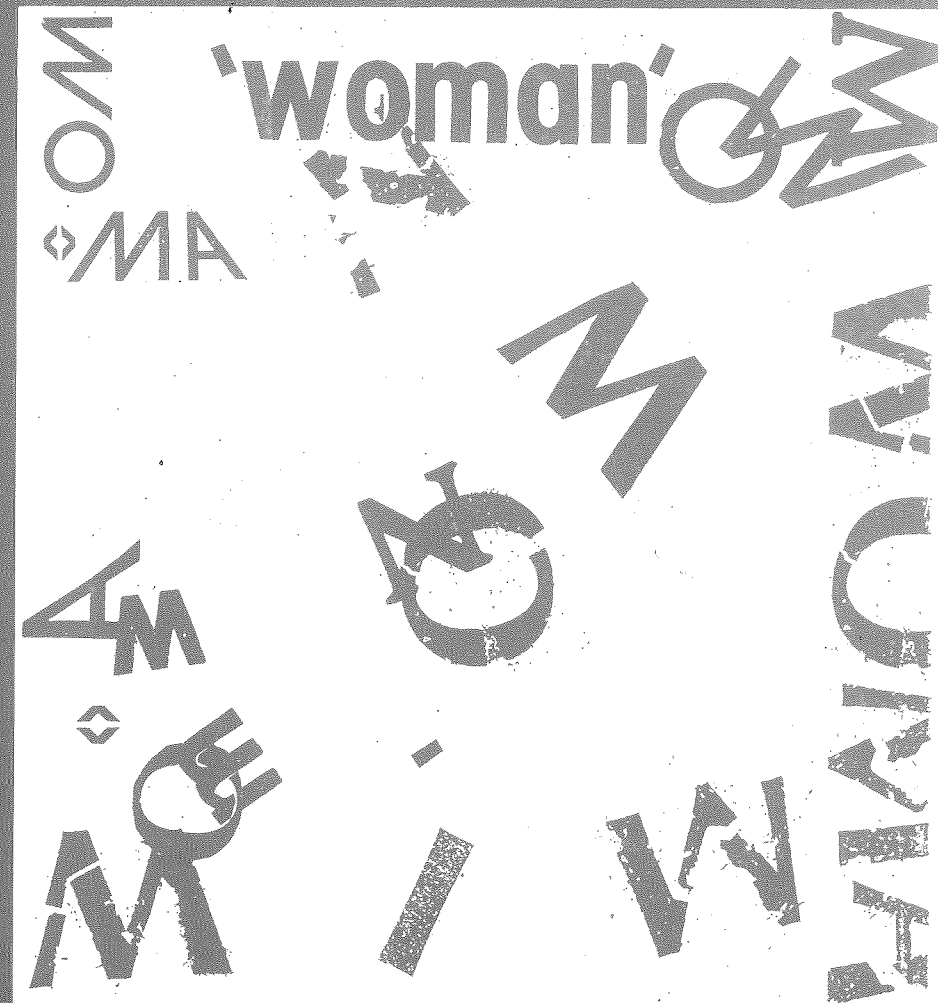


Trouble

The radical feminist magazine

& Strife



The Perils of Post-Modernism

Policing Women in Ireland
Female Friendship films
Sudanese Sisterhood
Lesbians on phones

NO.25
£2.95

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

Trouble & Strife is produced by Lisa Adkins, Marian Foley, Mandana Hendessi, Cath Jackson, Liz Kelly, Sophie Laws, Diana Leonard, Joan Scanlon and Sara Scott; with help from Paddy Tanton, Alison Dickens and Caroline Forbes.

With many thanks to Hilary Allen for doing the index and to the Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Information Centre for the use of their space and resources.

Printed and Typeset by Sandypress Manchester (061-273 7535)
Distributed by Central Books (081 986 4854).

Trouble & Strife is available on tape.

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

Trouble & Strife

Subscription rates/ Back issues

Subs for one year (3 issues):

Britain & Ireland	£8.50
Supporting Sub	£25.00
Unwaged Sub	£6.50
Surface mail worldwide	£10/\$19.50
Airmail worldwide	£13/\$24.50
Institutions: Inland	£25.00
Overseas	£35.00

Back issues nos.

3-18, 20-24

Britain & Ireland	£1.65
(3 copies)	£4.00
Seamail worldwide	£2.50
(3 copies)	£6.00
Airmail worldwide	£3.50
(3 copies)	£8.00

Costs for overseas subscribers are less if you pay by an International Money Order in £UK as the bank charges for converting currency are £3.50 per cheque!

Please send me *Trouble & Strife* for one/two years, starting issue

I enclose a cheque/PO for £ including a donation of £

Please send me back issues nos

I enclose a cheque for £

Name

Address

Trouble & Strife Subscriptions, PO Box 8, Diss, Norfolk, UK IP22 3XG

get your own oob!



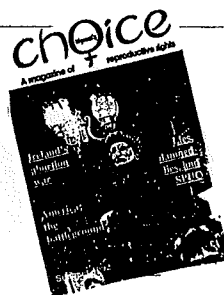
off our backs a women's newsjournal

Join us for our third decade of news, reviews, commentaries - the best in feminist journalism! subscribe today

11 issues a year	\$19
Contributing	\$22
Canada, Mexico	\$20
Overseas, all airmail:	US \$28, UK£16
Trial sub: 3 issues for \$5	

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____
oob,2423 18th St.NW,Wash.DC,20009

A NEW MAGAZINE FROM THE NATIONAL ABORTION CAMPAIGN



To understand about abortion in Ireland, read *Women's Choice*. If you want to know just how serious the situation facing American women is, read *Women's Choice*. If you have ever wondered how far anti-abortion organisations are prepared to go, read *Women's Choice*. And it has great cartoons!

It costs £1.00 plus 34p postage for a single issue. A year's subscription (4 issues) is £5.50. It comes free to NAC members and affiliates.

For a sample copy, send £1.34 to: NAC, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU, from whom details of membership are also available. (☎ 071 405 4801)

Contents No. 25

Trouble & Strife

Letters	2
Living in a police state <i>Ailbhe Smyth</i> looks at abortion in Ireland today	5
Hollywood feminism? Get real! <i>Louise Donald</i> and <i>Joan Scanlon</i> discuss recent female friendship films	11
In memoriam: Maria Elena Moyano, murdered in Peru	17
Why can't a woman be more like a man? <i>Elaine Miller</i> reviews <i>Faderman's "Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers"</i>	20
The amazing deconstructing woman <i>Stevi Jackson</i> suggests some problems with postmodern feminism	25
Sudanese sisterhood <i>Fatima Ibrahim</i> describes the Sudanese Women's Union's battles for women	32
Hunger strikes and children's rights <i>Jo Bridgeman</i> looks at the compulsory medical treatment of children	36
Hens in the heather <i>Libby Brooks</i> reviews "Grit and Diamonds" on Scottish feminism from 1980 to 1990	41
Dial a Dyke <i>Helen Bishop</i> interviews members of the Lesbian Line collective about the early years	45

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Thanks to all of you who filled in the questionnaire - we will be writing a piece on your responses in the next issue. The new cover price of T&S is necessary to meet increased production costs. We have, however, put a minimal increase on subs, and have kept unwaged subs at its previous level. We are going to have to increase the shop price again in 1993, so do take this opportunity to take out a subscription and save yourselves money.

Letters



Misrepresentation

Dear Trouble & Strife,

Diana Leonard's letter in response to my article contains a couple of points which I agree with but distorts or misrepresents much of what I wrote. I had understood from you that *T&S* was going to present the article not as a one-off but as the start of a debate, with an editorial statement to that effect asking for more contributions. You did not do this, and far from encouraging debate chose to print in the next issue a letter which might well have the opposite effect.

My article sought to do two things: to argue (in the context of a review of *The Psychology of Motherhood*) that mothers are not by any means a homogeneous group and that most generalisations about them/us are false, and to describe and attempt to account for the involvement of British feminists in childcare campaigns, or their absence from such campaigns. Diana Leonard's response to this is to warn me that "we need to think hard before appearing to attack other women". I can only see this as a silencing tactic, as there were no personal attacks whatsoever in my article. While I am certainly critical of some of the examples of feminists' behaviour (including my own) that I mention, I also try to explain them.

To be specific about the questions the letter raises, and its points of disagreement:

1. What does Diana Leonard have in mind when she writes "Mothers own - and intend to continue to own - their children (and this is very apparent at times in Dena's own article)"? I don't own any children and don't believe children can be 'owned', and I find this an offensive idea. She cites nothing in support of her statement apart from hinting that she found (unspecified) evidence in the article and referring to opinions expressed in *T&S* some years ago. Doesn't this at least give the appearance of attacking other women?
2. Childcare as a "bottomless pit". Is it the only issue for feminists which can seem like

a bottomless pit? The point I made about the "seemingly large sum of money" the National Childcare Campaign received has been completely misunderstood. It was £5m, once only (not annually), to cover *the whole country* excluding a few metropolitan areas and to include administrative costs. Of course it didn't go far, because it was a trivial sum. It was accepted on the grounds that even such a small amount was better than nothing given that some areas had no nursery provision whatsoever.

3. Children prefer to be comfortable in their own homes... Which children and which homes? What assumptions about happy families and comfortable homes is Diana Leonard working with? There's a lot of evidence to show that children with no previous experience of being cared for outside their homes are at a real disadvantage when they start school.

4. Diana Leonard writes that we "disagree in what we remember from our earlier reading". I did not simply rely on my memory but checked my sources. I did not misrepresent what Sheila Shulman wrote in her lengthy article 'Lesbian Feminists and the Great Baby Con', although I certainly drew on it selectively. So too does Diana Leonard.

Sheila Shulman examined the pressures towards motherhood experienced by lesbians in general, in the context of her own particular experience as a Jew. We don't all experience the same pressures regardless of sexuality, class, race, gender, age, disability or other differences between us. Diana Leonard ignores these differences in saying "we have to go on querying biological motherhood as a reasonable choice". Who does that "we" include, and whose choice is being queried? There is an assumption here that biological motherhood is already an unproblematic reasonable choice for women, particularly ironic considering that Sheila Shulman wrote of the intense pressure she felt as a Jewish woman since such choice had been murderously denied to a previous generation.



Diana Leonard also writes of "maternal privilege", and of the praise women get for becoming pregnant. Really? All women? I find an astonishing absence of any awareness that these remarks might not apply to everyone regardless of race, class, age, disability and other factors that differentiate us.

5. How did the letter manage to sound so patronising? By making repeated use of my first name (not usually done in this context), and in the many asides which imply superior knowledge which is not based on any reference to what I actually wrote. This enables Diana Leonard to picture me as having less sympathy than herself with non-mothers amongst other failings, and as not thinking hard enough before "appearing to attack other women". Well at last we agree that any writer should think twice before doing that. If *T&S* really wants to encourage contributions perhaps you should also think twice before publishing the suggestion (from a collective member) that critical comment on past feminist practice and debate should be suppressed.

Best wishes,

Dena Attar,
London.

What about anti-lesbianism?

Dear Trouble & Strife,

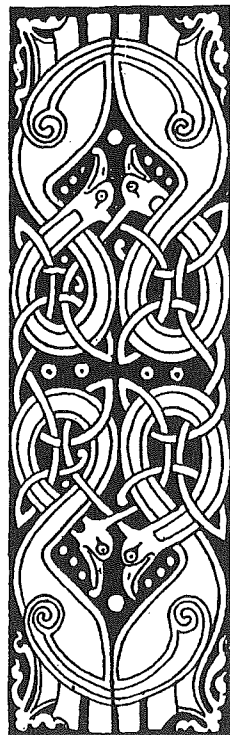
There are many things I could say about Debbie Cameron's reassessment of Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" pamphlet, but I'll confine myself to just one: the lack of any specific discussion of anti-lesbianism in Debbie's review. She talks about the "conflicts around sexuality" between lesbians and heterosexual feminists during the 1980s without mentioning one of the most pervasive and unpleasant aspects of that period (at least for lesbians): the extent of anti-lesbian feeling amongst heterosexual feminists.

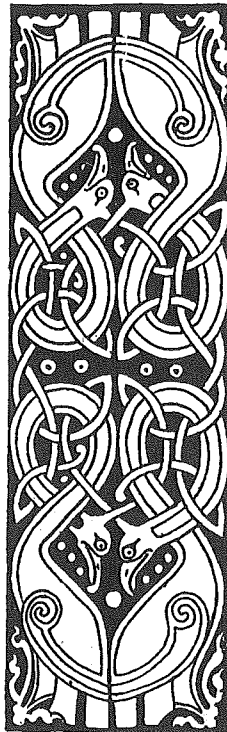
As a lesbian feminist then and now, I *still* see plenty of evidence of something which can be called anti-lesbianism

amongst feminists who identify as heterosexual, and it would be a mistake to obscure the extent or the importance of this 'difference' between women, either in the 1980s or the 1990s. We *still* need to be asking where that anti-lesbianism is coming from, what it's doing to feminism, and what makes women identify as heterosexual in the first place.

When Debbie Cameron looks at politics around HIV/AIDS and sexuality, she does it again, talking about homophobia as something which affects "lesbians as well as gay men". To ignore what is particular about anti-lesbianism here only undermines her argument that the interests of lesbians and gay men do not necessarily coincide.

I agree with Debbie that it is naive to equate the power of white women in a racist society with that of heterosexual women in a heterosexist and patriarchal one. Different sets of power relations are not equivalent, and anyway, what can this tell us about the different positions of Black heterosexual women and white lesbians for example? But women who identify as heterosexual *do* have privileges which accrue from their position, and they can and do (unfortunately) oppress lesbians in some very tangible ways. That identification is a political position, constrained by a massively dominant set of hetero-patriarchal institutions. And heterosexual women can recognize, as Debbie points out, that they too have "a political interest in opposing heterosexism". I'd like to see more straight women doing just that, *and* challenging anti-lesbianism, supporting lesbians politically, without always asking us to educate them about sexuality. And I'd like to see more of a discussion of the differences between heterosexism (the assumption that we are all straight until proven otherwise, and if we're not we should be), and anti-lesbianism (that view of lesbians as sick, deviant, hypersexual, loud, abnormal etc) which is supported both by such powerful and pervasive institutional structures.





There may be times when it is important to organise together as *women* around specific issues, but I'd hate to lose the sense of when it's necessary to organise autonomously (or, to use a less fashionable word, separately) around our *differences*, whether those concern class, age, race, disability and/or sexuality.

Christine Griffin
Birmingham

Women's studies courses

* Dear Trouble and Strife,

I have just completed my 2nd year of a degree in women's studies and have come to the conclusion that it is impossible for women's studies to be truly feminist at degree level.

To me, feminism means the personal is political, however this is totally opposite to the ethos of Academia. Academia means being detached, objective, theoretical, impersonal, non-political, and abstract. To be validated at degree level, women's studies has to adopt a traditional male-paradigm of study and not rock the boat. Therefore in my 2nd year of women's studies there has been an emphasis on statistics and elitist jargon and theory.

For my final year dissertation I have decided to do an autobiography, but have been told that it must relate to critical theory. In your article on the OU women's studies course Diana Leonard says: "It's very dodgy to require people to reveal aspects of their personal lives and be assessed on it for an academic course." She thus highlights the dilemma faced by women's studies: a) to go along with patriarchal academia and be 'objective', and therefore go against the ethos of feminism ('the personal is political') or b) allow women space to express their subjective experience - but assess them for it, and thereby also go against the ethos of feminism. Academia, like all capitalist, patriarchal institutions, emphasises competition - something which goes against feminism's belief in a non-hierarchical sharing of experiences.

* indicates a letter has been cut.

It is not just the method of study which is dodgy however, but it is also the content. 'Women' in women's studies are white, middle class and heterosexual. In my 1st year of womens studies there was 1 lecture on lesbians (called 'women loving women'), but none in my 2nd year. There have been no lectures on working class women, and just 1 or 2 on black women.

As a working class lesbian, I feel that women's studies has alienated me from my own experience. I have been taught that my own personal experience is not as important as the 'theorists'.

By theorizing feminism I feel removed from the day to day reality of women's oppression. Therefore, to me, a truly feminist women's studies would emphasize subjectivity, and personal experience, and use creative and artistic methods to explore women's situation, through discussion groups, creative writing, painting etc. It would also emphasize the diversity of women and the reality of their situation.

The only problem with my ideal vision of women's studies is that it is not academic.

In Elaine Hawkins' article on Madonna (*T&S* 24,) she says: "In any profession radicalism is concentrated at the lowest layers; you don't 'rise' if you express a politics which challenges the very foundation of the hierarchical system of which you are a part." Therefore if women's studies does actually challenge the whole ethos of academia, it will be rejected - because it is only male ways of knowing which have any status or authority. I feel, therefore, that instead of adopting a patriarchal academic method, women's studies should either challenge it or get out.

We need to get back to consciousness raising and grass-roots feminism - or at least try to make a stronger link between the reality of women's lives and academic theory. At the moment they are poles apart.

Nanette Herbert
Surrey

PS I am not a student at the OU, but feel I cannot name the institution I am in.

Living in a Police State

In a speech in Cork in June 1992, Ailbhe Smyth denounced the tightening control on women's reproductive and human rights in the Irish Republic.

Women in Ireland are living in a police state. Our reproductive rights are controlled by the police in accordance with state policy and laws, implicitly sanctioned by the constitution and explicitly empowered by the courts. Over the past six months and more we have witnessed or experienced a series of startling events.

Direct and indirect censorship

This has occurred:

* through the continuing ban preventing health clinics and services from providing information about abortion services abroad.

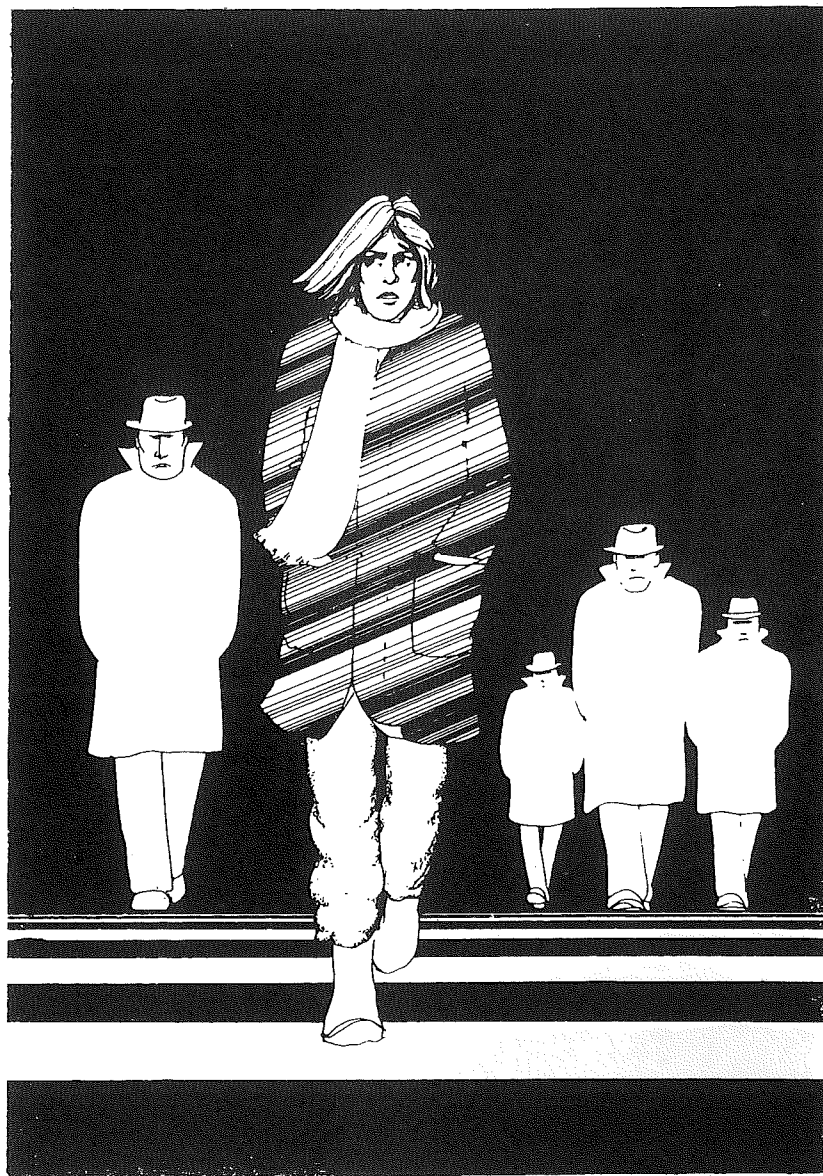
* through the continuing ban on the publication of information about abortion services abroad by student unions and, by extension, by any other publisher.

* through the removal of health manuals, including the highly respected *Our Bodies Our Selves* (published in the UK by Penguin Books), from the shelves of public libraries in Dublin, because they contained names and addresses of clinics carrying out abortions in Britain. (The books were later replaced.)

* through serious threats by members of Dublin Corporation to remove London telephone directories from Dublin libraries because they contain the names and addresses of clinics which carry out abortions in Britain.



Photos of demonstration in Cork in February 1992 by Tricia Thompson



Gro Vestby in Kjerringrad

LEEDS INCEST SURVIVORS ACTION (LISA) are appealing for donations to pay for a private prosecution by two sisters who want to bring a case against their uncle, who abused them throughout their childhood. They need to raise £1,500. Please send donations to: Ruth Bundy & Co., 37, York Place, Leeds LS1 26D, stating it is for Ann & Mary's prosecution. Further details from LISA 0532 310949.

* through the banning of the sale in Ireland of an American anti-abortion organising manual because it contained the names and addresses of abortion clinics in the USA. Ironically, the clinics were listed as *targets* for the anti-abortion movement while the Irish booksellers banned from selling the book are an important publishing outlet of the Catholic Church.

* through the decision by the Irish distributors not to distribute for sale copies

of *The Guardian* newspaper carrying an advertisement for the Marie Stopes clinic. While the police did not directly intervene in this case, they were present at the airport when the distributors made their decision. The distributors feared, of course, that they would be subjected to judicial injunction, based on precedents in previous 'information' cases.

* through the continuous low-level harassment of a feminist publishing house in the form of complaints by anonymous individuals to advertisers, distributors and booksellers, concerning the "moral unacceptability" of its publications and resulting in certain cases in their necessary withdrawal from circulation.

* through the refusal of a radio station to broadcast a live interview with representatives of the British-based Marie Stopes Organisation on the basis that such an interview *might* be against the law. This should be placed in the context of the earlier RTE ban on any live discussion of the "abortion issue" for the same reasons.

Police and judicial intervention

This has occurred with:

* the recall to Ireland by the Gardai (Irish police) of a 14 year old girl and her parents who had travelled to the UK for an abortion following the 14-year old's rape-induced pregnancy (the 'X' case). The High Court granted an interim injunction against the girl and her parents, which it later confirmed, although this was subsequently overturned by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled that in the event of "real and substantial risk" (which it did not define) to the life of the pregnant woman, she would be entitled to seek a legal abortion in Ireland.

* in the case of *The State v. X*, the Supreme Court did not, however, establish the right of women in Ireland (of whatever nationality) to travel abroad to obtain abortion. Technically, women can be interned inside the state if there are grounds to suspect they may leave the state for the purposes of availing of abortion services - services which are legally available to all other European Community citizens.

* Protocol Number 17 was appended to the Maastricht Treaty at the request of the Irish Government, with the aim of removing the issue of abortion in Ireland from the ambit of EC policy and law. Although the precise meaning and effect of this protocol are now disputed by lawyers, the clear *political* intention of its insertion was to ensure that women in Ireland would not be entitled to any increase in their rights with regard to abortion as a consequence of Ireland's participation in the European Union.

* the questioning and brief arrest of an Irish woman who had sought to import 20 copies, for non-commercial purposes, of the effectively censored 'Marie Stopes' issue of *The Guardian*.

* the arrival of the Gardai at the premises of a local radio station when informed that the station intended to broadcast the text of the Marie Stopes *Guardian* advertisement. It was promptly pointed out to the Gardai that this would not be illegal since the text of the advertisement had been read into the Dail record by Democratic Left TD, Proinsias de Rossa, and subsequently published and broadcast by the national media as the perfectly legal record of Dail proceedings.

* the Gardai reportedly investigated reports of the meeting held in Cork at which this paper was read, on the basis that the meeting would "give information about abortion". Whether the Gardai actually did investigate the legality of the meeting is not the most important point. *Reports* that they were doing so were of themselves sufficient to dissuade women from attending. And that is a totally unacceptable situation in a democratic state where the right to free assembly is being jeopardised.

* a local radio station in Cork declined to broadcast a live interview with a representative of the London-based Marie Stopes Organisation on the basis that such an interview *might* be against the law.

There are no doubt other incidents. Countless women, including myself and others whom I know well, have been subjected to unpleasant and sometimes

frightening personal and professional harassment and threats by extreme right-wing organisations and individuals, many of them very powerfully placed indeed. I am absolutely certain that very many Irish women postponed or cancelled their plans to seek a termination of pregnancy in the UK or travelled to Britain in fear and uncertainty, not knowing what actions might be taken against them on their return.

These incidents are not the fault of the police. They are a consequence of the contorted and contradictory position adopted by the government, whereby it persists in its aim of controlling women's reproduction but refrains from drafting measures which would enable it to do so with, at the very least, a degree of clarity. But the government has its own agenda and women's freedom is definitely not on it.

Spoken and unspoken constraints

Censorship and police and judicial intervention, combined with confused and confusing laws and governmental evasion, greatly exacerbate the climate of difficulty and fear in which Irish women must live their sexual and reproductive lives. Numerous aspects of sexuality and sexual behaviour are literally unspeakable because never spoken of. Abortion as personal experience is a taboo topic. Abortion may be discussed *only* within the context of moral, legal and political debate. Abortion is represented as either moral or immoral, legal or illegal, permissible or prohibited. The fact that it is a personal and material experience, a social, economic and psychological necessity, cannot be referred to without fear of sanction in our 'policed' culture. A woman may not easily declare in public, or indeed in private, that she has had an abortion. A woman may not even easily declare that she is pro-choice.

The absolute stigma once attached to single motherhood (which lingers, if the truth be told, with considerable tenacity) has been transferred or extended to abortion. Some argue that this is progress. I read it as the ability of the state and its institutions to consistently thwart women's fight for reproductive freedom. I read it as a sign that we are engaged in a continuing

struggle where victory is never absolute and opponents must never be trusted.

In a general sense, the question of 'reproductive freedom' for women in Ireland is highly problematic. It is still the case that womanhood and motherhood are represented as synonymous *realities*, as the latest statement from the Catholic hierarchy makes abundantly clear:

This teaching in no way implies that the life of the unborn child is "preferred" to the life of the mother, or that the mother's life is to be "sacrificed" to save the child. Both lives are equally precious. The life of the pregnant mother is as inviolable as is the life of the child in her womb. *The Irish Times*

Quite apart from the extraordinary - and unsuccessful - convolutions of the bishops' attempt to engineer a "balance of rights", their repeated use of the word "mother" when "woman" is the technically accurate term must be read as the rhetorical tool of a highly manipulative discourse - pregnant women are not necessarily "mothers" and may not, for all kinds of reasons, become "mothers". But for the bishops, only mothers are "real women" -

and 'real women' are not sexual. "Womanhood" is symbolically and materially non-existent until non-sexually osmosed into "motherhood":

We turn to Mary, the New Eve, Mother of all the living and ask her for her motherly intercession. At the message of the Angel, the Word became flesh in Mary's womb through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

So who believes the bishops? The evidence of the opinion polls taken in the months since the 'X' case and its public aftermath show a growing recognition and acceptance of the social need for abortion in limited circumstances, irrespective of Catholic moral teaching. And there can be no doubt that the moral authority of the hierarchy has been undermined by the recent exposure of Bishop Casey as a 'secret' father. The numbers of the faithful now reading the bishops' homilies with a (privately) raised eyebrow and a large grain of salt must indeed be on the increase. Nonetheless, an opinion poll is not a vote and it would be flying in the face of Irish social history in the 20th century to underestimate - far less to write off - the power



This is the text of a speech made to the women-only meeting: *Women's Voices - Women's Choices* organised by Cork Repeal the 8th Amendment Campaign, 4 June 1992.

Since then the European Court of Human Rights has ruled that information about abortion may be given to women in Ireland, in a case brought by the Dublin Well-Woman Centre.

of Catholic discourse to shape social and political practices.

In a society where motherhood remains virtually the only secure source of canonised validation for the vast majority of women, the decision *not* to be a mother is deeply subversive and risky. The traditional social pressures on women to reproduce (several times) remain strong, veiled through Roman Catholic ideology operating within the education and health systems, the law, the political arena, the Family as an institution and the labour force. Children and young people do not generally benefit from sex education at school, and investment in reproductive education for girls and women is virtually nil. Contraceptives are available in principle, by law, in pharmacies throughout the country. In practice, this is often not the case, with women frequently too intimidated to ask for them in small rural communities.

There is a marked class dimension to women's access to reproductive health services. Money, and location in some instances, *can* buy you a different doctor, a different pharmacy, travel to a Family Planning or Well Woman centre, or travel to Britain for an abortion without the risk of incurring debt or job loss. These are important differences which are never recognised by either our political or moral arbiters. The right to travel is of no bodily use to women who have no money to travel. But neither money nor class position can buy relief from the fear of exposure and stigmatisation. Money does not buy freedom from fear.

The policing of women's reproductive functions in Ireland cannot and will not cease until such time as the legislature, our elected representatives, are willing and able to recognise that reproduction is a *social process*, not a legal matter or a moral issue; and that women are social and moral agents, capable of making reasoned and responsible decisions, and with the right to do so in a democracy. The policing of women cannot and will not cease until such time as the legislature and all other institutions of the state have the courage to resist coercion by powerful and extreme right-wing forces which seek to impose their ver-

sion of morality on the population as a whole.

The politics of abortion

Abortion politics are unrelenting, brutal and brutalising. While the situation is particularly vicious in Ireland at present, the onslaught on women's freedom is an international phenomenon, with a long history and powerful tentacles into both neo-fascism and fundamentalism.

The politics of abortion is not about Maastricht any more than it is about morality. It is about *power*. Specifically, it is about the exercise of male power. It is about men's obsession with ownership and control of 'their' seed, not one precious drop of which must be wasted. It is about their overriding desire for dominance and their identification of reproduction as a primary site for the control of women. Abortion is crucially about male ownership of women.

Sociologist Ann Oakley points out that the management and control of reproduction are "inseparable from how women are managed and controlled". Abortion is never just about "abortion" and women cannot afford to think that it is. We need to see the "abortion issue" (which happens to be a concrete *experience* for countless thousands of Irish women) in the broad context of reproductive freedom and in the even broader context of women's historical struggle for social and political self-hood.

Reproductive freedom has been a central issue for feminism and the Women's Movement since the 19th century because reproduction has been - and is - a central part of women's lives and the arena in which male control has been consistently exercised. In the white West, the struggle has focused on birth control, abortion and, more recently, on the development of reproductive technologies. For Black women in the West and for women elsewhere in the world, the struggle has often centred around other reproductive issues - notably around population control strategies such as enforced sterilisation and limitation of family size.

Depending on class, race, ethnic origin or global location it can seem as if women are demanding diametrically



opposed "freedoms" and "rights". I believe that this is not so: what women consistently seek is the freedom to live our bodies as part of our "selves", the freedom to make sexual and reproductive decisions appropriate to our social, economic, physical and psychological needs. And whether that entails having more or fewer or no children, it is always about women's capacity and right to exercise choice.

The issue of abortion and its bitterly divisive politicisation over the past 20 years is just the most recent chapter in the long history of women's fight for freedom. Abortion has become the late 20th century arena for the playing out of a power struggle between the sexes - a struggle which has always been waged on women's bodies, whether through reproductive control, violence and violation, or through other forms of bodily appropriation.

The disconnection of procreation from sexual activity through the development of relatively safe and reliable contraception is one of the most significant discoveries of the 20th century. Women now hold, at least in principle, the means to control their fertility and - again in principle -

are free to choose if and when they will reproduce.

In her recent book, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, Susan Faludi records the extent of male distress, anxiety and fear at the shift in the balance of sexual power:

Having secured first the mass availability of contraceptive devices and then the option of medically sound abortions, women were at last at liberty to have sex, like men, on their own terms... Men who found these changes distressing couldn't halt the pace of women's bedroom liberation directly, but banning abortion might be one way to apply the brakes. If they couldn't stop the growing numbers of women from climbing into the sexual driver's seat, they could at least make the women's drive more dangerous - by jamming the reproductive controls.

As male control of women weakens, their efforts to tighten the reproductive screws become more desperate and cruel. In Ireland, the screws are being turned so tight that women are deprived of the basic freedoms that all men, irrespective of class, take for granted in a democracy: the rights to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of movement.

I am tired of being admonished to be 'reasonable', to avoid extremism, not to 'polarise' the debate. These admonitions are pointless because abortion inevitably brings into confrontation opposing views of the place of women as social subjects, where compromise is not a practical option. It is impossible to enter into a reasonable dialogue with the forces of unreason, as anyone who has ever been confronted by a fanatical anti-abortionist barrage knows to her cost. Meanings are twisted and deformed *beyond* reason. Words are used as weapons to damage and discredit the intentions of the speaker. But we must not, as women and as feminists, allow ourselves to be neutralised into acquiescence or intimidated into silence.

Women in Ireland must say no to any protocol, law or referendum which would limit our rights as citizens, as women, as social and moral agents. We must say no to any and all onslaughts on our integrity as women and as citizens of Ireland and of Europe. □

A collection of essays by Irish feminist scholars and activists, *The Abortion Papers: Ireland*, edited by Ailbhe Smyth, has just been published by Attic Press in Dublin at £11.99

Hollywood Feminism? Get Real!

Hollywood's recent women's friendship films have been met with a largely enthusiastic reception from feminists. But how pro-feminist are these female buddy movies? Louise Donald and Joan Scanlon rehearse the arguments between enthusiasts and sceptics

Enthusiast: *Thelma & Louise* is strong, positive and funny. It's a pro-women film that's opened up cinema to women in new ways. Most women I know loved it.
Sceptic: Well, I had a few problems with it.

E: Like what?

S: Like how a male director deals with rape, for a start. What can we seriously expect from Ridley Scott, director of *Bladerunner*? Look at the way the attack itself is edited - it's all legs and fear. And of course we can't have rape interfering with *Thelma's* main appeal for men, her basic sexiness. So let's quickly show her in a bikini by the pool. And we can't have rape turning women into men-haters either. That's a real turn-off and then where's your movie? And where's your audience, more importantly.

E: What do you mean legs and fear? You mean he's eroticised the rape scene? I don't think it could be seen as erotic at all.

Anyway they kill the fucker. I thought you would have liked that bit...

S: Of course I did. But by that time your emotions have been so manipulated you just hope the scene will end, and you're desperate for them to fight back. So you're bound to feel relief, and even a moment's satisfied revenge. That's the only thing that makes it different from other rape scenes.

E: But that's a huge difference. It's not just a film about women as victims. They fight back every time. From the beginning, walking out on the men; killing the rapist; learning how to survive as outlaws; taking control of their own sexuality; behaving badly; getting stropky, and not taking any shit from men, like the scene with the repulsive lorry driver when they blow up his truck.

S: That scene with the trucker was like the worst car ad ever: the women posing sexily on the bonnet, luring this comic character



with the usual *feminine* means, reinforcing the idea that women use sexual power.

E: But the point of all those scenes is that they fight back, and anyway don't you find those moments exhilarating?

S: In one way, yes, of course, but only because it's women behaving in ways we don't expect in movies. But those moments are so brief, so unconnected; ultimately they're really unsatisfying. It's as if there's no difference between holding up a store and losing the police in a car chase, and dealing with sexual harassment and male violence. We're simply supposed to applaud the women getting tough and asserting themselves. Far from challenging their function as objects for the male viewer, they just got sexier - foxy, sassy outlaw babes. It's just another fashion for women.

E: So you want them to have a hair-cut, wear DMs and get a couple of cats?

S: I'd settle for the women making a few connections when it comes to men, especially Thelma... and even Louise, although she's more complicated... You talk about them asserting their own sexuality, and yet Louise seems to think the main problem with Thelma's marriage is that she hasn't had good sex. And we, the viewers, are supposed to take the sex scene with the gigolo thief as liberating for her. It's not accidental that it takes place so soon after the rape scene.

E: But what's wrong with women asserting their sexual desires, and taking back control for themselves. Or do you just hate sex scenes in movies?



S: Most sex scenes in movies are just using women's bodies to turn on the audience. Power is sexy, and it's usually men's power over women. The sex scene in *Thelma and Louise* is filmed in a way which is scarcely different from the rape scene; it's just that we are supposed to read it differently. The sense of danger is here intended to evoke excitement; we are supposed to interpret the aggression this time as passion, and there's the same preoccupation with Thelma's legs and underwear. The intention is to rescue heterosexual sex from the bad press it's been given by the bad guys at the beginning. In other words: "Don't give up girls. Even if you can't find Mr Right, you can still have good sex: just don't have any romantic illusions." God forbid that the women might turn into men-hating dykes. I mean, how many men would pay to see that? I wonder how many men paid to see *A Question of Silence*, even?

E: But what about the scene with the gigolo. Surely that's saying even the good guys can't be trusted. The film is consistently critical of men, and of male institutions such as marriage and the law...

The good cop

S: Where does it suggest those institutions are male? Ridley tries not to make the nasty male characters too real; they're completely hammed up; just stereotypes. The gigolo is just another of the male 'baddies'; the lorry driver and Thelma's husband are caricatured to the point where they're just comic rather than seriously threatening. And they always imply the existence of a different species - 'the nice man'. Enter the Good Cop, alias Ridley Scott.

E: But you're not looking at the relationship between the women; for a start, they're not just seen in relation to men. The film's also about the development of real solidarity between Thelma and Louise. Thelma changes quite dramatically through her relation with Louise; until then she has been repressed and disempowered by her husband. It makes a really important point - that women who are hopelessly impractical have been forced into situations of dependency.



Thelma & Louise

E: I didn't find the relation between the women at all convincing. It's Louise's reaction to the sexual attack upon Thelma which triggers the action, but she never explains to Thelma how this connects with her own past. Instead it is Mr Good Cop who understands and empathises; he plays the benevolent father and psychotherapist. His communication with Louise is implied to be stronger than the connection between the women themselves, even where it's about an experience that they share. Their 'bonding' is only what's required for a buddy movie - nothing deeper than that.

E: Well their relationship meant something to me and to other women in the audience. The ending is a real tear-jerker. And even though they lose in the end, the mood of the film is defiant, and that's what you're left with.

S: But from the moment they become outlaws we know they are going to lose. We know all along they're going to be punished.

E: But that's one of the most powerful statements that the film makes: that the women know they won't get treated fairly within the law, won't be believed; that when it comes to rape, they must have been responsible. It would make that point much less effectively if the women were to escape at the end.

S: No, those are the reasons why they don't report the rape. But that's only a screenplay device to turn them into outlaws. And that's where any realism ends. Holding hands as you drive over a cliff-edge in slow motion is pure romanticism. If it had been two men they would have died heroically, like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid - but Ridley was obviously a little nervous of having a whole posse of police shoot up two

unarmed women - so they do away with themselves gracefully, without any mess.

E: But it was still making good points about male violence and the law, and even if they weren't developed very fully, it worked emotionally, and what more can you expect from a mainstream film? You can hardly expect it to be radical feminist, or it wouldn't be a box-office hit in the first place.

S: That's precisely the problem - what exactly can you expect of a mainstream film, especially when it's produced by a male director?

E: My God, you're a misery. I dread to think what kind of films you'd produce if you had any influence. I expect your idea of an action film is about two women bicycling to the Hen House for a conference. A major box office flop. I suppose you hate *A League of Their Own* as well - and *Salmonberries* and *Baghdad Cafe*.

Roles for women

S: Are you saying they're feminist films?

E: In a way, yes. So they're not polemical; not political in the way that *A Question of Silence* is, but they still have central roles for women and they focus on women's relations with each other. And they consciously avoid abusing women in the way that most popular movies do.

S: That's true but you could say the same about *Bambi*. Most of the films you've mentioned are hopelessly sentimental, and the relationships between the women aren't particularly convincing. It's the usually buddy movie formula: two very different characters coming together in the face of adversity; an unlikely alliance which depends on action and not on dialogue, and which isn't developed in any depth.



Director Ridley Scott (right) with the cast and crew on the set making 'Thelma and Louise'

E: But surely it's still an improvement for women to be relating to each other at all? And there are women at the centre of the films who are shown as strong and independent. Isn't that better than them simply being represented as victims or used as props for men? And it means more interesting work and more influence for women in the industry. Sigourney Weaver actually managed to get some measure of editorial say written into her contract, because she had become indispensable to the *Alien* trilogy.

S: Sure, there are some positive advances for a handful of women in the film industry - but they haven't had much of an impact on the films that are being produced. Don't you think there's a danger of confusing the individual success of certain actors with sweeping claims for the films they are in? It's tempting to believe this, especially where the actors themselves make these claims, like Jodie Foster talking about *Silence of the Lambs*. Of course it makes

a change to hear the word 'feminist' used with conviction at an Oscar film ceremony, but all Jodie Foster meant is that she got a strong central part in the movie. It doesn't alter the fact that the real hero is Hannibal the Cannibal, and the plot revolves around the hunt for a psycho who strips the flesh off women's bodies.

E: I don't agree with you about Jodie Foster. When she uses the word feminist she is aware that she is making a political statement. And it certainly affects her choice of roles; look at *The Accused*, where she was committed to the issue, and clearly influenced what the film was saying about rape. And Geena Davis isn't just interested in her own career either. She recently said she wanted to be part of making movies that wouldn't make women feel violated through seeing them; movies with a positive message for women to take home.

S: Well it'll be interesting to see what kind of films she does make when she's got her own production company. I can't see what

positive message you could take home from *A League of Their Own*. It made me totally depressed. These films don't exploit or humiliate women in all the usual ways, but they don't completely avoid it either. There's that character in *A League of Their Own* who's only there to be laughed at, purely because, by contrast with Geena Davis and Madonna, she is supposed to be ugly. Every time her face appeared on the screen the audience roared with laughter. With that sort of stereotyping going on it's hard to see what the positive message is.

E: But that'll take time. Actors like Geena Davis and Jodie Foster are selecting parts according to their politics, and because they are successful, its going to have some impact on the kind of films that are produced in the long run.

S: It's going to take more than a few famous women actors to change the film industry. All you're pointing out is just how limited their choice is, even where they are in a position to choose. If Geena Davis sits around waiting for her one script a year, and ends up doing *A League of Their Own*, I hate to think what other hideous garbage she must have waded through.

E: They can also have some say in the making of the film and that's a priority for these particular women - to be able to make some kind of political comment. Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon talk about what a major shift it was for them to have some influence over the filming of *Thelma and Louise*.

Hollywood profits

S: Maybe that just means the film would have been appalling without them, and I suppose we should be grateful for that. But that just shows how low our expectations are. Really all we're applauding is just greater celluloid visibility for women - for its own sake. We - and the women acting in these films - are still being exploited by Hollywood. After all, Hollywood is an industry, owned by men, whose exclusive interest is profitability. So we ought to be sceptical when they start making films about women's experience. We have to ask why these mainstream male directors, script-writers and producers are investing (literally) in movies where women have the

central roles, and are apparently relating to each other.

E: Maybe the film industry is beginning to recognize that women are a significant audience, and that they want to see something of their experience represented. It's not just that there are assertive and autonomous women characters in these films - even the possibility of sexual feelings between women is no longer taboo.

S: I think Ruth Picardie hits on the reason - albeit accidentally - in *For Woman*, the latest naughty porn rag for 'liberated women'. In the first issue she wrote about the 'new' woman - the post-post-feminist woman. She's Madonna, Sandra Bernhard, Shakespeare's Sister; she's a 'balls' woman with 'attitude' not politics. And *Thelma and Louise* are included in the list. "Frankly feminism didn't seem to work", she says. "Wearing dungarees didn't stop men raping women." The alternative to being a feminist is to be a "Bitch": "You really couldn't give a toss about toeing the line, whether it's offending moralists or men." If you're a bitch you can be tough and sexy at the same time.



E: I can see how that's fine where Madonna's concerned, but what about k.d.lang? Madonna may have been used in *A League of Their Own* to reinforce the image of the post-feminist woman, and it's true that she has no important relationships with other women in the film. But k.d.lang's role in *Salmonberries* is more complex than that - and surely it's important that an 'out' lesbian appears in a mainstream film, and a film which doesn't make lesbianism titillating for men.



Roswitha (left) and k.d.lang in *Salmonberries*

Marketable lesbianism

S: I think Percy Adlon's reasons for choosing k.d.lang are really dubious. He says he makes movies about women because he 'loves' them, and it's still a male director exploring women's sexuality after all. And the film is constructed around k.d.lang's public image and the sexual ambiguity she consciously exploits. "Is she camp, is she queen?" asks Cherry Smyth in *Lesbian London*. Is she playing with Elvis and marketing an ironic version of both to fans of neither? Or is she producing a marketable version of lesbianism? She happens to have an extraordinary voice, but that's beside the point. The closest she gets to singing in *Salmonberries*, apart from

the theme song, is when when she howls to the moon and sets off all the wild dogs.

E: But the fact that the film is based on her public image is precisely what makes it interesting, because she's a lesbian. So that issue can't be fudged, and they don't have to have a sex scene to prove the point.

S: Yet you can hardly say that *Salmonberries* offers a positive version of lesbianism. k.d.lang plays the part of a social outcast, confused about her gender identity and looking for a route out of emotional isolation. Roswitha, the woman she falls in love with, has lost her husband in Nazi Germany, and has been leading a secluded life in the frozen landscape (read emotional wasteland) and dusty library (read retreat into culture) of a remote town in Alaska. Primitive sexuality meets teutonic sensibility; nature meets culture. What a cliché.

E: What's wrong with showing that relationships between women can exist across difference? One thing I really liked about the film was that it shows two women of different ages and cultural backgrounds helping each other to make sense of their past experience.

S: It's not just that these women don't have anything in common, (That's true of *Thelma and Louise*, and *Bagdad Cafe* also.) As usual, particular differences have to be invented to substitute for gender difference - in order to explain desire between women, Roswitha is blonde, feminine, cultured and articulate, while Kotz is dark, brooding and silent. This means Roswitha gets to talk a lot, and at a significant point in the relationship, without having contributed anything to the conversation, Kotz drops in pseudo post-coital exhaustion. Like the doomed-damned-dead genre of lesbian movies, *Salmonberries* actually shows lesbianism as an absolute 'no-no'. The film is simply playing with lesbianism, not saying anything very new or radical about relationships between women. And if you look at all these mainstream, pro-women films made by men, whatever the relationship between the women, there's always a sub-plot, and the underlying message that they're still, *really* available to men. □

In Memoriam María Elena Moyano

María Elena Moyano was murdered by Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) in February this year. Forty thousand attended her funeral in Lima. In this article the Flora Tristan Feminist Centre calls for condemnation and rejection of Shining Path's political project.

María Elena Moyano has been murdered by Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path). She was 31 years old, mother of two boys aged 11 and 12, a beloved and supportive friend, a leader of the popular women's movement of Peru, and Deputy Mayor of The Municipality of Villa El Salvador (VES), one of the biggest districts of Lima. She was first killed and then her body was blown up with dynamite. The repeated death threats against her were, on February 15 1992, turned into a crime.

Political vision

María Elena's commitment to women and the people began with her first years in the youth movement. This was the beginning of her political experience, at the very moment of the birth of VES. From that time on, María Elena was a leader, first as an adolescent, then as a woman and finally as an important political activist in defence of democratic rights for women and the poor as a whole. In 1984, at 24, she was elected President of FEPOMUVES (Federation of Popular Women of VES), one of the most active and effective women's organisations in the country, and probably in the whole of Latin America. Her political vision - seeking a democratic and pluralistic future - favored links between FEPOMUVES and the various women's organisations operating in the neighborhood. The organisation thus went beyond the original political basis of the federation, the Mothers' Clubs (Clubes de Madres).

FEPOMUVES currently represents around 10,000 women from VES. This is a coalition that carries out the most diverse activities: people's kitchen's (comedores populares), health committees, groups related to the Glass of Milk Programme (Programa del Vaso de Leche), income generating projects, and committees for basic education. In 1990 María Elena left the FEPOMUVES leadership, opening the way to the rise of the new generation of female leaders formed in recent years. Directly after this she was elected Deputy Mayor in the municipality of VES. This was at a particular political moment: the circumstances required the people's leaders not only to seriously commit themselves to the grassroots, but also to take a principled stand on, and pronounce a clear-cut condemnation of, terrorist methods. These are being used by Sendero Luminoso to threaten and control popular organisations they cannot convince with political arguments.

Confrontation and control

The political confrontation between Sendero Luminoso and the organisations of the people has a long and sinister history in Peru. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of killings in which miners' and peasants' leaders, left-wing political representatives, soldiers and policemen of high and low rank, company executives, students and women's leaders have lost their lives.



Villa el Salvador (VES) is one of the most heavily populated districts of Lima Metropolitan Region, with almost 200,000 inhabitants. VES has mushroomed as a squatter settlement since the beginning of the 1970s. It has become an extremely significant and notable example of people's organisation and progressive municipal administration in both Peru and in Latin America more widely.

Sendero is particularly suspicious of women's organisations. The deep roots of these amongst the people, their commitment to democratic values, their distance from and criticism of political violence, their capacity to create new forms of everyday life (in order to counter the adverse economic conditions in the country) are diametrically opposed to Sendero's political aims. Sendero strategy has consequently been a campaign of murder and terror, intended to isolate the leaders from

During the last years of the 1970s, the economic crisis in Peru led to the creation, by popular organisation, of collective people's kitchens, as a survival strategy during the vicious repression of the strikes that culminated in the final defeat of the military government of Morales Bermudez. During the 1980s the people's kitchen model expanded on a nationwide scale. During the same period, the Glass of Milk Programme was established, as a municipal policy for the improvement of infant nutrition in the poor neighborhoods in Lima. The programme now exists on a national scale and is fundamentally dependent on the efforts and creativity of women's organisations.

their base. It also relies on ignominious accusations of betrayal of the popular struggle. Sendero accuses women leaders of reformism, of collaboration with the government, of opportunism (since they are committed to survival and to the improvement of their lives, those of their families and of their communities.)

Sendero does not accept the active role of women in the process of transforming the destiny of the country. It questions the efforts of women's organisations for better education for women and for their full acquisition of citizenship rights. It also accuses women leaders of imposing the use of contraceptive methods so as to diminish the number of children that women should produce for the so-called revolution.

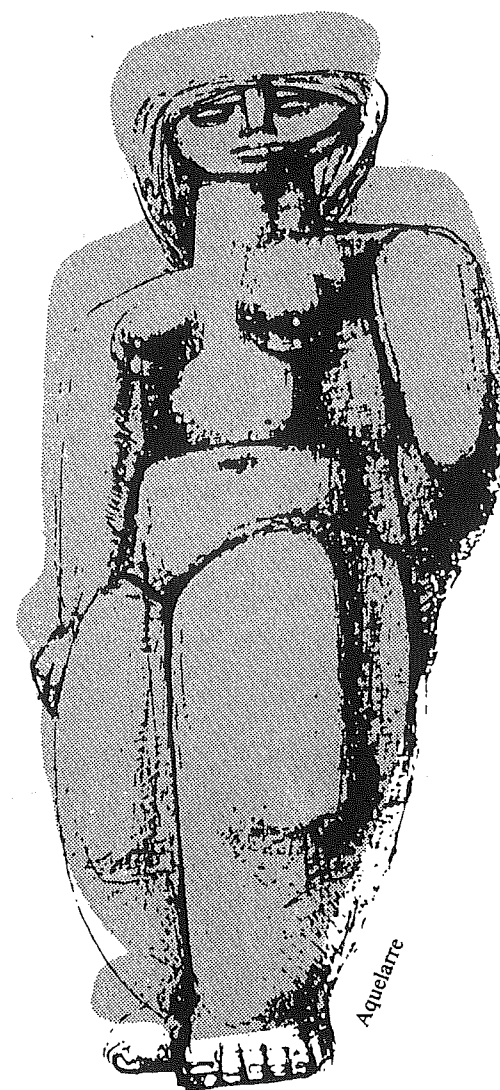
A brief chronology of terror

In mid-1991 Sendero Luminoso began an open attack on the leadership of popular women in Lima. In September, Juana Lopez, coordinator of the Glass of Milk Programme in the Carmen de la Legua District of Lima was murdered after she had denounced the presence and activity of Sendero in the neighbourhood. Beside her corpse was found a dead dog and a poster with the following lines: "Female Traitors Die Like This". The women's reaction was immediate: 30,000 female demonstrators, from the people's and feminist organisations, took to the streets of Lima to denounce and repudiate the bloody methods of Sendero. Maria Elena was a speaker at the final gathering, strongly condemning the demented terrorist activities of Sendero as threatening the very existence of the country.

From then on Sendero extended the death threats to various other female leaders, among them Maria Elena and Emma Hilario - the latter being the President of the National Federation of People's Kitchens. In October, Sendero attacked the FEPOMUVES food storage centres with bombs. In November, as threats against Maria Elena's life intensified, we managed to convince her to leave the country for several weeks. This was intended to provide her some relief from the daily tension she was being subjected to, and to permit us to establish minimal measures to protect her life. Maria Elena returned to Peru ten days later and told us that she would rather lose her life struggling against Sendero than die of feelings of anguish and impotence away from the country.

At 6 a.m. on December 19th, Sendero fired at Emma Hilario with a shotgun in her own house. Miraculously she was not killed, but she was forced to leave the country as the only way of protecting her life.

After that, the feminist movement, as well as the popular women's movement concentrated their attention on the protection of Maria Elena. We managed to obtain two Peruvian Police bodyguards for her. She did not sleep at home or even in the neighborhood. She carried out her activities in the Municipal Council and the



women's movement with considerable precautions. We had the illusion that these measures would protect her life. The death threats continued, however, as did the systematic condemnation by Maria Elena of Sendero's methods and actions. These direct and courageous denunciations inspired her nomination as "Personality of the Year" by the national press.

On February 15th Maria Elena was brutally murdered, the killing being witnessed by her children and people from VES. Sendero had decided on an "armed strike" in Lima for the day before. Maria Elena had once again resisted the proposal, calling upon the people not to accept Sendero's orders. The previous night she had not slept at home. She returned to the

neighborhood during the day, however, to participate in fund-raising activities being organised by the women's committees. During the party, in one of the committee rooms, an armed Sendero group arrived and forced those present to leave the place. Maria Elena stayed alone and, as her children and the women watched, she was machine-gunned and her corpse blown up with dynamite - an act of extreme cruelty that clearly reflects the crazed and perverse inspiration of the Sendero terrorists.

We strongly believe that Maria Elena's death has not been in vain. We believe Peru to be a viable country, a place for women and men - of all ages, races, classes and conditions - to live in. This is what Maria Elena lived for. Presently, in Peru we, as women, have taken on a political role of more importance than ever before in the history of the country. We are leaders, citizens, women's rights activists, organisers and mobilisers of the grassroots efforts to survive, to overcome the crisis and to protect life and livelihoods - as well as the democratic spaces and values that have cost us so much effort to construct.

We are strong, but we are also afraid. We are afraid of losing our friends, we fear putting other leaders in danger, we are frightened because we are not sure we will be able to stop the sinister advance of Sendero Luminoso: we are afraid of not being able to confront obscurantism and terror. The murder of Maria Elena gives us a terrible feeling of impotence and vulnerability, but at the same time it produces anger and the rebelliousness necessary to conquer these fears and keep alive our hope in a better future.

We know we are not alone in this struggle, and we need the expression of solidarity as an homage to Maria Elena, recognising her life and struggle as an international struggle of women in defence of the autonomy of our movements, for the right to decide the destiny of our countries and for the defence of democracy. But most of all we need it as a clear condemnation and rejection of what she was denouncing and rejecting: the perverse, authoritarian and destructive political project Sendero Luminoso seeks to impose on our country. □

From an Action Alert issued by Women Living Under Muslim Laws, an international solidarity network based in France, February, 1992. Reprinted from *Connexions*.

Flora Tristan Feminist Centre
Plaza Hernan Velarde 42
Lima 1
Peru
FAX: (51-14) 339060
Telephone: (51-14) 330694

Why can't a woman be more like a man?

Lillian Faderman's work has fascinated lesbians with her endeavours to understand what it meant for women to love women in past times. Her new book, "Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America" promises much. But Elaine Miller sees serious dangers in accepting Faderman's version of events.

Lillian Faderman's detailed and very readable book, newly available in the UK, claims to trace the changing experiences of lesbians throughout this century in terms of our perceptions of ourselves, the attitudes of the social mainstream towards us and the ways in which both of these have shaped the growth and development of lesbian life, subcultures and politics, especially in the big cities of America. She has based her earlier chapters on written sources, including some fascinating songs and revues from Harlem clubs of the 1920s. The later chapters are based on the "living voices" of the lesbians she interviewed, whom she consciously chose to reflect how varied we are in age, class, race, ethnicity and geographical location.

This is an American history and much of the detail applies exclusively to the United States, such as the sections on Harlem and Greenwich Village. Nevertheless, most of the political issues raised by the book, such as separatism, the nature of feminism, the conflicts stirred by the debates on lesbian sexual practices and the emergence of Queer Nation, are at least as familiar to lesbians and lesbian feminists in Britain and beyond.

Faderman surveys and then evaluates each decade for its positive and/or negative contributions to lesbian well-being. For eight chapters, she skillfully evokes the sense of a unique atmosphere for each period, beginning with the end of the nineteenth century and the era of

romantic friendship, proceeding to the influence of the sexologists, continuing with the 'Lesbian Chic' of the 1920s, detailing the oppressive decades of the 1930s and '40s and arriving at the bar culture of the 1950s and '60s.

Then follow the most controversial sections of the book, although these are not acknowledged as controversial by Faderman. They include a 'critique' of '70s radical feminism, '80s debates on lesbian sexual practices and '90s concerns with 'diversity', 'moderation' and Queer Nation.

Although Faderman might appear, at first sight, to be politically impartial in the first eight chapters of the book, and although she claimed impartiality for the whole of it at a talk for the Lesbian History Group in July 1992, her personal political stance comes through strongly and unmistakably in her evaluation of radical lesbian feminist activism in the 1970s. It is evident in the politically loaded language she uses rather than in any clear declaration of her politics, which would have indicated a greater degree of integrity.

SM enthusiasm

An examination of her particular political focus on the present is necessary to explain her interpretation of the past and, in particular, her evaluation of radical feminism. One aspect of this is the great enthusiasm with which she presents the movement which began in the '80s towards such practices as sado-masochistic sex,

stranger sex, public and casual sex among some lesbians. It is seen as a self-generated phenomenon, unrelated to commercialism, to emerging fascism or to the rise of the political Right in the mainstream. She describes in detail, for example, the rapidly growing business of Kathy Andrews, proprietor of *Stormy Leather* in San Francisco, a shop catering for lesbians into sado-masochistic sex, with no hint of a comment on the commercial impetus behind such a venture.

In Chapter Ten, entitled: "Sex Wars in the '80s", it is the lesbians who copy, in Faderman's words, "the gay male example" who now merit the term "radical": a strange word to apply to such unoriginal and derivative ways of going on. Faderman goes along with this appropriation of the language of radical feminism and even adds to it, giving one of her later sections the title: "The Struggle To Be Sexually Adventurous" and regarding free-wheeling sexuality as our means of liberation, equality and power.

In social constructionist mode, Faderman analyses why the so-called sexual radicals have had only a limited impact on lesbians as a whole. In effect, she asks: "Why can't a woman be more like a man?" The answer she gives is that we, as women, are severely inhibited in "the struggle to be sexually adventurous" (by which she means to experiment with sado-masochistic and stranger sex). We are inhibited, she claims, by our female socialisation. Lesbians get a double dose of this female socialisation, which implies that we have no analysis and no conscious control over our sexual choices.

Of lesbians she writes:

In their approach to sexuality they have been much more like heterosexual women than homosexual men, who historically and statistically have many more brief sexual encounters. When both partners in a couple are female, it appears that the effects of female socialisation are usually doubled, lesbianism notwithstanding. While a few lesbians have been able to overcome that socialisation, most have not yet been able to. (my emphasis)

Since just being a lesbian entails one massive rejection of female socialisation, the above hypothesis, from a lesbian, is remarkable.

Faderman writes almost with exasperation of how:

Another attempt to expand the possibilities of lesbian sexuality - lesbian strip shows - illustrates how female values that reflect the ways women have been socialised can infiltrate even the baldest of male sexual institutions when adopted by lesbians. (my emphasis)

Disaster! The lesbians started "bringing to it traditional female values - nurturing, relating, emotionally touching - that had been totally outside the concerns of such entertainment" - just like those lesbians at the Sutro baths who got bored with the orgy room and sat round in their towels talking! The venture, Faderman writes with regret, soon ceased to be "economically feasible" The new rallying cry: "Let's be like the boys" had been unable to arouse in lesbians "an unalloyed aggressive interest in sex outside love and commitment". Not encouraging news for those cruising lesbians who went shining torches on Hampstead Heath, only to find that the only lesbians to come out of the trees were their mates.

Clearly, the polarity with radical lesbian feminism is precisely here. Faderman is supporting the view that equality, justice, liberation and happiness depend on women changing their sexual behaviour and behaving sexually in the way men have traditionally always done.

Passing praise

A further strand of Faderman's focus on the present is her praise of '90s 'moderation' and 'diversity'. Manifestations of this include new alliances between lesbians and gay men, higher tolerance of bi-sexuality, assimilation into the mainstream of professionally successful lesbians, "who went to work in skirts and high heels, but many of whom could not wait to put on their 'lesbian clothes' when they got home or when they went out for amusement." She describes lesbians, young and old as less critical of society and more happy with their lot, "with little interest in confronting the heterosexual world with personal facts". Glamour dykes and lipstick lesbians being "far less distinguishable from heterosexual women than their 1970s counterparts" have no problem with that.

NATURE OR NURTURE?



read my brain

If you want to get ahead -



Cath Jackson

Far from judging these trends to be worrying for lesbian feminists, Faderman welcomes them with enthusiasm, celebrating the fact that "moderation replaced ideological rigidity" when lesbians were compelled, in conservative times, to become "less doctrinaire about how to be a lesbian." She asserts that "there was insufficient consciousness, moderation and savvy to do all that in the past."

Moderation, although perceived as emerging in a time of right wing conservatism, is not seen by Faderman as a survival strategy but as a welcome retort to '70s radical feminism. With this particular political view of the present, it is no surprise that her "evaluation" of radical feminism turns out to be a sustained attempt to discredit it as a political philosophy and a practical strategy. Her constant and monotonous use of "politically correct" as a term of abuse reveals no awareness (but surely she must have it?) of radical feminism's concern to construct a critique of heterosexuality and patriarchy and to create an alternative.

Reading her description of lesbian feminist ideas and activism in the 1970s, I was at one point reminded of the sheer originality of the vision and the amazing amount of energy it released in so many women. However it is shortly after this point in the book that Faderman begins to use her most emotive and politically loaded language. She writes about "lesbian

chauvinism", "fanaticism", "extremism", "unrealistic notions", based on "excessive youth" and "excessive idealism" when lesbian feminists, with "basic ineptness" and "youthful inexperience", "dreamt grandiosely" of "Utopia".

She makes the same, old, boring mistake (but does she still *really* believe it?) of describing the 1970s as "sexually tame" and lesbian feminists as women who regard the sex in their personal lives as a "triviality". Where *has* she been?

Separatism does not appear in the index, although "sex circuses" merits inclusion. In view of the AIDS epidemic, separatism is perceived as a luxury. It is also blatantly mis-represented as a philosophy urging women to run away from the world. She mentions the film *Family Values*, made by David Stuart, to highlight the way lesbians are supporting gay men through the AIDS crisis and to assert the values of that very different kind of family. This is a reasonable stance to the extent that action around the AIDS horror is action around homophobia. However, Faderman does not choose to see the irony that the family values also being reflected are those of the traditional heterosexual family in which the women subordinate their own needs to those of the men.

At best, she sees lesbian-feminism as having been useful in "lessening lesbian guilt", addressing homophobia in the Women's Movement, sexism in the Gay

movement and serving as a helpful backdrop generally:

They played a kind of "bad cop" in a social drama, which then permitted more moderate activist lesbians to play the "good cop".

Functioning as foils, lesbian-feminists made agitation for simple justice (which was considered outrageously radical at other times) seem tame.

The aims, objectives and strategies of radical lesbian feminism, then, according to Faderman, have no validity in themselves. That feminism, she asserts, was generated by the mainstream liberalism of the 1960s and was, by its nature, doomed to failure. Her analysis here breaks away from any historical underpinning. Her conclusion is that the movement would have failed because of what it *essentially* was regardless of its historical context. Its demise was, she implies, unconnected with the rise of the Right in mainstream politics. She accuses radical feminists of exhausting themselves because of their grandiose notions. She conveniently passes over any consideration of the power of the forces ranged against them. She even attempts to discredit them by describing them slyly in the language of fundamentalism, asserting that radical feminists were "true believers" and like all true believers they were condemned to fanaticism and disappointment.

Past tense

Faderman's analysis is more to do with her political stance than her perspective as a historian. Faderman writes of radical lesbian feminism in the past tense, with no recognition of its recurring nature as a vital part of the many waves of active feminism recurring throughout history. Nor does she acknowledge the rising defiance of women now in response to their sense of the backlash against the feminism of the 1970s and early '80s. Nowhere does she take seriously the legitimacy and continued relevance of those issues which remain the focus for some feminists today: hard issues about living as women in the real world, far distant from Utopia.

By linguistic sleight of hand, Faderman, who needs the word 'radical' at a certain stage in her argument to describe those

lesbians who imitate gay male sexual practices, takes it away, without explanation, from the '70s radical lesbian feminists whom she subsequently refers to as "cultural" feminists. This conflation of cultural and radical feminism is a blatant distortion. She can hardly be ignorant of the differences between them, two of which are fundamental

Separatism, for radical lesbian feminists, is a strategy for changing the way patriarchal society is arranged, in the interests of women. It involves living as a woman, among women, in the world. This is not the case for cultural feminists who choose not to address the problems of living as women within patriarchy but to withdraw and create a women's counter-culture. They are also, by and large, essentialists, believing in a fixed, genetically based female nature.

Faderman's use of the word "cultural" is, at best, a major error of terminology. At worst, it is a major misuse of terminology for political ends. It looks like yet another attempt to "disappear" the kind of feminism - radical feminism - which is least popular because it is most threatening to the social and political mainstream. It is yet another example of backlash.

There is also the question of her sources. On whose experiences and perceptions of '70s radical lesbian feminism does she base her evaluation? What are the current political stances of these particular women? What did she do with their answers? Why is there no reference to books and other written sources which provide a different critique of radical feminism?

At the end of all her research and deliberations, Faderman concludes that "the only constant truth about the lesbian in America is that she prefers women". This is the distillation of wisdom that she offers us. It is a conclusion that massively begs fundamental questions. A writer more interested in feminism might have explored the notion that there might be a different constant: a connection between the love and passion women feel for each other and their consciousness of female oppression within patriarchy, however variously and at whatever level that oppression is perceived and experienced.

women of the world unite

HANG ON TO
YOUR CHAINS...



WE KNOW
WHAT WE'RE
DOING...



Instead, she admits the possibility that lesbianism might be biologically determined, believing "that some women, statistically very few, may have been 'born different' ie genetically or emotionally 'abnormal.'" However, she describes herself, at the moment, as a convinced social constructionist who sees sexuality as always related to currents in the historical mainstream. To feminists, it is politically alarming, though not surprising, that she even admits the possibility of a genetic base to lesbianism.

The book is a disappointment as a sequel to *Surpassing the Love of Men*. (The new book casts an ironical shadow over that title now.) It lacks the incisive original-

ity and pioneering quality of that classic. Even the fascinating earlier chapters gain their fascination from absorbing details rather than from new thoughts, containing as they do what has been sometimes thought but never so well expressed nor so colourfully documented.

Being so readable and accessible, this book will no doubt be widely influential. It will find its place in the canon of Women's Studies. It will please the mainstream, being conciliatory rather than challenging. Even more significantly, it supports the idea that men had it right about sex all the time. All that lesbians have to do is follow. It is a dangerous book. □

Lillian Faderman (1992) *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, Penguin Books, £9.99

"We are workers, not slaves"

I am one of 120 workers, mostly women, who have been arbitrarily sacked from the 800-strong workforce in the laboratories of Avon Cosmetics in Mexico City. We are living with our families in Zocalo Square (the site of the laboratories) in order to highlight our situation. I would like to appeal for the solidarity and assistance of Irish & British trade unionists. For the most part we are working mothers, single mothers, divorced, who have to take care not only of our children but of our parents and other family members. Our rights have been violated by the secretary of our union El Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores de Grasas, Aceites, Jabones, Perfumes, Productos y Laboratorios Quimicos, Industrias Conezas y Similares de la Republica Mexicana in collusion with the Avon management. We are requesting justice from our civil and national authorities; also from our countrymen and women and from anyone in the world who will listen to our story.

We are asking that people recognise that we are workers, not slaves, and that we are trying for justice and a recount of the votes in the union elections which imposed a union leadership on us that is corrupt.

The arbitration committee is not

listening to the demands of the majority of the workers.

Most of all we'd like it to be made known on an international level that the civil authorities, from the Mayor up to the Secretary of Labour, to the President, have not been present during this labour conflict, and they have not been complying with their obligations to the labour movement.

Although we are getting advice from the Union of Free Workers (Sindicato de Obreros Libres) we are not necessarily looking for the support of union officials of the rank-and-file, to demand the reinstatement of our fired workers.

The way we are surviving is that we are requesting the co-operation of people in the street, and of all other workers. We haven't even been paid for the two weeks of work done before we were fired; we haven't any strike funds; we are living on the generosity of other citizens.

We want it made known on a world level that this is not an isolated case. There are a number of companies, international, transnational companies, that operate in the same way and fire us unjustly. Because we are poor, because we have no money, our voices are never heard.

Rosamaria Guerra

Write letters of protest to:
Avon Cosmetics, S A de C V,
Apartado 591, Mexico 1, D.F.
and to Mexican Embassy, 8
Halkin Street, London SW1X
7DW

The Amazing Deconstructing Woman

Publishers' catalogues and the media suggest feminism has been taken over by yet more esoteric language: that of postmodernism. Stevi Jackson gives us a critical guided tour of this latest fashion, and suggests we recognise its strengths but confront its weaknesses.

Postmodernism is an intellectual fashion which has established a very strong position within academic feminism and which is well entrenched in women's studies courses. Postmodernists are attempting to set the agenda for feminist theory, to define what feminist theory is. Books like *Feminists Theorize the Political* and *Destablizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, whose titles might lead us to expect consideration of a range of feminisms, turn out to be exclusively concerned with postmodernism. Judging by the amount of space such books occupy in their catalogues, this trend is becoming big business for publishers. Postmodernist ideas have spread beyond the confines of academia and academic publishing and are well represented in the media, cropping up for example on *The Late Show* and *The Guardian Women's Page*. This article is an attempt to explain what postmodernism is about, and why, although I find some of its ideas interesting, I think it is potentially dangerous for feminism.

Postmodern feminists are currently telling us that feminism "belongs in the terrain of postmodern philosophy" (Flax 1990) and that feminism can "benefit from a closer association" with postmodernism because it corrects some of our regrettable "essentialist tendencies" (Hekman 1990). This is all rather bewildering and mystifying to those who have not been initiated

into the secrets of postmodernist thought. The condescension with which we are told that we stand in need of correction is, to say the least, irritating.

The impression that we are being chastised by our intellectual superiors is heightened by the language postmodernists use. Their work is far from accessible to the general feminist reader. It has its own peculiarly slippery style of argument and its own esoteric vocabulary. To be fair, some, like Chris Weedon, have tried to make their work accessible; but unfortunately she too still sets herself up as "an expert bringing male theory to the women's movement" (Brodribb 1992). And make no mistake, this is a very masculine theoretical tradition. The points of reference for most postmodern feminists are not other feminists, but theorists such as Lacan, Derrida and Foucault.

While I do not support a kneejerk reaction against male academics: a position which rejects all masculine thought as useless by definition, these thinkers are not simply men. They are men who speak from a position which is not sympathetic to feminism. Indeed they can be downright misogynistic. Why then, are so many women sitting at the feet of these masters? Why are they adopting such missionary zeal in bringing their work to the attention of feminists?

WOMAN

What is postmodernism?

First we need to clear up some confusion over the term 'postmodernism'. There are at least three senses in which it is used, only one of which concerns me here.

First postmodernism refers to an artistic and architectural style which borrows from and reassembles elements of past styles.

Secondly it refers to the notion that we are living in a postmodern world. There are different variants of this 'postmodernity' thesis, suggesting for example that we are living in a post-industrial age, that capitalism has become less organized, that new technologies and new working practices have radically altered the relations between classes, or that social divisions are now based around the sphere of consumption rather than production. The overall picture is of a more fragmented and fluid society.

The third sense of the term, the one which I am dealing with here, refers to a body of theory which is also sometimes called poststructuralism. The word postmodernism is now more frequently used since it carries with it some of the ideas of the second usage - that old certainties have gone and therefore a new mode of theorizing is appropriate.

The structuralism to which this theory is 'post', and from which it often takes its point of departure, concerns ideas about the structures underlying all human language and culture: for example Saussure's structural linguistics. It is also 'post' another form of structural explanation, marxism, and its adherents and sympathisers include many who used to call themselves marxist feminists. One such is Michèle Barrett who has recently announced that she is "nailing (her) colours to the mast of post-marxism". In Britain at least many postmodernists are, however, quite happy to use psychoanalysis - also a modernist, structural theory - and do not call themselves post-Freudian. Freud seems to have escaped the fate of being superceded.

The modernism to which this body of theory is 'post', and from which it distances itself, is usually defined in relation to ideas which emerged from the 18th cen-

tury, in the period known as the Enlightenment. This is a useful starting point since most postmodernists define their project in opposition to what they identify as Enlightenment thought, questioning ideas about language, the self, and truth which derive from that period. The basic tenets of postmodernism can be thus outlined as follows:

1. Language does not simply *transmit* thoughts or meaning. Thought and meaning are *constructed through* language, and there can be no meaning outside language. Meaning is also, for all these theorists, in some way relational. A word, for example, means something only in relation to other words. Meaning is never fixed. Nothing has a stable, unambiguous meaning. Hence the word 'woman' does not of itself mean anything. It is defined in relation to its opposite 'man' (which also has no fixed meaning) and means different things in different contexts. It can even refer to a man, as in the derogatory phrase 'old woman'.

2. There is no fixed, unitary, rational subject. There is no essential self which exists outside culture and language. Subjectivity is constituted through language and culture and is fragmented and always in process. There is no place from 'outside' language and culture from which we can 'know' anything (including ourselves). Our identities and knowledges of the world are products of the way in which we are positioned (or position ourselves) within knowledge and culture. (This is referred to as 'de-centring the subject'.) Our own experience as women cannot therefore be taken as an unproblematic starting point for feminist theory and politics, because that experience has no given meaning, because there is no experience outside language and culture. For example, doing housework for a man can (theoretically) be 'experienced' as a labour of love *or* as exploitative drudgery, depending on whether it is understood in terms of a discourse of traditional femininity or a feminist discourse.

3. There is no possibility of objective scientific 'truth' which exists out there waiting to be discovered. Knowledges are 'discursive constructs'. This idea comes from Michel Foucault, for whom discourses

Trouble & Strife

Index to issues 22 - 24

A

Adkins, Lisa: 'Hors d'oeuvres', 24:6

Africa: See South Africa; West Africa; Black women

Ahluwalia, Kiranjit: case of - Margot Farnham, 'Still working against the grain' (interview with Southall Black Sisters), 23:41

- Sandra MacNeill, 'Change the law (I)', 22:7

AIDS - and homophobia - Deborah Cameron, 'Old het?' (book review - "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", by Adrienne Rich), 24:41

Ainley, Rosa: 'Who's conning who?', 23:11

Anon: 'Back behind the wheel', 23:9

Attar, Dena: 'The demand that time forgot', 23:24

Aung-Thwin, Maureen: 'Power kept powerless', 22:22

B

Berer, Marge: 'A feminist population policy?', 22:36

Beres, Zsuzsa: 'Hungary for a change', 23:16

Black women - Margot Farnham, 'Still working against the grain' (interview with Southall Black Sisters), 23:41
- see also Racism; International Feminism

Bly, Robert - "Iron John" - reviewed by Sigrid Rausing, 'Men of tin', 22:40

Body politics - Cath Jackson, 'Broadening out' (interview with Rachael Field), 23:18

- Lisa Adkins, 'Hors d'oeuvres', 24:6

Botcherby, Sue: 'Thelma and Louise go shooting' (film review - "Thelma and Louise"), 22:15

Brooks, Libby: 'Finding feminism', 23:30

Burma: democratic struggles - Maureen Aung-Thwin, 'Power kept powerless', 22:22

C

Cameron, Deborah: 'Old het?' (book review - "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", by Adrienne Rich), 24:41

Campbell, Beatrix: 'After Margaret', 22:3

Childcare - Dena Attar, 'The demand that time forgot', 23:24; 'Baby Talk', (letter) 24:3

Cooper, Sarah: 'Who's conning who?', 23:11

D

Delphy, Christine: 'Mother's Union?', 24:12

Detective fiction - Magda Devas, 'Dyking the detectives', 22:27

Devas, Magda: 'Dyking the detectives', 22:27

Domestic violence: see Violence against women

F

Farnham, Margot: 'Still working against the grain' (interview with Southall Black Sisters), 23:41

Fat politics - Cath Jackson, 'Broadening out' (interview with Rachael Field), 23:18

Feminism - and black women - Margot Farnham, 'Still working against the grain' (interview with Southall Black Sisters), 23:41

- and New Age philosophies - Daphne Francis, 'Crystal balls', 22:45; 'New age nuisance', (letter), 23:3

- history and recent developments - Beatrix Campbell, 'After Margaret', 22:3
'Re-writing history' (letter), 23:2

- Shocking Pink, 'Writing our own

history', 22:49; 'After Bea' (letter), 24:2
- Rebecca Walker, 'The third wave', 23:36
- Christine Delphy, 'Mother's Union?', 24:12
- Elaine Hawkins, 'Dicing with Madonna', 24:25
- **in academia** - Betsy Stanko, 'Angst and academia', 22:19
- **personal experiences** - Libby Brooks, 'Finding feminism', 23:30
- Cath Jackson, 'School for scandal' (interview with Open University women's studies tutors), 24:46
Field, Rachael: 'Broadening out' (interviewed by Cath Jackson), 23:18
Force feeding - Karis Otobong, 'Fattened by force', 23:8
Francis, Daphne: 'Crystal balls', 22:45

H **Hall, Alison**: 'Abuse by lesbians', 23:38
Hawkins, Elaine: 'Dicing with Madonna', 24:25
Heterosexuality: Deborah Cameron, 'Old het?' (book review - "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", by Adrienne Rich), 24:41
- see also Lesbianism

Hill, Anita v Clarence Thomas: case of
- Anita Hill, 'Heart of the beast', 23:33
- Rebecca Walker, 'The third wave', 23:36

Homicide: Legal defences - Jill Radford and Liz Kelly, 'Change the law (II)', 22:12
- Sandra MacNeill, 'Change the law (I)', 22:7
- see also Thornton, Sara: case of; Ahluwalia, Kiranjit: case of; Violence by women; Violence against women

Homosexuality: see Lesbianism
Hungary: Zsuzsa Beres, 'Hungary for a change', 23:16

I **Incest**: 'Fighting back', (letter), 23:3
- see also Sexual abuse of children

International Feminism - Burma: - Maureen Aung-Thwin, 'Power kept powerless', 22:22
- **Ireland** - Ailbhe Smyth, 'Hail Mary - a president of women', 23:4
- **Hungary** - Zsuzsa Beres, 'Hungary for a change', 23:16
- **Russia** - Olga Zhuk, 'Coming out in the cold' (interviewed by Cath Jackson), 24:20
- **Saudi Arabia** - Anon., 'Back behind the wheel', 23:9
- **South Africa** - Mary Masechaba Mabaso, 'Gang rape in the townships' (interviewed by Diana Russell), 24:30
- **West Africa** - Karis Otobong, 'Fattened by force', 23:8
Ireland: Ailbhe Smyth, 'Hail Mary - a president of women', 23:4

J **Jackson, Cath**: 'School for scandal' (interview with Open University women's studies tutors), 24:46
'Broadening out' (interview with Rachael Field), 23:18
'Coming out in the cold' (interview with Olga Zhuk), 24:20

Jacobsen, Yola: 'Women first: a national speak out for women with learning difficulties', 24:35

K **Kelly, Liz**: 'Demons, devils and denial', 22:33
'Change the law', 22:12

L **Learning difficulties** - Yola Jacobsen, 'Women first: a national speak out for women with learning difficulties', 24:35

Lesbianism - Libby Brooks, 'Finding feminism', 23:30
- Deborah Cameron, 'Old het?' (book review - "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", by Adrienne Rich), 24:41
- **abusive relationships** - Alison Hall, 'Abuse by lesbians', 23:38
- **and art** - Cath Jackson, 'Broadening out' (interview with Rachael Field), 23:18

- **and popular music** - Rosa Ainley and Sarah Cooper, 'Who's conning who?', 23:11
- **and Women's Studies** - Cath Jackson, 'School for scandal' (interview with Open University women's studies tutors), 24:46
- **in detective fiction** - Magda Devas, 'Dyking the detectives', 22:27
- **Russia** - Olga Zhuk, 'Coming out in the cold' (interviewed by Cath Jackson), 24:20
- **young women** - Shocking Pink, 'Writing our own history', 22:49

M **MacNeill, Sandra**: 'Change the law (I)', 22:7

Madonna - images of female sexuality
- Elaine Hawkins, 'Dicing with Madonna', 24:25

Maleness - myths and images - Sigrid Rausing, 'Men of tin', 22:40

Masculinism - Sigrid Rausing, 'Men of tin', 22:40

Masechaba Mabaso, Mary: 'Gang rape in the townships' (interviewed by Diana Russell), 24:30

Motherhood - Dena Attar, 'The demand that time forgot', 23:2; 'Baby Talk', (letter) 24:3
- Christine Delphy, 'Mother's Union?', 24:12

Murder: see Homicide

Music industry - and lesbians - Rosa Ainley and Sarah Cooper, 'Who's conning who?', 23:11

N **New Age philosophies - and feminism**
- Daphne Francis, 'Crystal balls', 22:45; 'New age nuisance', (letter), 23:3

Nurseries: see Childcare

O **Otobong, Karis**: 'Fattened by force', 23:8

P **Population control** - Marge Berer, 'A feminist population policy?', 22:36

Pornography - South Africa - Mary Masechaba Mabaso, 'Gang rape in the townships' (interviewed by Diana Russell), 24:30

Power politics - Elaine Hawkins, 'Dicing with Madonna', 24:25

R **Racism** - Margot Farnham, 'Still working against the grain' (interview with Southall Black Sisters), 23:41
- **and education** - Yola Jacobsen, 'Women first: a national speak out for women with learning difficulties', 24:35
See also Black women

Radford, Jill: 'Change the law (II)', 22:12

Rape: see Violence against women, Incest

Rausing, Sigrid: 'Men of tin' (book review - "Iron John" by Robert Bly), 22:40

Religious fundamentalism - Margot Farnham, 'Still working against the grain' (interview with Southall Black Sisters), 23:41

Reproductive rights - Marge Berer, 'A feminist population policy?', 22:36

Reproductive technologies - Christine Delphy, 'Mother's Union?', 24:12

Ritual abuse - of children - Sara Scott and Liz Kelly, 'Demons, devils and denial', 22:33

Robinson, Mary - President of Ireland
- Ailbhe Smyth, 'Hail Mary - a president of women', 23:4

Russell, Diana: 'Gang rape in the townships' (interview with Mary Masechaba Mabaso) 4:30
Russia: Olga Zhuk, 'Coming out in the cold' (interviewed by Cath Jackson), 24:20

S **Satanic abuse - of children** - Sara Scott and Liz Kelly, 'Demons, devils and denial', 22:33

Saudi Arabia: Anon., 'Back behind the wheel', 23:9

Scott Sara: 'Demons, devils and denial', 22:33

Self advocacy movement - Yola Jacobsen, 'Women first: a national speak out for women with learning difficulties', 24:35

Sexual abuse - of children - Sara Scott and Liz Kelly, 'Demons, devils and denial', 22:33

- **South Africa** - Mary Masechaba Mabaso, 'Gang rape in the townships' (interviewed by Diana Russell), 24:30

Sexual harassment - Rebecca Walker, 'The third wave', 23:36

- **in academia** - Betsy Stanko, 'Angst and academia', 22:19

- **at work** - Anita Hill, 'Heart of the beast', 23:33

- **in tourism** - Lisa Adkins, 'Hors d'oeuvres', 24:6

Sexual politics - Elaine Hawkins, 'Dicing with Madonna', 24:25

- Deborah Cameron, 'Old het?' (book review - "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", by Adrienne Rich), 24:41

Shocking Pink: 'Writing our own history', 22:49

Smyth, Ailbhe: 'Hail Mary - a president of women', 23:4

South Africa: Mary Masechaba Mabaso, 'Gang rape in the townships' (interviewed by Diana Russell), 24:30

Southall Black Sisters: 'Still working against the grain' (interviewed by Margot Farnham), 23:41

Stanko, Betsy: 'Angst and academia', 22:19

T **Thatcherism** - Beatrix Campbell, 'After Margaret', 22:3

'Thelma and Louise go shooting' - film, reviewed by Sue Botcherby, 22:15

Thornton, Sara: case of - Sandra MacNeill, 'Change the law (I)', 22:7

V **Violence by women** - Sue Botcherby, 'Thelma and Louise go shooting', 22:15

- Alison Hall, 'Abuse by lesbians', 23:38

- see also Thornton, Sara: case of;

Ahluwalia, Kiranjit: case of

Violence against women - Jill Radford and Liz Kelly, 'Change the law (II)', 22:12

- Sandra MacNeill, 'Change the law (I)', 22:7

- Sue Botcherby, 'Thelma and Louise go shooting', 22:15

- **black women** - Margot Farnham, 'Still working against the grain' (interview with Southall Black Sisters), 23:41

- **South Africa** - Mary Masechaba Mabaso, 'Gang rape in the townships' (interviewed by Diana Russell), 24:30

- see also Sexual harassment at work, Force feeding

W **Walker, Rebecca:** 'The third wave', 23:36

West Africa: Karis Otobong, 'Fattened by force', 23:8

Women's magazines - Shocking Pink, 'Writing our own history', 22:49

Women's Studies - Cath Jackson, 'School for scandal' (interview with Open University women's studies tutors), 24:46

Women's Liberation Movement: see Feminism

Y **Young women** - Shocking Pink, 'Writing our own history', 22:49

Z **Zhuk, Olga:** 'Coming out in the cold' (interviewed by Cath Jackson), 24:20

(ways of thinking and talking about the world) produce objects of knowledge, rather than describing pre-existing objects. (There is, in any case, no objective 'knower' standing outside the culture which produces her; nor is there a transparent language in which to convey some absolute truth.) Knowledges and discourses can be deconstructed - taken apart - in such a way as to reveal that they are not universal truths but rather discourses constructed from particular positions. This leads to the sceptical dismissal of grand theoretical 'metanarratives', like marxism, which purport to explain the social world. At its most extreme this scepticism implies a denial of *any* material reality.

On the basis of these propositions, postmodernists oppose all forms of 'essentialism', any perspectives which posit social groups or social structures (like 'women' or 'patriarchy') as natural objects which exist independently of our understandings of them. Feminist postmodernists, for example, contest essentialist conceptualisations of "women": the idea that women exist as a natural category. They seek to 'deconstruct' gender categories, to reveal the ways in which they have been culturally constructed, to demonstrate that they are 'regulatory fictions' rather than natural facts.

The idea of deconstruction derives from the work of Jacques Derrida. In general it means looking closely at any text, argument or assumption in order to reveal the inconsistencies and paradoxes which underpin it. Hence statements which define what women are, can be shown to contain contradictory assumptions. For example, we are told that femininity is 'natural' and yet women are constantly exhorted to work hard at producing femininity. This suggests that 'femininity' is not natural but rather the product of specific discourses which define it. For Foucauldians there is also the issue of power: the power inevitably at play in the production and deployment of discourse. Knowledge and power are inextricably linked (often the form 'knowledge/power' is used to convey this), hence Judith Butler's conceptualisation of gender as a *regulatory* fiction

So what's new?

Some feminists, like Jane Flax, argue that feminism is necessarily postmodern; that postmodernism and feminism share a scepticism about knowledge, truth, language and the self. To some extent Flax is correct. Feminists have long questioned what counts as knowledge and have revealed the androcentric bias underlying much of what passes for truth in, for example, scientific 'proof' of women's inferiority. We have long known that language is not a neutral medium of communication, which is why we have been concerned to challenge linguistic sexism. We know that meaning is not fixed: that what it means to be a woman can shift, and hence we have always contested essentialist understandings of gender. We are also aware that there is no unitary, consistent self. What feminist has not experienced desires and feelings at variance with her political ideals?

To some extent, then, postmodernists seem to be reinventing the wheel. In part this is because many of them come from a literary background where challenges to ideas of individual creative genius seem revolutionary; and where the ideas that our subjectivities are socially and culturally constituted is novel and innovative. This, however, is not news to feminist theorists whose background is more sociological - nor to most feminist activists. Yet postmodern feminists are keen to distance themselves from other feminists and to demonstrate that others harbour essentialist assumptions about femininity and masculinity. Radical feminism in particular is castigated for the crime of essentialism.

What usually happens in postmodernist accounts is that 'straw women' are set up to be knocked down. Mythical radical feminists are cited who apparently believe in women's natural difference from men. Those who do espouse this view are in fact very few: some eco-feminists, some American radical feminists, and some European 'difference theorists' who take their cue from Luce Irigaray's ideas about women's difference being suppressed and silenced by patriarchal culture. As a few postmodernists themselves admit, 'essentialism' is in danger of becoming an over-used term of



Lisa Adkins

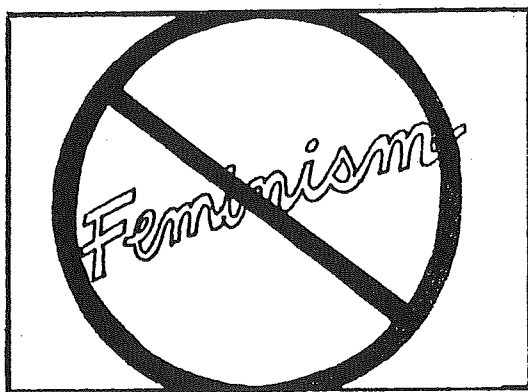
abuse.

Most radical feminists, however, actually argue that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed and are just as concerned as any postmodernist to challenge essentialist conceptions of women. Some have consistently argued this on a theoretical level - for instance those associated with the journal *Questions Féministes* as long ago as the 1970s. However, despite the customary genuflections to 'French theory' on the part of postmodernists, they have, with a couple of exceptions (Diana Fuss and Judith Butler), ignored the work of these French feminists.

This is part of a wider problem with postmodern feminism: its refusal to accord academic credibility to feminist theory unless it is affiliated to the work of fashionable male theorists. Many feminists, for example, were challenging essentialist conceptions of sexuality and questioning the idea of sexual repression well before we had heard of Foucault. Yet it is his work on the history of sexuality which gets credited with this as an original idea, as if no one else (and certainly not radical feminists) could possibly have thought of it.

Deconstructing feminism

So if the charge of essentialism is misplaced, if we are all engaged in deconstructing the category 'women' and questioning the basis of knowledge, what's new about postmodern feminism? What is new is a theoretical project which takes this deconstruction and scepticism to such lengths that it threatens to undermine the possibility of feminist knowledge and feminist politics. Three features of postmodernism are particularly crucial here.



Firstly de-centring the subject means recognizing that subjectivity is culturally constituted, that there is no fixed feminine identity, that what it means to be a woman, for any one of us and can shift, can be contradictory. This is fine, but the emphasis on the temporary, fluctuating character of identity can undercut any positive identities we construct for ourselves. In particular it challenges the possibility of our taking a collective stance as women, or even as specific categories of women such as Black women or lesbians. As Nancy Hartsock and Liz Stanley have pointed out, just when the Women's Liberation Movement had made it possible to speak confidently for ourselves as women, we are told that such a stance is theoretically and politically suspect.

Secondly, postmodernism stresses meaning is not fixed in objects or events, but is a product of language and discourse. So meaning shifts, and can be contested. Feminists have, of course, consistently challenged the meanings of dominant patriarchal discourse. But if no one set of meanings is more valid than any other, who is to say that feminist meanings are any more valid than anyone else's? What basis is there for arguing that a feminist reading of forced sexual intercourse as rape is any more valid than the rapist's interpretation of it as pleasurable seduction? Regarding meaning as *entirely* fluid can mean denying even the starkest of material realities. It is this emphasis on shifting, multiple meanings (along with a Foucauldian notion of power as deployed from multiple locations rather than having a material basis) which leads some postmodern feminists to defend pornography and sado-masochism (eg. Gayle Rubin).

This view of meaning connects with the third aspect of postmodernism - scepticism about truth and knowledge. Postmodernist suspicion of metanarratives, of explanatory theory, means raising questions not only about the possibility of any theory of women's subordination but of any systematic description of it or even that 'it' exists at all. From a postmodernist position, a statement that 'women are oppressed' is problematic, for what do we mean by women, and by whose criteria are they/

we oppressed? Once they go this far, postmodern feminists' claim to be feminists becomes dubious. Indeed we might wonder why they cling to the identity 'feminist' and why they consistently address an audience of other feminists, when they call all categories and identities into question.

Feminist challenges to malestream knowledge have usually been mounted not on the assumption that no valid knowledge is possible, but on the basis that feminist knowledge, which takes account of women's experience, can be more valid than what has previously passed as knowledge. But when 'women', 'experience' and 'knowledge' all become problematic concepts, we can find ourselves with no place from which to speak as women and from which to make political demands or to challenge patriarchal structures (which themselves are held to have no existence except within feminist discourse).

The problem all this raises can be explored by looking more closely at debates on the category 'women'.

The amazing disappearing woman

Although some feminists argue from a position of women's essential differences, most I think would agree that gender is culturally constructed. We are all aware that what it means to be a woman changes from one culture to another, from one historical era to another, from one social context to another. We have also all, I think, become increasingly conscious of differences among women. I would not want to minimize the painful divisions amongst us that these differences have sometimes produced, but it should also be noted that feminist activists have often found productive ways of working together across our differences.

The question of these differences has, however, become central to the postmodern feminist position. They warn of the

dangers of using 'women' as a unitary, absolutist category and of making statements about 'women' in general which actually only apply to particular women - white, Western, middle-class and heterosexual women. Trying to come to terms with the complexities of these differences is a real problem for feminist theorists, but I am not convinced that postmodernists have the solution. In fact, although they harp on and on about the arrogance of those who construct general theories of women's subordination, or who dare to speak for all women, they themselves are one of the most exclusive feminist groupings in existence. Their own work silences other women very effectively, and they are as guilty of white, middle-class heterosexist bias as anyone else.

To illustrate this problem I'll take a specific example. Denise Riley's recent book opens with reference to a speech made by Sojourner Truth, a black American feminist, in 1851. Riley doesn't bother to quote the speech - apart from the refrain "Aint I a Woman?" - but simply uses it to give political credibility to her historical deconstruction of the category 'women'. Here, in part, is what Sojourner Truth said:

That man over there says women need to be helped into carriages and over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages... or gives me any best place! And aint I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And aint I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And aint I a woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And aint I a woman?

This speech does of course challenge the naturalness of the concept of 'women', pointing out that the idea of women's 'natural' frailty is demonstrably false. It is

WOMAN! WOMAN!

also, however, an attack on the exclusivity of that category. Sojourner Truth's words can be read as a plea to be included in the category, as an affirmation of her womanhood, rather than a statement that 'women' do not exist. According to Riley, a new Sojourner Truth might say "ain't I a fluctuating identity?"! It is, as Tania Modleski comments, rather odd that a writer concerned to demonstrate the historical variability of the category 'women', should reach out

across racial lines, historical eras and national boundaries to claim commonality of belief with a black female abolitionist... (to) envisage a "new" Sojourner Truth, abolitionist, feminist, ex-slave. It also demonstrates a stunning lack of sensitivity to the fact that a black female slave in 19th century America had "little freedom to 'fluctuate' in any way".

Treating the category 'women' as entirely fictional in this way ignores the material realities which constrain us into membership of that category. Moreover, for some women those constraints are more total than others. As Modleski also says, it is only white, middle-class, academic feminists who have the luxury of being able to deny that they are women. And even they, as Riley herself recognizes, can on occasion be forcefully reminded that they are women in the eyes of most of the world.

It is not only 'women' that get deconstructed by postmodernists. The use of other categories can also be defined as essentialist, so that positive political identities that women have constructed for themselves, for example as Black women or lesbians, can be invalidated. Hence academic theorists can be seen as setting themselves up as 'certified deconstructors' of other women's experience (Stanley 1990).

Challenging postmodernism:

I do not, however, think it is useful to respond to the threat of postmodernism by asserting the existence of some essential womanhood which is suppressed by masculine theory - which is effectively the position taken by Somer Brodribb in one of the first feminist critiques of the misogynistic traditions of thought from which postmodernism developed. Brodribb's book is impressive in many respects, but it is mar-

red by an assumption that such theory, and indeed male domination in general, derives from something essential about masculinity: a male denial of nature and repudiation of the mother, rooted in men's reproductive experience. For Brodribb, anti-essentialism equates with being anti-women. For example, she criticises Rubin's notion of a sex/gender system because of its reliance on the idea of "the exchange of women" as underlying all human culture, a notion which derives from Claude Levi-Strauss. Her objection is not that this theory presupposes what it sets out to explain (ie women would have to be already subordinate in order to be exchanged as objects). Nor does it worry her that this explanation is so universalistic that it represents little advance on the idea that women are naturally subordinate. What she objects to is that it is insufficiently biological, that it repudiates the body, that it represents kinship as an abstract relation between men. According to Brodribb, "kinship is not an abstract concept for women: it is experienced materially as well as socially in the process of birth".

It is precisely this mode of thinking that Christine Delphy critiqued so effectively in the last issue of *Trouble and Strife* (No. 24). Like Delphy, I would argue that this perspective undermines rather than furthers the cause of feminism. Brodribb objects not only to postmodernism, but to any perspective which claims that gender is socially constructed. This she sees as a denial of the female body which is "sexism not liberation", which implies "a liberal laissez faire gender economy" and which privileges "culture over nature once again". Has she not noticed that the idea of women's 'natural' difference continues to be used to justify our subordination? That it is continually invoked by the Right in attempts to roll back whatever precarious advances feminism has gained?

Brodribb correctly castigates postmodernism for its anti-materialism, but her idea of materialism is not mine. She equates the material with the politics of reproduction, with the material fact that women give birth and men do not. Her position is thus reductionist. Male theory and male dominance are reduced to men's

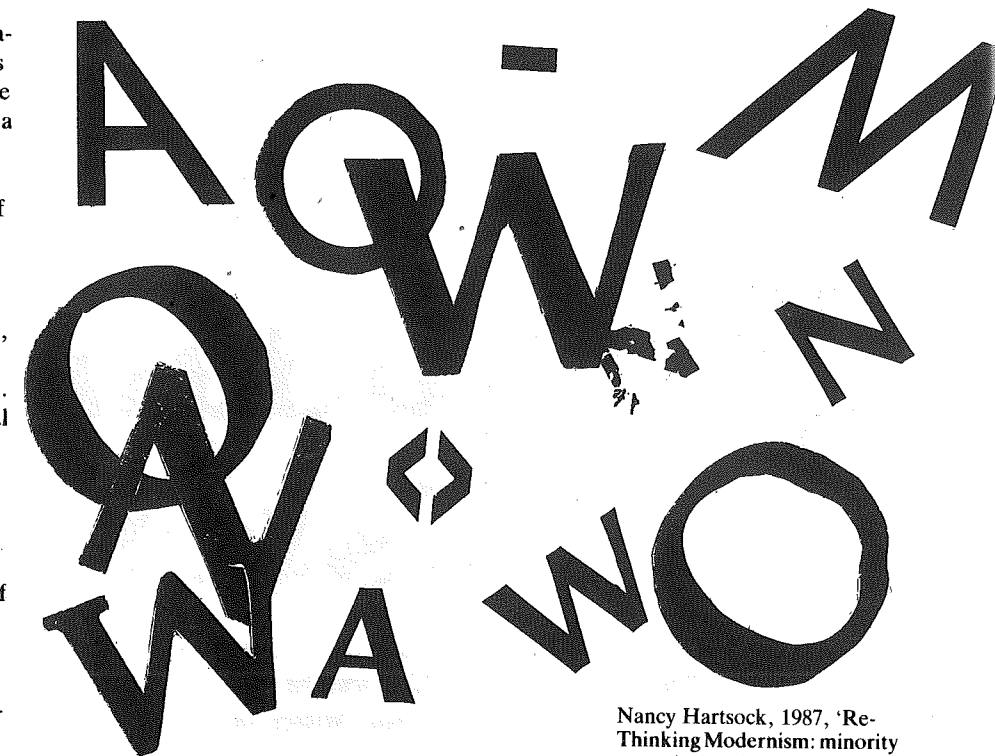
reproductive experience. The material advantages men gain from the subordination of women, the uses they have for us other than as bearers of their children? The meaning of being a woman, the basis of a feminist ethics and politics denied by male theory, gets reduced to our reproductive experience. Where does this leave those of us who are not mothers? Are we not women?

There is an alternative position, properly materialistic and anti-essentialist, deriving from the work of feminists such as Christine Delphy and Monique Wittig. They maintain that gender has no natural basis, but they differ from postmodernists in claiming that it rests on material foundations. For Delphy and Wittig, sexual difference is the product, not the basis of, women's oppression. Women exist as a political category (and a class) because of patriarchy. Within this formulation it is possible to retain a conceptualisation of womanhood as a material reality without positing some essential, pre-given femininity

In placing the social construction of gender in its material context, we avoid a major danger inherent in many attempts to deconstruct gender categories - that of denying women a position from which to speak. This difficulty can only be resolved from a non-materialist position by a politics of essential difference - the position Brodribb adopts. A materialistic stance on the other hand, allows us to think of 'women' as a socially constructed category without denying the existence of women. Gender categories may be cultural constructs; but they are not merely 'fictional'. Our lives are materially bounded by membership of those categories. Such a perspective also allows us to take note of the real, material differences among women rather than relying on the more abstract, discursively produced 'differences' of postmodernism.

Conclusion

Although postmodernists claim that they are sceptical of claims to truth, they make their own truth claims. Although they claim to be anti-essentialist, they essentialize other feminisms, especially radical feminisms. We are told with certainty that



radical feminists all appeal to some essential female nature, that we all deny differences among women, and so on. We are told, in effect, that we are essentially essentialist.

The charge of essentialism is thus used to deny the existence of women as a political constituency and to tell us we must think in terms of gender relations rather than women's oppression. The language in which we are told these things excludes and silences many women and brands other feminisms as unworthy of serious attention. This may earn kudos within male dominated academia, but it plays into the hands of those who would like to see women's studies de-radicalized, those who find the study of gender less threatening than knowledge constructed from women's standpoint, in a word those who have no interest in women's liberation. We are facing the threat of *Feminism without Women* (the title of (Modleski's book). 'Women' are being deconstructed out of existence and 'gender' is replacing women as the starting point of feminist analysis. The logical outcome of postmodern feminism is indeed postfeminism. □

Michèle Barrett, 1991, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault*. Cambridge: Polity.
 Michèle Barrett & Anne Phillips (eds), 1992, *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary feminist debates*. Cambridge: Polity.
 Somer Brodribb, 1992, *Nothing Mat(t)ers: a feminist critique of postmodernism*. Melbourne: Spinifex.

Judith Butler, 1990, *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
 Judith Butler & Joan W. Scott (eds), 1992, *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge.

Christine Delphy, 1984, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*. London: Hutchinson.

Christine Delphy, 1992, 'Mothers\Union?', *Trouble and Strife*, 24.

Jane Flax, 1990, 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory', in L. Nicholson, *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge.

Foucault, Michel, 1981, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*. Harmondsworth: Pelican.

Diana Fuss, 1988, *Essentially Speaking*. New York: Routledge.

Nancy Hartsock, 1987, 'Re-Thinking Modernism: minority vs. majority Theories', *Cultural Critique*, 7.

Susan J. Hekman, 1990, *Gender and Knowledge: elements of a postmodern feminism*. Cambridge: Polity

Luce Irigaray, 1985, *This Sex which is Not One*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Tania Modleski, 1991, *Feminism Without Women: culture and criticism in a 'post-feminist age'*. New York: Routledge.

Denise Riley, 1988 *Am I that Name? Feminism and the category 'women' in history*. London: Macmillan.

Gayle Rubin, 1984, 'Thinking Sex: notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality', in C. Vance *Pleasure and Danger: exploring female sexuality*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Liz Stanley, 1990, *Feminist Praxis*. London, Routledge.

Chris Weedon, 1987, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Monique Wittig, 1992, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.



Sudanese Sisterhood

In Sudan women have experienced oppression from patriarchal and religious laws. Fatima Ibrahim describes how the Sudanese Women's Union has fought and won battles for women's social and political rights.

Women in Sudan experience discrimination before they are even born. At the marriage celebration, guests and friends of the newly-wed couple sing a popular song in which they wish the groom a baby son as his first child. After marriage, discrimination becomes even more apparent at the family house, where the largest and most beautiful quarters of the house are usually reserved for the man and his guests. Girls are denied even the right to choose their husbands and in most cases they are not even consulted about their marriage. The father usually has the final say in these matters. Moreover, all family laws are designed in men's favour. As mothers, women do not enjoy equal rights to those of the fathers. The man has the right to marry more than one wife, and the right to divorce at any time, while the 'obedience law' forces the woman to go back to her husband even if she is no longer interested in him and does not want to live with him any more.

Furthermore, family laws grant the mother custody of her son until seven years old and the daughter until nine years old.

Only a few years back, there was no law to make fathers pay maintenance for their children after divorce. Ironically, even in the southern region, where the majority of the population is Christian, men also marry more than one wife. This is especially so because women represent an important economic force. They provide valuable work in agricultural and food production. Thus the more wives the man has, the greater his wealth and the larger his number of children, which gives him social status.

Women also face other forms of social discrimination. Women's illiteracy is still higher than men's, and the number of girls' schools are far less than those for boys. The majority of women do not go out to work except for a tiny minority whose work is confined to nursing and education. Working women used to get four-fifths of men's wages for the same kind of work and qualifications. Women were denied equal opportunities for training, promotion, pensionable service and the right to paid maternity leave. The monthly contract work arrangements in operation at that time forced women to quit their jobs after

marriage and they could lose their job at short notice.

In agricultural areas, on the other hand, women's work is considered part of a man's work, and they do not get paid for the amount they carry out in the fields. In western Sudan, for example, women do all the agricultural work, while men do nothing but sit there all day long and enjoy themselves by drinking local beer and chatting to their friends. At the end the man takes all the income, and marries another wife to increase his income. As a result the number of husbands killed by their wives is increasing rapidly.

Independence

This was women's situation before independence was achieved from British rule - which lasted 58 years, up to 1956. In 1952 the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU) was formed and endorsed the following objectives:

1. Women's liberation from oppression both at home and in society at large.
2. Equality with men with respect to economic, political, cultural and family rights and with respect to decision making at all levels and in all fields.
3. Protection of family and children's rights.
4. Protection of political independence by achieving economic independence and establishing democracy, social justice, preservation of human rights and support for world peace and fraternal ties and friendship between nations.
5. To achieve economic development based on self reliance that could lead to a positive change in Sudanese society, that would achieve the following for the Sudanese people:
 - a) eradication of poverty and improvement of living standards.
 - b) overcoming unemployment and making women an influential economic, political and social force.
 - c) eradication of illiteracy among all people quickly and for good.

- d) provision of a free and compulsory education to people of both sexes on an equal basis.
- e) provision of clean and safe drinking water and electricity to areas where these essential needs are not available.
- f) provision of healthy and comfortable housing.

Through lack of experience, however, the Union started first by promoting reformist and charity work, by opening classes for adult education, illiteracy eradication and raising funds to assist poor families. It was soon realised that these kinds of activities would not solve women's problems or promote equality, and charity would never eradicate poverty. As a result, the Union introduced some changes to its tactics by conducting a peaceful demand campaign, to go side by side with the work it had already been doing, so as to put pressure on the government to change its policies and laws concerning women. Thus, a campaign to win women voting rights was launched in 1953 with a view to transforming women's votes into a political force that parties would compete to win. To assist in this campaign, the Union started publishing its official magazine, *The Women's Voice*, to explain to women the real issues behind their oppression and what is actually meant by women's liberation. It also brought to the forefront women's and children's rights; and explained the close correlation between women's issues and the policies and legislation of the ruling classes; and highlighted the relationship between these issues and the prevailing general economic, social and cultural situation.

As could be expected, the Union's demands for women's political rights were met with strong opposition from the Islamic Front and some Islamic leaders, on the grounds that Islam allows neither these rights nor women's equality in general. The Union realised that the best way to fight off the attack was to use the weapon of Islam itself to defend women's rights. To achieve this, we studied Islamic teaching carefully and could prove that Islam did not prohibit women's political, economic and social rights, nor prefer men to women. Furthermore, we proved that Islam does



not permit polygamy: it is the religious leaders who interpret Islam in a way that suits them. This argument was finally won by the Union, and Sudanese women won the right to vote in 1954. The Union then continued its campaign and won the support of the trade union movement, youth and student organizations, as well as the support of some of the political parties and national figures.

In 1958 the Prime Minister of the civilian Umma Party government handed over power to the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, General Ibrahim Abboud, after being defeated in parliament over American aid to Sudan. On coming to power, the military government accepted the American aid and one of its first tasks was the dissolving of all political parties and trade unions, including the SWU. As a result, the Union went underground and started to organize women to take part in the opposition to the military regime. For the first time in the history of Sudan, women took part in a popular revolution. This overthrew the military regime in 1964.

After that women were given the right to vote and the right to stand for election. Two women stood for election in 1965: one representing the Islamic Front, which previously opposed women's political rights, and the second was me. The result of these elections was a defeat for the

representative of the Islamic Front, and I became the first Sudanese woman member of parliament.

Rights for Women

In parliament one of my tasks was to put women's other rights before the assembly. Outside parliament, a committee for the consolidation and defence of working women's rights was formed, which included representatives from trade unions, workers' organizations, youth and students and some national figures. As a result of all this work and campaigns, it was possible to achieve the following for women:

1. The right to enter all economic spheres, except those prohibited by the International Labour Organisation.
2. Equal pay for equal work.
3. Equal opportunities in training and promotion.
4. Pensionable service.
5. A fully paid maternity leave of up to eight weeks.
6. The abolition of the monthly contractual work arrangement for women.

On the family laws front, the result of our campaign was the following:

1. An act was passed giving girls the right to be consulted before marriage and stating that they must agree to be wed to their chosen husbands without pressure. Any marriage that does not take this into account is considered illegal and can be contested in court.
2. Abolition of the 'Obedience Law' which forces women to go back to their husbands against their wishes.
3. Women's right to divorce in cases of abuse or if the woman does not want to live with her husband any more, provided that she gives him back the dowry.
4. The custody law has changed, giving women custody of their sons up to the age of 17 and daughters until they get married.

5. Children were given the right to maintenance after divorce provided it does not exceed half of the father's income.

As a result of this women were able to enter all employment spheres including the police and armed forces, judiciary, buying and selling and hotel management. Women also started to take part in public life, political parties and all activities inside and outside Sudan.

In May 1969 President Numeiri came to power after a military coup. He made a deal with the Union, to put all women's achievements into practice in return for Union support for his regime. But less than a year later he changed his mind and withdrew all that was agreed. As a result the Union withdrew its support for the government and tension grew between the Union and the government.

The result was the banning of the Union's activities in 1971 and the forming of an official new women's organization, financed by the government. The Union went underground again and started to organize women to take part in the struggle to overthrow Numeiri's regime. During that period the leadership of the Union was subjected for the first time in the history of Sudan to detention, imprisonment and expulsion from government service.

Islamic clamp-down

In September 1983, following the Islamic Front's entering Numeiri's government, they passed what are known as the "September Laws" for implementing Islamic rule. The first victims were women. Special emergency courts were set up to implement the newly introduced adultery law, together with other laws. According to this law, a woman is accused of committing adultery if she has merely been seen in the company of a man from outside her immediate family, even if this takes place in public. The penalty for this offence is a fine of 100 Sudanese pounds, plus 80 lashes and a prison sentence for one year.

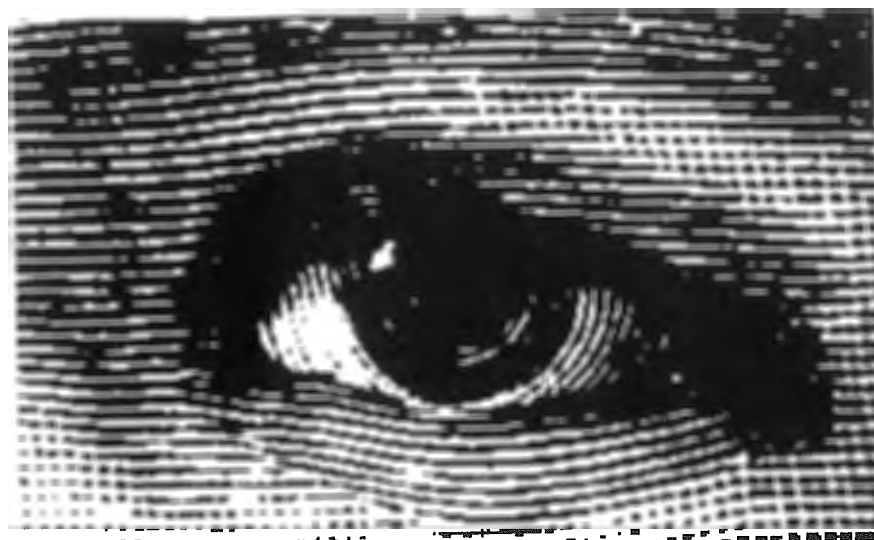
Wrongful convictions led to an increase in the number of suicides among women, especially as the accused were publicly shamed in the media. Of course the hidden purpose of passing this law was

to make all families stop their girls from going out, in order to protect the family reputation.

Another law passed at that time was to forbid women travelling alone. They were also expelled from public service and from the judiciary. The government reduced the number of girl students attending university education by increasing the pass mark for them and made it difficult for them to get access to higher education. All these laws remained in force even after Numeiri was removed and throughout the Sadiq El Mahdi government, which came to power after the March/April uprising in 1985. People were still tried according to these laws, but sentences were frozen.

Following the National Islamic Front coup in 1989 under the leadership of General Omer El Bashir, the activities of the Union were once again suspended and its leadership became a target for detention and imprisonment. Women from other women's organizations were also imprisoned. This regime has also, for the first time in the history of Sudan, threatened women detainees with rape and torture.

In the last few months the government ordered women to wear Iranian black costumes, saying the Sudanese national costume was not Islamic because it does not cover the face. To enforce this law, students and working women were threatened with expulsion from institutions and government service if they did not wear the Islamic costume. Moreover any woman found not wearing this costume in public would be flogged and beaten in public. To stop this barbaric attack on women's liberties, the Union circulated leaflets explaining to women the main motives behind this law. It revealed that the benefactor from this costume Law was the National Islamic Front party, which had been given a huge number of these Iranian costumes free, and was planning to sell them at very high prices. Hence this legislation. The Union called it the "Commercial costume" instead of the "Islamic costume". The Union and other women's organizations sent a memorandum to General Omer El Bashir and organized a demonstration. Under this pressure, the government has finally abandoned the idea. □



Hunger strikes and children's rights

Young women with anorexia nervosa are routinely force-fed in hospital. Jo Bridgeman examines children's legal rights to determine how they are treated by adults and draws links with the suffragettes' use of hunger strikes to protest against women's inequality.

Marie Leigh was forcibly fed whilst in prison, involving violent physical assault which caused her extreme pain. She brought a civil action against the prison authorities claiming damages for assault and seeking an injunction to prevent repetition of the events which had led to the alleged assault. The judgement of the court explains that she was originally forcibly fed through the mouth:¹

(The doctor) forced her mouth open with his finger and formed her mouth into a kind of pouch, and the wardress put milk and brandy into it. She was tied to the chair with a towel and held there.

She was also forcibly fed through the nose:

The tube was then inserted into one of her nostrils, she resisting with all her might. Great pressure was used, but the tube produced such great pain, as was evident to the doctors that it was withdrawn. She coughed, was sick, and suffered great mental and physical pain. She seemed stupefied and the drums of her ears seemed bursting, and there was pain in the throat.

The year was 1909 and Marie Leigh, a suffragette, had been imprisoned following conviction for disturbing a meeting held

by Mr Asquith, and for resisting arrest. Marie undertook a hunger-strike protest because she considered herself to be a political prisoner and, as such, believed that her sentence of hard labour was an infringement of her rights. The Lord Chief Justice told the court that it was the duty of the prison officials to preserve the health and lives of those in custody. He said medical evidence indicated that at the time Marie was force fed it was dangerous to allow her to abstain from food any longer; only if she had been forcibly fed when it was not necessary should she receive damages. The jury, instructed that it was for them to decide whether she had been improperly treated, decided that she had not.

The description of steps taken, over 80 years later to artificially feed J, a young woman suffering from anorexia, do not sound any the less dreadful:

the girl had to be "forcibly fed" by nasal tube. Her arms were encased in plaster to stop her removing the tube and causing sores by picking her skin. She later lost the weight she gained and it was thought that she might have to be tube-fed again.²

Refusals and resistances

Food and intake of food can be used for purposes far more complex than to provide basic nutrition, as is shown by these examples of a suffragette refusing to eat and of an anorexic denying herself food. Voluntary abstinence from food may be used in hunger strikes as a political weapon against imprisonment and unjust authority, however, it may be a far more complex matter. As Hilda Bruch writes in *Eating Disorders*:

Though anorexic patients may die from their condition it is not death they are after but the urgent need to be in control of their lives and have a sense of identity.³

For anorexics, refusing food may be a revolt against authority; denying themselves food in an attempt to take control over their lives. These women feel their bodies are the only thing over which they have any power; the only thing which they possess to control. Force feeding those who refuse food shows the drastic steps which society will take to secure conformity.

The case of *Re J (A Minor) (Medical Treatment)*, 10 July 1992, considered whether treatment can legally be forced upon anorexics. However, it has wider implications, not only in terms of the legal right to force children and young people to submit to medical treatment, but also the right of young people to exercise control over their own lives and bodies. And under the Children Act 1989, you are still legally a child up to the age of 18.

Anorexia is a medical condition about which there is disagreement as to its cause and its real nature, and for which there is no established or universally effective treatment. Anorexia is variously explained as a manifestation of depression; a personality disorder; a cry for help; a way of avoiding growing up; an attempt to meet perceived parental demands; or a response to the pressures of the 'beauty myth', taking to extreme the desire to conform to the ideal presented by omnipresent media images. One fact which is certain is that the majority of sufferers from anorexia are women. Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth*⁴ estimates that there are 3.5 million sufferers from anorexia in Britain, 95% of whom are women. Food exerts a powerful control over the lives of many other women;

Naomi Wolf further estimates that 50% of British women suffer from disordered eating.

The decision of the Court of Appeal in *Re J* removes from young women suffering from anorexia the right to decide whether they should receive medical treatment.

J is a young woman of 16 years suffering from anorexia. The local authority, in whose care she was, applied to the court for leave to administer medical treatment to her under s100(3) of The Children Act 1989. J did not want to be sent to a special unit for eating disorders, as proposed by the local authority, but wished to stay in the adolescent psychiatric unit where she had been treated for the past year. The question before the court in J's case was whether, in the light of these provisions, the court had the jurisdiction to order that J be given medical treatment against her vehemently expressed wishes. The effect of the judgement is to uphold existing power relationships, allowing parents and the judiciary to over-ride the decisions of teenagers.

Patriarchal precedents

Whilst nobody wants to see young women die through denying themselves food, can we support a decision which ignores an



individual's fundamental right to self-determination? In J's case she was not in fact at immediate risk of death - nor was she refusing all treatment. She wished to determine how she was treated and where. Before a doctor treats a patient she must obtain the consent of that patient to treatment so that she does not commit a civil or criminal battery by the touching which is involved in examination and treatment. Underlying this legal requirement is the ethical principle of self-determination: a patient can give or withhold her consent to treatment advised by the doctor.

The question of the ability of children to consent to medical treatment is one that has been considered by the courts on several occasions. J is an orphan who was in local authority care at the time her case came to be decided by the court. Therefore the question before the court was simply what powers it had in exercising its inherent jurisdiction. Lord Donaldson addressed this issue briefly, saying that their powers were "theoretically limitless" and he was in no doubt that they had the power to override the refusal of a teenager to consent to medical treatment. The judges sitting with Lord Donaldson in the Court of Appeal, Nolan LJ and Balcombe LJ, took a more considered approach, looking in greater detail at how exactly the court should exercise its powers. The Children Act 1989 introduced as a central principle the importance of ascertaining the views and wishes of children in relation to decisions about them. The Court of Appeal took account of this in considering the weight which should be given to the wishes of the teenager in question.

However, the majority of the Appeal Court judges went on to express an opinion upon the powers of parents where the child, aged between 16 and 18, was refusing to give her consent to medical treatment. The court followed the approach taken in R's case. In this case, heard by the Court of Appeal last year, it was held that both the court and parents of children under the age of 16 have the right to over-rule a refusal to consent to medical treatment.⁵ The case was essentially concerned with the powers of the court in wardship, but the Court of Appeal went further and consi-

dered the powers of parents in such a situation. The Master of the Rolls, Lord Donaldson MR, expressed the opinion that there are a number of people who can give their consent to the treatment of a child under the age of 16. Only if all these people withhold their consent will treatment be prevented. If the child refuses consent but her parents give the required consent, the case becomes an ethical but not legal dilemma and so one which the doctor must resolve. Bearing in mind the pro-treatment attitude of doctors, it is likely that this dilemma will be resolved by treating the child according to the wishes of her parents. Thus, once a child has reached a level of intelligence and understanding where she is mature enough to form a rational view of medical treatment, she is not in fact allowed to determine whether or not she should be treated; she may only give consent.

The Court of Appeal was not bound by this reasoning when considering J's case, but followed it rather than the approach taken in Victoria Gillick's case.⁶ Gillick's crusade brought to the House of Lords the question whether children under the age of 16 could give their consent to contraceptive advice and treatment. Their Lordships considered the issue as applied to medical treatment generally and determined that if a child has sufficient intelligence and understanding to fully understand what is proposed, she can give the required consent to medical treatment. As such, it is a landmark decision in upholding the right of children to bodily autonomy.

In J's case, Lord Donaldson decided that the Family Law Reform Act 1969, which applies to children over the age of 16, should be interpreted so that a teenager's refusal to consent to medical treatment is not an effective veto, as there are others who can give the required consent. Section 8 makes it clear that a teenager *can* give consent to medical treatment and, in this respect, her wishes prevail over those of her parents. It states:

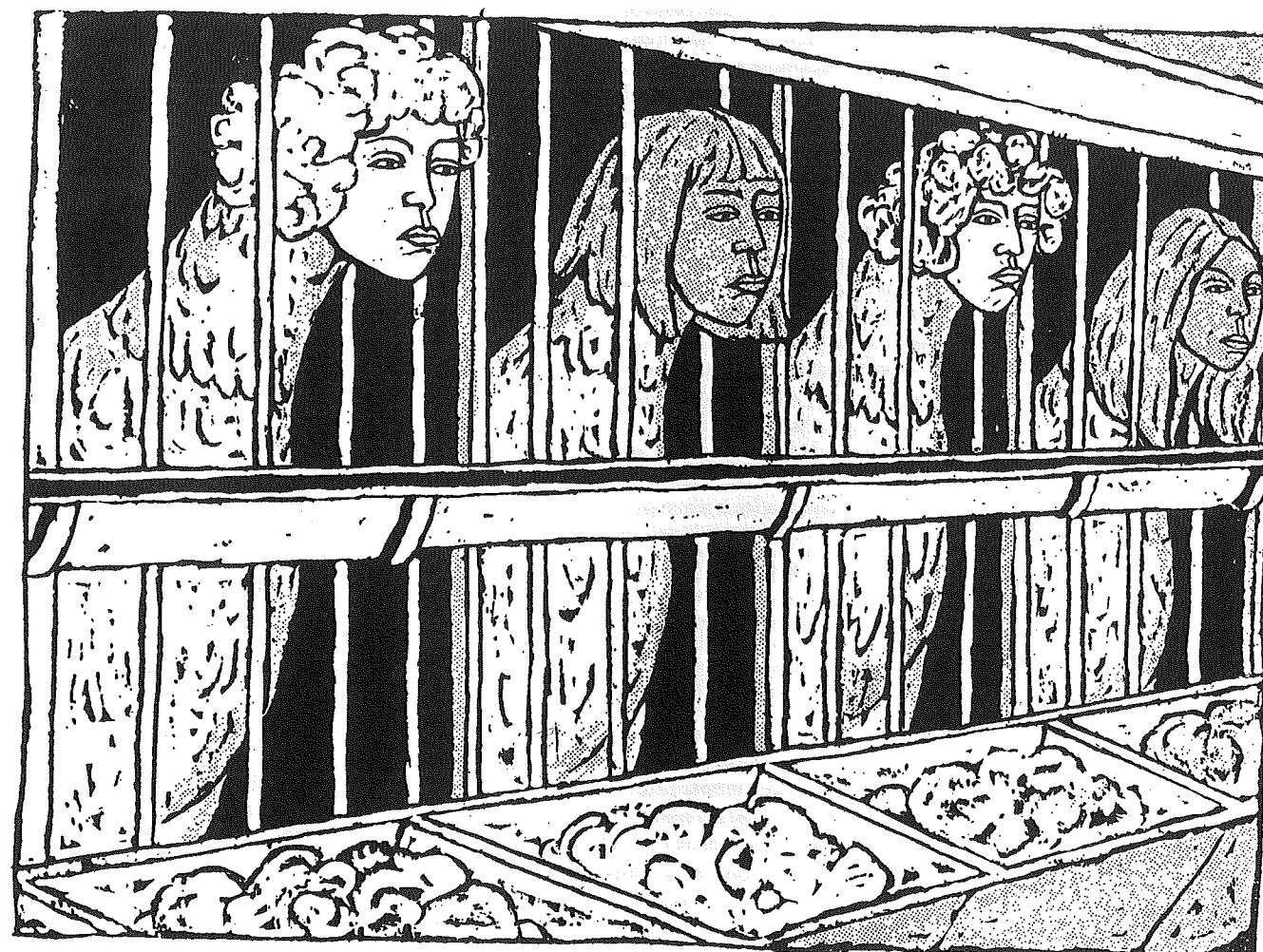
The consent of a minor who has attained the age of sixteen years to any surgical, medical or dental treatment which, in the absence of consent, would constitute a trespass to his person, shall be as effective as it would be if he were of full age; and where a minor has by

virtue of this section given an effective consent to any treatment it shall not be necessary to obtain any consent for it from his parent or guardian.

However, what was not clear from the terms of the statute was whether the same applies if the teenager is *refusing* to give her consent to medical treatment. The ruling in J's case was that if a teenager gives her consent, a doctor may treat without committing a battery upon her patient. However, if the teenager refuses to consent to treatment the doctor may still act upon the wishes of her parents. But should either the courts or parents have powers which essentially remove from teenagers the right to determine how and, indeed, whether they live?

Whilst it is questionable whether a pre-dominantly middle-class, middle-aged, white and male judiciary is best able

to make decisions about the future of teenagers, at least the potential for them to decide whether teenagers should receive medical treatment is limited. There will be far more cases where parents will over-ride the decisions of their children. By enabling parents to over-ride the wishes of their teenage children not to receive medical treatment, the rights of those teenagers are severely diminished. This can be seen as a political decision on the extent to which the law will respect the autonomy of teenagers. Teenagers have, by law, the right to decide that they should be given medical treatment; and the law also confers certain other rights upon them, making it lawful for them to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol and drive a car. But the Appeals Court's paternalistic decision *Re J* means that teenagers have no rights when it comes to refusing



Notes

1. *Leigh v Gladstone* (1909) 26 TLR 139
2. *The Independent*, 30th June 1992
3. Hilda Bruch *Eating Disorders* (Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1974)
4. Naomi Wolf *The Beauty Myth* (Chatto & Windus, 1990)
5. *Re R (A Minor) (Wardship Medical Treatments)* (1991) 4 All ER 177
6. *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbeck Area Health Authority and another* (1985) 3 All ER 402
7. *The Independent*, 1 July 1992
8. Elaine Showalter *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (Virago, 1987)

medical treatment. A fundamental aspect of their lives is thus denied them.

J, 16 years old and fully able to understand what was being proposed, was refusing to consent to medical treatment. The law over-rode her wishes in favour of those of the judiciary, the local authority, and the medical profession. The judgement did include a reservation - a nod in the direction of The Children Act 1989 - that those making the decision whether to treat must place great weight on the "very important factor" of the wishes of the teenager. However, with a parent urging treatment and a medical climate which is essentially pro-treatment, there seems little hope that the wishes of the teenager will be heard.

From control to action

Concern with food can be interpreted as a response to the powerlessness felt by young women; an attempt to take control over some aspect of their lives. In exercising its patriarchal control over this one young woman, and forcing her to eat, the court reinforced her sense of powerlessness. J emphasised that she wanted to be able to decide when she would eat; she wanted to retain control over her self; she wanted to retain power. Forcing treatment upon J merely reinforces her perception that she lacks these very things, by taking the decision out of her control. It reinforces her ambiguous feelings about her capacity for self-directed action - a capacity which must surely be developed if she is to recover from this illness? Writing about the effect of the Court of Appeal judgement, *The Independent* concluded:

Very little imagination is required to understand her reluctance to eat. Her self-esteem must be somewhere near zero, her view of the world and the value of life about as negative as it is possible to get, her feeling of loss of control almost total. Food may be the last area of her life over which she feels she has power, and even that power is now being taken from her by the court.⁷

At the turn of the century the suffragettes refused food as a political protest. As Elaine Showalter comments they deliberately used the elements of hunger, rebellion and rage in the tactics of the suffrage campaigns: "The hunger strikes employed the symptomatology of anorexia nervosa for a feminist cause".⁸

As the suffragettes were fighting for women to be allowed some control over their lives through the vote, the anorexic fights to control one aspect of her life. This court ruling will not stop young women, constantly bombarded with images of what women should look like, from starving themselves. What is needed is no less than a complete reversal of cultural images and societal attitudes so that young women are given real choices about their lives, and a re-assessment of the relationship between the generations, to give young adults the self-determination to which they are entitled. Perhaps then young women will be able to appreciate the power which they have as individuals and be able to use it effectively, through explosive action rather than self-destruction. □

Women's Studies Network (UK) Annual Conference 16-18 July 1993

Call for papers

Proposals for papers for the Women's Studies Network (UK) Annual Conference, to be held 16 - 18 July 1993, are invited for the following conference strands:

- 1) Violences
- 2) Lesbians in Theory
- 3) Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, Black Studies
- 4) Women and Religions
- 5) Women and Cultural Production
- 6) Managing Women

Papers by women from diverse ethnic backgrounds, of diverse ability and sexual orientation for all six strands are most welcome.

Please send proposals (up to 200 words) and any queries to:

Gabrielle Griffin, Dept. of English,
Nene College, Moulton Park,
Northampton NN2 7AL.

Hens in the Heather

In this review of "Grit and Diamonds", Libby Brooks looks at Scottish feminist history in the making.

I have just returned from a women's lunch at Strathclyde University where I was speaking on the topic "Is feminism still relevant in Scotland?" The response was, not surprisingly, a resounding "yes", but what I found disturbing was the fact that this question had to be asked in the first place. As a member of the *Harpies and Quines* collective, producing Scotland's new feminist magazine which was launched in May of this year. I have no doubts that the Women's Liberation Movement still has a huge role to fulfil within our society. The demand for this new magazine, and the responses to it from women throughout the country, indicate that it is already filling a substantial gap in Scottish female culture. But when did this gap occur?

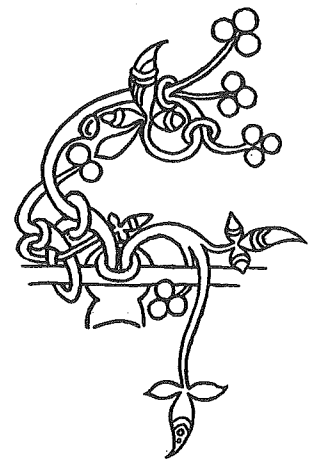
I knew exactly why those women at Strathclyde could feel discouraged. They are women who are still exploited at home and in the workplace, who still face isolation when they identify themselves as feminists, who are still not safe to walk the streets, who still see the top-shelf porn when they buy their morning papers. On the surface, it is possible to view the last decade as stagnant years for feminism, when women were bewildered and immobilised by the "well now you've done it all so you can go home again" attitude of many institutions. But *Grit and Diamonds* is a relief to read, as it shows that, despite this negative climate, there was still plenty bubbling just beneath the surface.

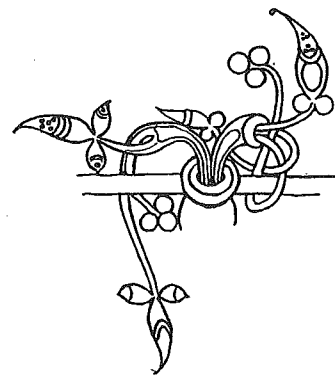
As a relative newcomer to women's action, the time I have spent with *Harpies* represents some of the most challenging,

full and exciting months of my life. I've changed a lot, I've learnt a lot, and when I leave next week to begin my studies in England I will take with me the strength, support and friendship which I have found with this group. I have never before seen the amazing things that can happen when women commit to a vision and to each other. And so, for me, this is the essential relevance of feminism in Scotland today - it is about visions and reality, about every woman who has ever felt like I do, and about the fact that I know I shall come back soon.

Grit and Diamonds, published by the sadly now defunct Stramullion Press, takes a retrospective look at the relevance of feminism in Scotland between the years of 1980 and 1990. It consists of over 70 articles, ranging from interviews and campaign notebooks to group discussions and overviews, which examine the organisations, events and attitudes which have shaped the lives of Scottish women throughout the '80s. Each one is written by women with first-hand experience of their subject, thus providing a personal and direct approach to stories of struggle, commitment and achievement. The vitality and warmth of this evidence, which could so easily have been lost in secondary evaluation and analysis, shines through the pages of *Grit and Diamonds*, making it an inspiration as well as a worthy and necessary record.

It is undoubtedly true that, in whatever social or national context, feminism desperately needs more historical coverage of this kind. It is a sad fact that the role of women in history is all too often devalued



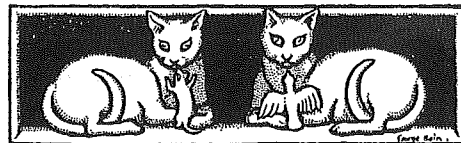


or effectively lost by the work of male archivists. Yet this omission is sometimes unwittingly fuelled by women themselves, who remain unwilling, in the light of patriarchal tradition, to regard their activities as note-worthy and historically valuable. In their introduction, editors Shirley Henderson and Alison Mackay emphasise the importance of documentation:

To recover our past and substantiate our present, there needs to be written and visual evidence. Unless women write down and record what happened yesterday, there will be nothing to be found - even by those with the will to find it.

They also talk of the initial difficulties which they faced in encouraging women

to accept that what they have done is important and worth writing about... to recognise that what we are involved in has long-term meaning and that our lives have historical importance.



Such comments highlight the nature of historical conditioning which pervades contemporary and past analyses, negating the role of women in events. *Grit and Diamonds* proves that, whether forming a community sewing group or organising a national conference, every instance of women working together can and must be regarded as history. It is hoped that this book will serve to encourage all sisters involved in change and challenge to maintain some form of criterion for notation and preservation. It certainly made me proud to be a Scottish woman. Beyond this, it reinforced my belief in the need for solidarity worldwide, and a uniform, unquestioning acceptance of our own value. For when we have implemented this ethos historically, it will also work into our everyday lives, which is just as vital.

The articles encompass a wide range of issues and are written by women of diverse social, ethnic and ideological backgrounds. While the editors comment on the under-representation of minority, disabled and working class women, and the omission of major debates such as housing,

poverty and rural areas, I think that considering the magnitude of their task and understandable problems of logistics and time, they are a little too hard on themselves. And although issues of racism, sexual violence, health, faith and the environment have implications throughout womankind, this book provides a positive grounding in Scottish culture which allows them to stand as examples and practical educations rather than theory. This is definitely not a book which preaches, but rather challenges other women to consider the problems which have spurred their sisters into action, and to take heart from their activities. Nevertheless, *Grit and Diamonds* is far from parochial or isolationist, as is shown by the inclusion of general articles which place Scottish Feminism in an international context.

One such article, "Scottish Feminism in the Eighties" by Jennifer B. Kerr and Paula Jennings, raises two interesting points which I think are worth discussing. The first is one which I have already dealt with, as the authors refer to the need for a "collective movement" in order to make feminism effective.

In a book about Scotland, it is also important to stress the value of international links... From an anti-imperialist starting point, we must participate in dialogue and campaign with women worldwide.

The second point concerns an area of radical lesbian feminism partially dealt with in Deborah Cameron's classic review of "Compulsory Heterosexuality", featured in *Trouble and Strife 24*. She commented on two conflicts facing lesbians - the question of alliance with gay men and disunity between lesbian and heterosexual feminists. Kerr and Jennings comment "Sexuality is socially constructed, so any woman can choose to be a lesbian."

Catriona Macauley writes:

There are still great differences between Lesbians and gay men, we are not the same thing, the language we use is different, the history and culture is different, the life experiences different... The question we should be asking is whether or not the new spirit of co-operation and struggle can be sustained...

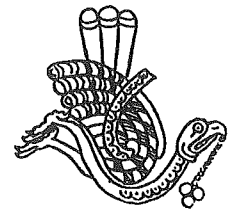
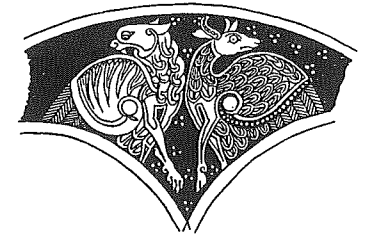
She adds:

I have seen connections between Section 28... and the backlash against feminism.

But I still don't see us being recognised when we support those other struggles. I still don't see us free to walk down the street arm in arm, I still don't see us welcome in the unions or at rallies. We are still the invisible minority.

In Scotland, society holds fast to its selective sight when viewing this invisible minority. Homophobia rules OK, as demonstrated in the recent sacking of a lesbian from a Glasgow delicatessen for no fault other than her sexuality. And anti-lesbian feeling ran to fever pitch in March with Edinburgh Tory councillor Christine Richard's 'exposé' of a supposed 'sex orgy' which took place during the women's disco on International Women's Day. Councillor Richard, who earlier opposed the budget for the event because she claimed that groups such as Lesbian Link were not representative of 'normal women', got her full fifteen minutes-worth of fame as she appeared in the Scottish press brandishing her evidence for the orgy theory - a rather shrivelled condom which was apparently strewn throughout the building where the disco took place. (How could a condom be in more than one place at any given time? The mystery deepened.) Unfortunately for the good lady, the offending items were found to contain nothing but carpet dust, and had simply been used for display purposes on the Lesbian stall. One question not raised by Richard, but later addressed by *Harpies* was: why were there condoms on the Lesbian stall in the first place? Someone came up with the bright idea that they were going to be cut up to make dental dams.

Laughable as such incidents may be on reflection, they nonetheless indicate the underlying oppressive attitude towards lesbians throughout Scotland. As one woman working on a Glasgow based gay committee said to me recently: "We waste so much time just trying to stop the shit that its difficult to start on anything positive". I discussed the effects of such prejudice on lesbians in Scotland, and the aforementioned problem of feminist disunity with another member of the *Harpies* collective, who prefaced her comments with the says-it-all remark: "I could write a fucking book on it." She talked about the lack of dyke activity in Glasgow, where West of Scotland bigotry keeps the door of the closet firmly



locked, unlike areas further south such as London, where it is possible to be "out and proud". She added that the lack of lesbian-only groups was connected to the fact that, in the present social climate in Scotland, even straight feminist groups have difficulty gaining support and acceptance, while women involved face the perennial fear that evidence of dyke activity will "scare off" potential members. It seems to me, from the evidence in *Grit and Diamonds* and the comments of women I have talked to, that there remains an unwillingness in Scotland as a whole to confront homophobia head-on, or to identify what lesbianism really means within our nation's society. Worse still, there remain far too many who do not even deem this action necessary.

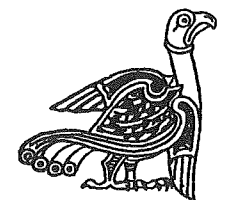
However, the book refers to several instances when the odds have been, at least temporarily, overcome in order to create a better reality for lesbians in Scotland during the '80s. Women's discos were successfully organised in Glasgow, Dundee and Edinburgh, while the Lesbian Line telephone counselling service has answered calls from over 1,400 women during the five years in which it has been in operation. The overwhelming triumph of the Second Scottish Lesbian Gathering, which took place over a weekend in October 1989, is documented by Sally Wainwright:

Perhaps the best comment on the weekend was women's reluctance to go home. As we had to leave the building we finally suggested meeting at the Fudge House for a last cup of tea, fully expecting that once they were in the street everyone would opt go home. When I got to the cafe half an hour later there were over forty Lesbians trying to keep a straight face as a slightly bemused waiter asked where we had all come from.

I leave the final comment on Scottish lesbians to Catriona Macauley, who writes in her conclusion:

Sometimes it can make you scared, and sometimes it can make you bitter, and sometimes it just makes you tired. But just when the closet starts looking like a nice place to be they show a dyke film on Channel 4, or a book jumps out of the shelf at you, and you remember when all's said and done, it's just water off a dyke's back!

Although the articles in *Grit and Diamonds* indicate beyond doubt that the road to a woman-friendly Scotland is a long



and arduous one, there are nevertheless many examples of courage, commitment and success which deserve to be celebrated. While these examples may appear minor when isolated, collectively they form the stuff that mountains are moved by. One such achievement is the building of the Maryhill Women's Centre in Glasgow. The campaign for the Women's Centre began in April 1987, sponsored by the Maryhill Joint Women's Action Group which emerged at the end of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1985. At the time of publication of *Grit and Diamonds*, the steering committee for the centre was "getting to grips with the technological jargon, the bureaucratic complexities and the logistical headaches of 'building' a women's centre". In their article, group members Jane McBride and Joyce Mutch catalogued their struggles of the past three years to obtain funding, but acknowledged the fact that if they thought that was difficult "we ain't seen nuthin' yet!!"

But neither had those who stood in their way! The Centre was finally completed in April of this year, despite wrangles with the Scottish Office, regional and district councils and contractors. Stella Coombe, a *Harpies* co-founder, has been involved in the campaign since the beginning, and was able to take up where *Grit and Diamonds* left off in her article on the centre which appeared in the launch issue of *H&Q*.

The project... is the result of four years of hard work, campaigning and weekly meetings... Despite... problems and the new ones such as the neighbours concerned about there being violent husbands hanging around outside the Centre at night, the group is still together and still battling away - all the women in the group are looking forward to the opening of the centre and it is hoped that Elspeth King, who has done so much work on Glasgow women's history, will lay the first stone.

Stella adds:

...the Women's Centre will incorporate a creche, meeting rooms, workshop, library, cafe area, hall and place for women of all ages to meet in a non-threatening and secure atmosphere where their children can be looked after... The Centre will be a focal point for the development of campaigns, groups and activities relevant to local women. Most importantly it will be a place where subjects such as isolation, health, discrimination, rape, incest, sexuality and

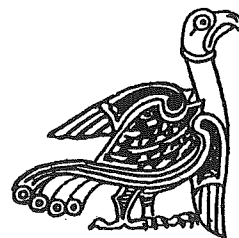
domestic violence can be tackled in a women only setting.

I visited the new Centre recently and got a conducted tour. The group has much to be proud of.

And I am proud of them too, as I am of all the women whose struggles, triumphs and tears have made their way onto the pages of *Grit and Diamonds*. It is stories like those of Catriona Macauley, the Second Scottish Lesbian Gathering and the Maryhill Women that make the book what it is - a challenging and inspirational read. I wonder what this new decade has in store for the women of Scotland? Will *Harpies and Quines* feature in *Grit and Diamonds II*? Who can tell. What I am certain of is that, whatever setbacks and successes the future has in store for us, they will be met with the same strength, vigour, sense of fun and downright Scottish-ness that fills this book to overflowing. Pat Aitchison's comment in her account of the Dalkeith Women's Support Group during the Miners Strike of 1984-85 could be applied to all the women who appear in the book. "We have the grit - and it's grit that eventually polishes diamonds". □

Post Script

I ended my discussion of lesbian activity in the '80s on a positive note. It is now the autumn of 1992 and it has become increasingly difficult for anyone to remain optimistic. Why has lesbian action become practically non-existent? Why is it that the only thing which can now mobilise Scottish dykes is a k.d. lang concert? Has oppression been internalised to such an extent that solidarity is impossible? These questions, and the thousands of others that inevitably must follow them, have remained as unanswered cries in the dark for too long. At present a group of women has begun the unenviable task of organising a conference, with the aim of re-politicising and reclaiming the Scottish lesbian identity. Please offer your support and ideas c/o T&S. Thank you.



Shirley Henderson and Alison Mackay (eds) *Grit and Diamonds Women in Scotland making history 1980-1990* Deborah Cameron "Old Het" *Trouble and Strife* 24 (Summer 1992)

Stella Coombe, 'Maryhill Women Making History', *Harpies and Quines* 1 (Spring 1992)

Writing Our Own History

DIAL-A-DYKE

The first national lesbian phone line opened in London on 23rd September 1977 "for help, advice, information or just a chat". This year London Lesbian Line celebrates its fifteenth birthday. Helen Bishop, a founder member, describes those early years, with contributions from Rachel Beck, Shauna Brown, Janet Green, Sibyl Grundberg, Rachael Hamilton and Pam Isherwood.

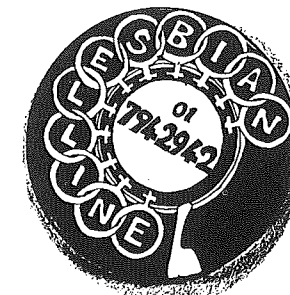
The group of about 12 women who set up the Line in 1977 came from different backgrounds. Some had been lesbians in London for many years; some were new lesbians coming out through the women's movement; some had just come to live in London; some had experience of working on mixed gay phone lines; others had never done anything like it before. Three women from Gay Switchboard advertised the first meeting in the "London Women's Liberation Newsletter". That and "Spare Rib" were the only information points in those days.

RB: I had worked on the Icebreakers phone service since 1974. We were four women on a collective of 25. Icebreakers were different from Gay Switchboard in their sexual politics: they were radical to the extent of being sexual libertarians (as they would be called now), but they were also anxious to be seen to be right on, so they encouraged women to join.

SB: On Gay Switchboard there were 75 men and five women. Inevitably when you were doing the phones with men from the collective, you would be busy talking to a male caller just when one of the few women callers rang, so she would have to talk to one of the male volunteers. It was very frustrating.

RB: In 1976 there was a regular phone-in programme on BBC Radio 4 with Jean Metcalfe called "You think you've got problems". One of the gay men on Icebreakers worked for the BBC and he put in a proposal that the series should do a programme with happy homosexuals on it, to counteract the negativity that so often appeared. We said "Let's do the lesbians first". However Ian MacGregor, the Director of Radio 4, cancelled it because it was not a "suitable subject for Sunday broadcasting". So we phoned Adrian Love on Capital Radio and said "We've been censored by the BBC", and he invited us to do a phone-in. We used this to start an Icebreakers' women's night.

SB: Most of the Icebreaker women went along to that first meeting in spring 1977. It wasn't called Lesbian Line then; the meeting was advertised as Gay Women's Switchboard. Lots of women came. A couple of Gay Switchboard women wouldn't come because they said it was terribly divisive and they would be leaving a 24 hour service; but there was bound to be that sort of tension and we thought that was fine. Some women could stay on the mixed lines and we'd start a new one. Also a lot of other lesbians who hadn't been on switchboards before came to that first



meeting and most of them would never have gone to a mixed evening.

The second meeting was at the Camden Women's Centre, in Rosslyn Lodge near the Royal Free Hospital. It was an amazing old mansion that is now an old people's home. There we were, this marginal group having meetings in this crumbling Georgian palatial building! We arranged to have an office there for the phones and held our first fundraising event there, with a band and disco.

RB: About a year and a half ago I met the first caller. She remembered my name so I must have told her she was the first (I did the rota on the first day) and she said it had changed her life.

There were no other women-only lines in Britain and few Gay Switchboards then, so we got calls from all over the country. In the first week I got a phone call from a lesbian who lived in a village in Wales with only eight houses. I asked her how she had found out about us and it was someone who saw a sticker and told a friend who told a friend who told someone she knew - and that happened all the time. But it was also very difficult because we were the only women-only lesbian phone line and we were in London and there was often nothing local we could refer callers to. All we could offer was a friendly listener at the end of the phone. Some isolated lesbians started to ring us regularly, just for some contact with like-minded women. And women would ring us from other towns, either lonely or in distress from a relationship break-up and it was really hard. We had this debate as to whether you put two callers from the same town in touch with each other, or whether that was the wrong thing to do and how you handled it. But as more feminist and lesbian groups came into existence, and as lesbian lines started up in other towns, this became easier.

Breaking the ice

SB: It was pretty high odds that a silent call wouldn't be from a man because no man would be able to be silent for so long. You let them be silent, but you also chatted a bit: "I know there's someone there and maybe if I chat a bit you'll feel like ringing back even if you don't want to talk this

time." We'd tell them things like, "There are 20 of us on the collective, aged from 18 to 55, and we're all lesbians and all of us know what it's like to discover you are a lesbian and admit it to yourself and then tell your friends and family." Sometimes after a while the person would speak.

Sometimes we'd try to make them laugh. We kept a list of appropriate jokes or cartoons for use on silent calls and when you described them to callers you'd sometimes get a giggle. But you would know all the time that there was someone out there, terrified because she had taken the first step. Sometimes they would just hang up suddenly. But lots of callers told us they had rung two or three times before and never said anything and now they wanted to talk, and they would thank us for not putting the phone down on their silent calls.



We got many calls from women who knew they were lesbians but were isolated with no-one to talk to and just rang to talk to another lesbian. Some had been in a closet lesbian couple which had broken up and because they had been closet they had nobody to talk to, nobody to get support from in their distress. The hardest for me were calls from women who were either married or who wouldn't describe themselves as lesbian and had been having a relationship with another married woman which had broken up, or else they could no longer bear the strains of a secret relationship and they had no one to talk to. Then there were younger women having to deal with the emotional and practical turmoil after coming out to parents who turned out to be unsupportive, or even threw them out. The fact that collective members

had themselves been through some of these experiences was extremely useful and helped in our discussions of how to deal with different types of calls.

Then there were the genuine calls from young women wanting to know "what lesbians do in bed".

SG: During our collective discussions of this type of call a lot was made of the book *The Joy of Lesbian Sex*; you could always refer them to that. But I couldn't imagine them going into a bookshop and asking for it; equally I personally was never into graphic discussions of what people did in bed. I remember one woman saying "My sister says there's something called 'lovejuice'. What is it?" I had never heard anyone use that word and was completely thrown. Some women on the collective felt that one should be able to talk explicitly, if that's what a caller wanted help with. I felt that we shouldn't emphasise sex as technique, but say that if you followed your feelings and found your way through it you would have fun. But I remember Pam saying "I disagree! Every woman is entitled to an orgasm. It's woman's inalienable right!"

SB: There were also calls from men saying they were women. That was always difficult, someone says "I'm upset" and you think "You're a man!", but then it might be a woman and if you say something that will make them more upset.

Socials

Following the Icebreaker model, we started monthly Sunday afternoon socials, held in our houses, for callers who wanted to meet other lesbians or to have the chance for a longer discussion face-to-face and who didn't want to go to discos. Sometimes only two or three would turn up; sometimes about 20. Many of the women had never knowingly met other lesbians before.

PI: I remember a woman who came to a social at my flat. She sat and said nothing all afternoon in this room with half a dozen women, and she had apparently walked up and down the street for an hour before she came in. I knew she was saying nothing; you keep an eye out, and when everyone went I said "Would you like to stay and have another cup of tea?" and her whole

story came out. She didn't stop for two hours and she was completely freaked out, realising for herself that she wanted to be lesbian and this was the first time, apart from the original phone call, that she had ever spoken about it at all. She sorted herself out remarkably fast and the next time I saw her was two months later working behind the bar at the Carved Red Lion (a pub in Islington with a women-only bar), absolutely revelling in it.

We also ran discos in some very seedy places in the early days, like the cellar of a pub in Wharfedale Road. Later (in 1978) some better discos got going at Terri Quaye's disco above the Sols Arms pub near Warren Street.

Moya (where are you Moya?) from Lesbian Line was the driving force behind the regular Lesbian Line fundraising events, with women's bands, poetry reading, comic duos. This fundraising and the small amount of donations we got from individuals and local groups were crucial to pay the phone rental, premises and general expenses in the first years before any grants were received.



In the news

When Lesbian Line set itself up in 1977 the word "lesbian" wasn't used openly outside lesbian circles. It was only included in the Women's Liberation seven demands in 1974. The new Sexual Offences Act in 1967 had made gay men's lives easier, but lesbians were still not really on the map and suffered from the fact that the only thing the general public really knew about us were the stereotypes presented in films like "The Killing of Sister George".

Then in 1977 the Northampton Labour Party decided to deselect the sitting MP, Maureen Colquhoun. They didn't say it was because she was a lesbian, but the media picked this up and Lesbian Line was involved in her support campaign. Suddenly it seemed the word "lesbian" was appearing in newspaper and TV headlines all over the place. In January 1978 the "Evening News" paid a woman reporter to infiltrate the self-help Artificial Insemination group, and one group of lesbian parents had to get an injunction to stop their names and addresses appearing, but the newspaper still ran the front page article. Then Janet Street-Porter invited two Lesbian Liners to appear on the ITV "London Weekend Show".

RB: We reckoned they had said the word "lesbian" more times in half an hour than in the whole history of TV.

Jumping on the bandwagon in August 1978, Thames TV invited representatives of all the gay groups, about 30 of us, to take part in a discussion about gayness called "Gays Speaking Up". It was a pre-recorded programme and we discovered just as we were about to go in to do the recording that they were not intending to broadcast our organisations' phone numbers. We all refused to do the programme unless this happened, and we won that one too, but they cut a lot of the more radical things we said.

Before this programme we were getting 150 calls a week on two afternoons and two evenings (many callers did not have access to a phone where they could have a private conversation in the evenings). After the programme, calls went up to 230 a week for several weeks.

In June 1979 "The Guardian" wrote

a scurrilous article belittling the Gay Pride march, and a bunch of gay groups got together and occupied "The Guardian" newsroom for about 1 1/2 hours. We answered their phones saying "This is Lesbian Line", which was a laugh. In the end the editor agreed to give us equal space for the right to reply.

Outreach

We got lots of requests to do speaking engagements from a huge range of groups, like the housewives' register, doctors and social workers' groups, university groups, groups of counsellors and therapists, and political groups.

SB: A whole band of us would go out to the heartland of the suburbs and there would be a room suppressing nervous giggles while we were talking about being lesbians. Every time you walked into a "speak" and they saw you for the first time, you could see their mental processes written all over their faces. They had expected some sort of freaks, sort of monsters, and there we were, perfectly ordinary women of all ages, to whom they could relate. There was always someone who said "Oh, we didn't expect someone older", or "We didn't expect you to look so like us".

We'd always start out by saying "Have you ever known any lesbians?" and they'd say "No, you're the first ones we've met". But by the end they'd be saying "Well I remember now, there was this woman I was at college with", or "There was this woman at work", or "I remember my mother had a friend who never married and she lived with another woman, and - yes, I realise now..."

The Hertford Housewives' Register had seen one of the TV programmes and rang the traditional information service, at the "Daily Telegraph", to get a speaker, but they couldn't find us, so one of the women plucked up courage and asked at the Hertford reference library. "The librarian was so efficient," she said admiringly, "within a day she had found your number for us." I often wondered about that librarian.

Quite often half way through a conversation with a caller we would say

something that confirmed that we were lesbians and the caller would react with surprise, as if they didn't really expect us to be lesbians, or certainly not to say so; they had understood that it was a helpline FOR lesbians but not staffed by lesbians.

Pat: The vital difference between Lesbian Line and non gay help lines is that it is not done as a favour for others, that the operator and the caller might at any later stage change roles - the dividing line is very

thin. (Recorded in the minutes: Pat)

RB: Some callers felt we were denying the reality of the situation by saying that we were all equal, because they said "You've been around for ages and you're much more confident and it isn't true, you are all superdykes, you know!". But we were always scared we weren't going to give the callers as much support and help as they wanted and needed, so really the nerves were on both ends of the phone.



Pam Isherwood

Lesbian Liners on Gay Pride, 1978 (the phone number is now 071-251 6911)

How we dealt with calls, particularly the calls from married women who were in a closet relationship or attracted to another woman, varied a lot. There was a certain group on the collective who would say, "Well leave him, what are you doing with him? What are you doing in a marriage?"

RB: We actually managed to be quite broad in our politics. Icebreakers had this dogma that you had to come out and they were incredibly scathing about the men on Gay Switchboard who led double lives with their wives at home. But whatever you thought about it for men it was actually far more problematic for a lot of women and I don't think we were hard-line about lesbians coming out.

SB: In the end the group whose line was "OK leave your husbands, come out, kill 'em!" left, after many debates in which we told them we thought it wasn't helpful to say that on the phone.

Over the years the types of call have changed; 'where to go' calls have got fewer as more information has become available. But the 'help and advice' calls have stayed much the same, although there are new issues. AIDS and safer sex have come into the volunteer training and, more recently, sexual abuse.

PI: We are here to talk about things like lesbians as victims of incest and child abuse. We've also got women on the collective who have identified themselves as survivors and that's made a big difference. I'm not saying we're expert at handling it, but sometimes we're the first people that women have talked to about it. Lesbian-on-lesbian violence is starting to be talked about too and we have occasionally had calls from women who are batterers. But we need more training in how to deal with this.

SM was a particularly controversial issue. Early on, Lesbian Line adopted a policy against SM and would not recruit volunteers or workers who identified as SM dykes. However, while some volunteers would not refer to SM bars, others would tell women callers what different clubs offered and then let them make their own choices.

Another issue in the early days was calls from pre- and post-operative transsexuals, most of whom rang up saying that after the operation they wanted to be lesbians and could they join us. In one or two cases they asked us to find them a partner! We certainly didn't operate as a dating agency for anyone.

Moving on

In 1978 the Line moved from Rosslyn Lodge to a small room at the top of the old "Time Out" building in Grays Inn Road, above the Mole Jazz Shop. A group of women's organisations took over the lease of the building: ROW, NAC, Women's Aid, Homeless Action and Lesbian Line.

SB: It was a good atmosphere in the building with all these women's organisations. It was nice to be with other groups that were funded and recognised.

It made us feel a bit more grown up really, like we had to get proper filing systems and we started training properly.

We had also had a running battle with the GPO who refused to put our name in the telephone directory, until someone organised a listing in the phone book for all our groups under "W" for "Women's Liberation".

In June 1983, after much discussion, Lesbian Line applied for and got its first GLC grant to employ a worker. Then in 1984 the GLC funded a building for a group of women's organisations and Lesbian Line moved into its first decent premises (with heating).

The line also functioned as a friendship group for the women working on it.

JG: It was fun; weekends away at Oaklands (the women's holiday house) to enable new and old collective members to get to know each other, outings together, times in the pub after meetings. And inevitably it functioned as a social group where people met each other and sometimes fell in love... and left the collective because they fell out of love!

And the networking was exciting.

SB: We had this great conference at the end of 1978 in Liverpool, the "Lesbians on Switchboards" conference. Apart from

Lesbian Link from Manchester and the new Preston Lesbian Line, everyone else there was on mixed switchboards and feeling the same frustrations. We talked about what we had achieved in a year, and how different it was, and told everyone "Leave the boys! Start your own!", and after that many more Lesbian Lines started.

Recruiting volunteers

Being on the Line wasn't just about doing the phones; there were a lot of other duties: collecting and answering the mail, organising the keys, buying light bulbs and stationery, finding and filing new information and keeping everyone up to date, sending out the minutes, sending messages to women who were not at meetings, taking part in decisions about whether to open more nights, making sure the phone rota and the rota of people doing the socials were filled, liaising with other groups in the building, cleaning the office, not to mention the endless discussions about recruiting, training and inducting new volunteers, organising speakers and benefits and dealing with media requests.

Lesbian Line has always insisted that volunteers should not simply do the phones, but take some responsibility for the collective as well.

In the early days just being a lesbian was enough to be able to join the Line:

PI: I was recruited on a march because someone saw my home-made "Gay Pensioners against the Nazis" badge. "You look like someone who ought to be on Lesbian Line", she said.

Later the issue of criteria for joining the Line came up and there were formal selection criteria. One of the first versions, minuted in 1978, read:

- racist and sexist behaviour is out
- women must support the seven demands of the WLM
- recognise the importance of coming out and be prepared to do so positively on the phone
- not be a woman who calls herself a lesbian but has never had a relationship with a woman.

This last was a much discussed point. How could you deal with callers if you hadn't actually crossed the taboo divide yourself?

There was also a suspicion of women who had professional counselling skills.

SG: I think it's an interesting point about anti-professionalism: it's a direct consequence of our history of oppression in a way. Psychiatry and psychology have been traditionally associated with trying to socialise us out of our sexuality and our sexual and life choices.

One woman who had worked as a professional counsellor ended up not being ratified to join the collective. I think it was more to do with the fact that she made no dress concessions to the collective; she was older and tall and elegant, and she had previously worked on the Samaritans. Since Lesbian Line always saw itself as radically different in the sense that it wasn't a service 'for' women, but a more equal service of lesbians to other lesbians, we didn't like the 'expert' role.



Pam Isherwood

I thought Lesbian Line lost a potentially good person there, but in those early days the Line reflected the marginalisation of the women's movement and its anti-establishment nature, so to some extent such rejection was inevitable.

Training

Training for volunteers comprised two initial sessions and then an

Lesbian Line
Tel: 071-251 6911
Minicom, for women with hearing disabilities: 071-253 0924
Open for calls Mon and Fri 2-10pm; Tues, Wed and Thurs 7-10pm; new Saturday evening opening soon.
Postal address: BM Box 1514, London WC1N 3XX
This article is based on a Lesbian History Group meeting in June 1992, an oral history panel discussion with four of the founder members; on interviews with volunteers and workers, and on information from the minutes of the Lesbian Line collective meetings.

apprenticeship doing the phones with an experienced volunteer and learning the way round the files. Then the volunteer's progress would be reported to the collective; she would be discussed, and then ratified - or sometimes not. There were occasional rows over what sort of person we wanted to recruit. The early group had several years of working and campaigning together and it was difficult to accommodate new women with different ideas.

In the '80s Lesbian Line made a conscious effort to be more representative in its membership. For a short while we had a separate working class lesbian group. Women with disabilities have been collective members and there was one who was a worker in the '80s. However attracting Black volunteers was more difficult.

SG: We started looking for a racism awareness trainer. It was thought that Black women joining the Line would end up acting as 'trainers' and that would be difficult for them as individuals with little

power in a large white collective.

At one point membership was closed to anyone who didn't fit one of the categories of targeted new recruits: working class, Black, women with disabilities.

JG: This was fine as a policy. Unfortunately the net result was that the number of women available to do the phones dropped and we had problems filling the rota. So these restrictions were dropped after a while.

The Line also offered one night a week to some Black lesbian groups, but the offer was declined because the groups were already over-committed with their own issues. There is now the Black Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, and the Line has some Black volunteers and is looking for more.

Where now?

The context around Lesbian Line is different now to when it was founded. There are Lesbian Lines in nearly every big town in Britain, several lesbian and gay centres and many active groups. Many national and local publications have a gay listings page. But the phone lines are still needed.

PI: We are talking to lesbians who are not 'out'; aren't politically involved in gay or women's issues; to those married women with two kids in Hemel Hempstead who don't ever make contact with other lesbians until the relationship goes wrong. Everyone thinks they know what a lesbian is. Well they might know what one particular type of 'out', active, confident, public lesbian is, but we actually speak to the ones who aren't any of those things.

Lesbian Line is 15 years old and lots of us still enjoy doing the phones. Twenty-eight volunteers, each doing one fortnightly three hour shift, is the minimum number needed to keep the phones covered, so volunteers are always needed. Ring us and have a chat about it! We would also like to get some feedback from callers. Have you ever phoned the Line? Write and tell us what it meant: to Helen Bishop, c/o Lesbian Line. You can write anonymously if you prefer, and nothing will be used without the writer's permission. It would be interesting to have the perspective from "the other side" on Lesbian Line's first 15 years.

RADICAL WOMEN'S NEWSPAPER

bad attitude

A brand new feminist newspaper lashing back against the backlash, witty, wicked and wild... and dedicated to the overthrow of civilisation as we know it.

"No one in their right minds would launch a newspaper like this." (Out 1st December 1992)

subscribe! and get your Bad Attitude delivered **1 year: 6 issues**

£5 individuals £10 supporting rate
 £15 groups or send £1 for one issue

Name

Address

Bad Attitude, 121 Railton Road, London SE24 0PH, 071 978 9075

Harpies & QUINES



Yearly Rates: Unwaged £7
Waged £14 Organisation £21
Supporter £28 For those who would like to give more & enable unwaged women to receive the magazine at a special low rate.

I wish to subscribe to Harpies & Quines. I enclose subscription of

Name

Address

Send to: Harpies & Quines P.O. Box 543 Glasgow G20 9BN

Sinister Wisdom
A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination in the Arts and Politics since 1976

Great Issues full of terrific dyke writing and art agitate, soothe, inspire, move us to reflection and action:

- #40 On Friendship
- #41 Italian-American Women's Issue
- #42 Lesbian Voices (open theme)
- #43/44 15th Anniversary Retrospective (368 pages!)
- #45 Lesbians & Class
- #46 Dyke Lives
- #47 Lesbians of Color
- #48 Resistance (12/92)
- #49 The Lesbian Body (4/93)
- #50 Lesbian Ethics (8/93)

To get this great work sent to your home, your office, your friends — SUBSCRIBE NOW!

Name

Address

City

State & Zip

Subscription rates 1 yr or 4 issues
\$17 1 year, \$30 2 years
International: \$22 (\$US)
Single issues: \$6.50 (\$12.50 - 43/44)
Free on request to women in prison and mental institutions CA res.: add 8.5% tax

POB 3252 • Berkeley, CA 94703 • USA

feminist ARTS NEWS

Wouldn't it be wonderful to find a magazine that challenges stereotypes and confronts our ideas? — well, such a magazine exists....

Subscribe to Feminist Arts News and keep in touch with the variety of cultural strategies women use to keep our voices being heard....and have FAN delivered to your door.

Name

Address

Postcode

Individual £9 Organisation £14
Overseas: Individual £14 Organisation £16
I enclose a cheque for.....payable to **Feminist Arts News**
All payments to be made in pounds sterling
**FAN Unit 26, 30-38 Dock Street
Leeds LS10 1JF
(0532) 429964**

25 Back issues of FAN are available — Disability Arts, The Lesbian issue, Working Class women working it out!, Censorship and lots lots more. For details contact FAN

Subscribe to Women's News!
Ireland's feminist magazine

We have news on the state of the movement in Ireland & worldwide, as well as cartoons, creative writing, events & contacts... Women's News has numerous contributors from Ireland and Elsewhere

If you would like to subscribe, then fill in the form below and send, with a cheque to Women's News: 185 Donegall St. Belfast BT1 2FJ

Rates (for 11 issues)	N.Ireland & Britain	S.Ireland	Europe	Overseas
Low/Unwaged	£7.00	IR£8.00	£9.00	
Ordinary	£9.00	IR£10.00	£11.00	£20.00
Women's Groups/Support sub	£12.00	IR£12.00	£14.00	
Institutions	£22.00	IR£22.00	£25.00	£30.00

NAME:

ADDRESS

Winter 1992/3

Letters	2
Living in a police state <i>Ailbhe Smyth</i> looks at abortion in Ireland today	5
Hollywood feminism? Get real! <i>Louise Donald</i> and <i>Joan Scanlon</i> discuss recent female friendship films	11
In memoriam: Maria Elena Moyano, murdered in Peru .	17
Why can't a woman be more like a man? <i>Elaine Miller</i> reviews Faderman's "Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers"	20
The amazing deconstructing woman <i>Stevi Jackson</i> suggests some problems with postmodern feminism	25
Sudanese sisterhood <i>Fatima Ibrahim</i> describes the Sudanese Women's Union's battles for women	32
Hunger strikes and children's rights <i>Jo Bridgeman</i> looks at the compulsory medical treatment of children	36
Hens in the heather <i>Libby Brooks</i> reviews "Grit and Diamonds" on Scottish feminism from 1980 to 1990	41
Dial a Dyke <i>Helen Bishop</i> interviews members of the Lesbian Line collective about the early years	45

£2.95