

Trouble & Strife

The radical feminist magazine

The politics of
personal behaviour
False Memory Syndrome
Analysing anorexia
Bandit Queen biopic on trial

New Feature:
Barking Back

Feminist
prima donnas

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Spirituality vs feminism

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

For those of you who did not see *T&S* 29/30, we'd just like to clarify that *T&S* now appears twice a year rather than three times. The size and price of each issue has risen in proportion. The new improved *T&S* represents excellent value for money. Larger issues means more variety, and a longer production schedule means greater reliability—so you'll know when to look out for the next issue.



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New Feature: Barking Back

Letters

Dear T&S,

I'm writing to you as a black working class lesbian. I have subscribed to your publication for a number of years. I have finally felt so angry at the content that I have decided to write to you (issue 27, 'Radical Feminism in the 1990s'). I'm disgusted at the lack of, virtually non-reference to, black women, or indeed the non-inclusion of articles by and for black women.

At a time when racial attacks are on the increase—every three minutes a black woman is attacked—you choose to ignore the realities for black women, black lesbians living in Britain today.

Looking at the content and imagery of the latest issue I question why do I bother subscribing to you—why am I spending money which I haven't really got on a magazine which is no better than any racist, non-radical, non-feminist magazine!

It seems that not much has changed since your ancestor grandparents were slave masters, except now slavery is much more complicated and elusive. Your exclusion, non-inclusion, of issues concerning black people, black women, black lesbians is a reflection of your inherent, deliberate, oppressive racism. I suggest you all, or those of you who I expect are mostly white—look at your personal and political racism and decide what you are going to do about it.

Do not ignore this letter—I would like it printed in your next issue and responses invited, and I would also like a non-defensive anti-racist response from you as the producers.

Yours in black lesbian struggle,
Kosar Saira

T&S replies: We acknowledge Kosar Saira's point that issue 27 contained little material by or about Black women. While we regularly publish interviews and reports about Black feminists outside Britain who define the struggle against racism and imperialism as integral to their feminist politics, it is true that Black women living in Britain have been under-represented in T&S and as contributors to the journal. We do not believe this is because we actively and deliberately exclude Black women's perspectives. We do approach Black women, but in many cases they have other priorities. The content of T&S depends heavily on what contributions we are offered or can elicit, and from whom. But clearly questions can be asked about why we tend to be offered some things but

not others, and what we could do to change this.

As a currently all-white collective, we obviously do have a responsibility to think carefully about the implications of our own racial positioning, to be aware of the potential for exclusionary and racist practices, and to learn from mistakes that are pointed out to us. We are well aware that there are issues around the relation of radical feminism to anti-racism and to Black feminist politics, which have not been resolved and which need to be discussed. Following Kosar Saira's suggestion, we invite responses from T&S readers to her letter and to the issues it raises. We will publish them, and respond to them, in a future T&S. □

Corrections

In the last issue, due to snags in the new production process, we forgot to credit and/or reference some of the books referred to or reviewed in the articles.

Catharine Mackinnon's latest book is: *Only Words* (Harper Collins, 1994)

The two books reviewed in the Women, Development and Ecology article are: Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva *Ecofeminism* (Zed Books Ltd., 1993); and Rosi Braidotti et al. *Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis* (Zed Books Ltd., 1994)

The article 'One Hell of a Trip' was excerpted from: Louise Armstrong *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened when Women Said Incest* (Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1994)

'Unfair Play', the article on sex-testing in sport, was excerpted from: Mariah Burton-Nelson *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football: Sexism and the American Culture of Sports* (Harcourt Brace, 1994)

Can you feel the force (and should you give in to it)?

'Spiritual' tendencies amongst feminists take many forms, from religious belief to dabbling in astrology and tarot readings. Debbie Cameron is sceptical of the temptations which assail feminists across the spectrum, whether to reclaim patriarchal traditions, invoke supernatural powers, or borrow imagery and symbols in the name of feminism. Feminist politics, she argues, will always be at odds with 'immaterialist' beliefs and practices.

Feminist talk about 'spiritual' matters has always made me uneasy. Here's an example:

It is a Thursday evening and the moon is full. I step out of a hot tub full of sea salts and roses and menstrual blood. I blow out my twelve candles, place my crystals and pentagram back on the altar, douse my sage and remove my rosary...I am a solitary witch, an Indian psychic, a pagan Chicana catholic, a lipstick lesbian.

This particular quote comes from an article in a recent issue of the US lesbian feminist journal *Sinister Wisdom*, which has the theme of 'lesbians and religion: questions of faith and community'. Of course, I'm quoting it out of context, there are other pieces in the same issue which don't resemble it in either content or style (though there are also a fair number which do), and



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In the dim dim,
deep deep mists,
of time before
grey television
prehistoric
cave paintings
and the
internet
there was
matriarchy



I'm aware that selecting it here leaves me open to the charge that I'm simply making fun of the author's beliefs, in a way that is neither sisterly nor politically constructive. But that's exactly the point I want to begin from. I do have a negative response to the passage I've quoted, and indeed to the entire genre of feminist discourse I recognise it as belonging to. The desire to laugh, to make fun of it, is part of that response. But there's a deeper discomfort too, which demands a deeper analysis.

I don't think the discomfort arises simply because I myself feel no urge for rituals like the one this woman is describing. I am equally unenthusiastic about gardening or sport, but when women talk about these things I do not feel uncomfortable, just bored. My response to spiritual talk, by contrast, is not simple indifference (or embarrassment, though there's an element of that)—it's more like irritation or

even hostility, of a kind I don't feel when feminists talk about other things, even if they are remote from my own concerns or I have political reservations about them.

One source of my irritation is the way spiritual experience usually gets talked/written about. It tends to close down discussion: either you 'get it' or you don't. And if you don't, what can you say? 'Good for you', or 'actually, I've never felt that way myself' does not really advance the discussion, and it is bound to be heard as dismissive or hostile. The only 'appropriate' response is a respectful one which silences doubts or questions and makes real exchange impossible. In the absence of meaningful exchange it becomes problematic that, unlike gardening and sport, religious and spiritual concerns are felt by many women to be part not just of their lives but of their politics. What kind of feminist politics is this?

There are actually several different strands to be unravelled in feminist politics around spirituality and belief, and by 'belief' I do not just mean religious belief. The issue is not a commitment to any specific religion as such, but more generally a commitment to the importance of the spiritual, supernatural or non-material: the sense that there's something out there which we need to take seriously, although we can't fully explain or analyse it.

This feeling does not have to be expressed in specifically religious allegiances and practices. For example, there is something of the same impulse in certain forms of therapy which are practised by significant numbers of women, such as 12-step programs which direct you to put yourself in the hands of a 'higher power'. And perhaps it is a similar (though less authoritarian) belief in 'higher powers' that leads some feminists to take an interest in 'occult' practices like astrology or tarot cards.

Higher powers

It's this willingness among feminists, religious or not, to entertain the notion of 'higher powers' which I find hard to understand or sympathise with. By temperament, politics and academic training I am sceptical of all invocations of invisible and inexplicable forces, be they gods or goddesses, saints or spirits of nature, the Freudian unconscious or therapy's 'inner child', fate written in the stars or revealed in the cards. Why do feminists need such notions?

Before I try to answer this question I should

clarify the terms I am using. A 'belief system' is any systematic set of ideas we use to order experience—feminism is as much a belief system as christianity or astrology. The difference is, however, that the latter two belief systems involve supernatural belief (in God, or the power of heavenly bodies). It is feminists' relationship to supernatural belief systems that I want to explore. Within this set of belief systems I will distinguish between religious beliefs (involving gods/goddesses), spiritual beliefs (a more general term that would also include, for instance, 'pagan' belief in the spirits of nature or of your ancestors) and occult beliefs like astrology.

While I find it helpful to make these distinctions, I am aware they are not clear-cut, and that where you draw the lines is often a matter of cultural tradition (or prejudice). For instance, witchcraft is popularly conceived as an occult practice, but most of its feminist adherents would probably view it as spiritual, and some might argue it is a religion ('Wicca').

For my purposes, however, the distinctions among types of supernatural belief matter less than the basic distinction between holding such beliefs and rejecting them. The fundamental question I want to address is why (and whether) feminists should entertain any kind of supernatural belief.

Spirituality and identity politics

One significant strand in current feminist religious and spiritual discourse is a particular kind of identity politics—I express my identity through these beliefs and rituals, which are part of my cultural heritage as an X'. The contributors to *Sinister Wisdom* apply this formula to everything from Buddhism to snake-handling, and the effect is to set up an additional obstacle to discussion of the beliefs themselves. Since in this discourse they are associated with ethnicity or ancestral culture, it becomes hard (because potentially racist or ethnocentric) to broach the subject of what particular beliefs mean for women and whether it makes sense for a feminist to subscribe to them.

Identity politics with its emphasis on cultural differences among women can obscure the fact that women's relation to all cultures is inherently problematic. One of the difficult and sometimes painful things about becoming a feminist is that you can no longer have an uncomplicated or uncritical relationship to the

traditions of your culture. I accept that ethnicity, class and so forth make a difference to the way women relate to their particular traditions. But feminists of all backgrounds have to struggle with the exclusion, marginalisation and devaluation of women in the cultures we have been taught to call 'ours'.

The question therefore must arise: in what sense can we think of any religious, spiritual or supernatural belief systems as actually or potentially 'women's traditions'? Do feminist attempts to reclaim/redefine/reinvent religious traditions gloss over the essentially patriarchal nature of such belief systems in general?



Reclaiming or romanticising?

The organised religions of the world could reasonably be described as patriarchal (literally so in the case of monotheistic religions), while the alternative 'traditions' of paganism and witchcraft some women are involved in have arguably had to be romanticised if not invented from scratch to make them more woman-friendly. If you take an anthropological rather than theological view of religion, there is nothing strange about this—all religions reflect prevailing social norms, and all are cobbled together from different cultural and historical sources (which is why christians celebrate the birth of Christ around the pagan festival of the



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winter solstice, for example).

For feminists, however, the problem is the unrelievedly patriarchal nature of the available sources. Looking to some distant 'matriarchal' past to provide models for a feminist spiritual tradition is no more satisfactory than looking to present-day orthodoxies. From goddess worship to the Catholic cult of Mary, the centrality of female religious symbols in a given tradition does not imply that women either constructed the tradition or were powerful in the culture whose tradition it was.

I have a similar problem with some feminists' desire to reclaim the less distant historical figure of the witch. Historical evidence does not entirely support the idea that witchcraft in early modern Europe was a proto-feminist practice based on women's traditional knowledge of healing and their resistance to patriarchal control. Some scholars have argued that the women persecuted in witch-crazes were not powerful or rebellious, rather they were vulnerable and that is why they fell victim to a contemporary form of misogyny. We should be wary of constructing romantic myths around women who were persecuted, then or now.

Some feminist advocates of reclaiming religion point to its role in various movements for social justice (e.g. the part played by US and South African christian churches in the struggle for racial equality). But even if such radicalism were the rule and not the exception, it would still be difficult to make a case for religion as a

progressive force when it comes to gender and sexual politics. On the contrary, it has been, and still is, among the most important institutions promoting and justifying misogyny. This is something I think feminists who want to reclaim it must take very seriously indeed.

That doesn't mean I condemn all attempts by feminists to challenge the sexism and heterosexism of mainstream religious institutions which they were brought up in and wish to remain part of. For minority women particularly, traditional religion may be an important aspect of ethnic identity—for a Jewish or Chicana woman to reject Judaism or Catholicism is not the same thing as for me to reject the Church of England. But equally, for such women to embrace their traditional faith and work against sexism within it is not the same thing as to call for a more general commitment to spiritual concerns among feminists.

Spirituality and cultural feminism

This kind of call often has more to do with attempts by some currents within feminism to reclaim the spiritual, not as an expression of ethnic/cultural identity but as an aspect of women's shared heritage which should be celebrated in a feminist or woman-centred culture. From this point of view, the question of how women relate to the religious traditions of a given (patriarchal) culture becomes less important: spirituality is seen as a 'woman's tradition' in and of itself.

I will refer to the kind of feminism that views spirituality in this light as 'cultural feminism', although that term is problematic. The problem is that the label 'cultural feminist' is rarely if ever used by the women to whom it is applied; it is frequently used by others as a term of abuse; and as such it is often directed against a much wider range of feminists, including for instance radical and revolutionary feminists, than I think it is meaningful or fair to include in it. Though I am critical of cultural feminism, I do not share the hostility of those socialists and sexual libertarians whose overgeneralised use of the term has come to dominate most discussion of it. In fact, I am only using the term myself at all because I want to make a clear distinction between cultural feminism and radical feminism. It is the former and not the latter that celebrates spirituality as part of women's heritage.

Where does this connection come from?

Despite the patriarchal nature of organised western religion and the dominance of men in religious hierarchies, there has been a long-standing association between women and certain kinds of spirituality or mysticism. Many of the best known christian visionaries were women (like Joan of Arc and St Theresa), and when visions of Christ or the virgin are reported today it is often women or children—especially girls—who are said to have seen them. Women have also been central figures in pagan and occult traditions. When we think about the witch, or the medium who communicates with the spirits of the dead at a seance, or the fortune-teller reading palms, cards and crystals, the image that comes to mind is of a woman, not a man.

This has something to do with the persistent western association between women and the non-rational. Women are supposedly more 'intuitive', more open to supernatural forces, just as we are supposedly closer to nature, because reason is less dominant in us. Similarly, in western societies mystical powers have often been attributed to both women and men of a subordinated ethnic group (e.g. gypsies, native Americans); and they are also associated with the poor, the uneducated and the 'simple'.

Put in these terms it might seem there is nothing in this tradition for feminists to celebrate. Not only is it essentialist, it's misogynist and racist. But cultural feminism has a tendency to pick up on qualities traditionally associated with women and reinterpret them as positive virtues. A cultural feminist might point out, for instance, that women like Joan of Arc are among our few icons of female strength and leadership, or that witches and goddesses represent an ancient, authentically female power-source which feminists today should reclaim.

I have already said why I am sceptical about this sort of argument. It raises the perennial question of how far you can build a feminist culture or politics on ideas and myths about women which we inherit from patriarchy. Cultural feminism has been criticised, by radical feminists as well as others, for recycling essentialist patriarchal stereotypes. Thus there is criticism of the 'women-are-more-peaceful-and-nurturant' rhetoric favoured by some elements in the women's peace movement, and the 'women-are-closer-to-the-earth' rhetoric found in some kinds of ecofeminism. Like the

'women-are-more-spiritual' idea, these rhetorics may seem to affirm women's moral superiority, but they have their origins in a culture that allotted women restricted opportunities to be anything but peaceful and nurturant, while at the same time devaluing these allegedly 'feminine' qualities.

That does not mean, however, that feminists must automatically continue the devaluation, still less that we should take up a political position against peace or environmentalism. You can (and many feminists do) reject some kinds of rhetoric as sentimental rubbish, while still supporting the underlying political goals, and perhaps admiring the determination with which women have historically pursued them.

Is the same thing true about spirituality? Can we reject the patronising equation of women with the non-rational while agreeing that there is some value for feminists in acknowledging a sphere beyond the material? Can it be argued, that even if it is sometimes expressed in questionable ways, the desire for something 'more' addresses real and legitimate needs?

Materialism, anti-materialism and immaterialism

Here it is useful to make a distinction between two meanings of the words 'materialism' and 'materialist'. One meaning, the one I have been using up until now, comes from the technical



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vocabulary of philosophy and politics. It refers to the belief that the world we inhabit is all that exists—there is no supernatural order, no gods, no spirits, no destiny or fate.

This also implies that what happens in the world depends on the actions of the people who live in it, and not on mysterious forces or higher powers. As Karl Marx observed, people make their own destiny—though he added a politically important qualification, 'but not under conditions of their own choosing'. The idea that we can simply choose to end our oppression, which is associated with some kinds of therapy and with New Age philosophies, is mystical rather than materialist, since it denies the materiality of social structures (that they exist and have real, tangible effects). A materialist would insist that while patriarchal capitalism is not ordained by God or fate, its existence is not just a figment of our imagination and we cannot just wish it away.

But 'materialism' has another meaning, which is far more common in ordinary language. This refers to greed or acquisitiveness, an attitude that values things above all else, as in 'she's so materialistic' (the word 'materialistic' can only be used in this sense, not the philosophical one). The two meanings are related—both have to do with a distinction between things that can be grasped (or owned) and



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imaginary or intangible entities like spirits. However, they are not the same; and in some feminist discussion I think they get muddled up.

One example of the muddle I am trying to get at is the way some feminists express hostility to science and technology. In many ways this hostility is justified. We live in



cultures that worship scientific 'progress' and the wealth it gives (some people) access to, while at the same time those cultures downgrade or destroy the other things human beings need for a satisfying life: health, dignity, justice, equality, meaningful work, connections to other people. Feminism is rightly concerned with these 'intangible' things, and therefore it could be called anti-materialist, meaning against the mindless pursuit of wealth, status and power. A critique of science and technology is a legitimate part of this.

But science is not materialist only in the 'greed' sense but also in the philosophical sense. It is a way of understanding the world which assumes that what you see is what you get—there is nothing which cannot be understood by observation and reason, no mysteries except the ones we haven't yet managed to solve. While there are certainly criticisms to be made of science in this respect (it has often

elevated prejudice over reason; for ideological reasons it has tended to deny the role of intuition and the limits of 'objectivity'), the basic commitment to rational, materialist principles of analysis is important for radical politics. To reject it outright is to move for anti-materialism to immaterialism, from a world of material conditions we can understand and act upon to an immaterial world that is inherently mysterious.

Let me try to summarise this argument. 'Immaterialism'—the desire to affirm that there is something more than the material world—may be prompted by political opposition to the materialistic values that dominate our societies. This quest for an alternative definition of the good things in life is another strand contributing to the prominence of spiritual concerns in feminist discourse. But if we reject materialism as a tool for feminist analysis, the effect is to suggest there are forces affecting our lives which we cannot understand or control. This denies us the power to pursue our political goals—understanding and changing the conditions of women's existence in the world.

Meeting our needs

If immaterialism is politically disempowering, how do we explain the fact that many feminists who do not identify with the religious, spiritual or cultural feminist currents I have already mentioned feel some degree of attraction to it? Why, for example, do so many women dabble in horoscopes or tarot cards? It could be that activities of this kind, done without a strong commitment to the underlying belief system, meet important but usually unspoken needs. This is the final strand I want to try and unravel.

Politically active feminists often feel pressure to appear strong and 'in control' and to suppress our doubts, fears and personal insecurities. There are more immediate priorities and women with more pressing needs. Occult practices provide a space in which we can focus on ourselves and we don't have to appear in control. For instance, things may 'come up' in the cards or the stars that we want to talk about but are reluctant to bring up directly ourselves. We may also use certain practices to seek support, reassurance and advice in an informal or disguised way. If we consult someone for a tarot reading or an astrological chart, we are implicitly giving her permission to analyse and question our past, present and future actions.

Quite similar purposes are served by therapy, or consciousness raising, but giving them a supernatural gloss makes them less 'serious' and therefore less threatening. If things do get uncomfortable, it's always open to us to retreat into the kind of discourse which treats the supernatural as a bit of a giggle.

There is also pressure on feminists to set high standards of personal conduct and engage in constant self-criticism when we fall short of these standards. Feminist politics is not split off from every other part of a feminist's life, so in principle almost anything we do could be up for discussion. Things like astrology, used casually or in passing, provide a sort of holiday from this kind of responsibility, by offering an account that says we are the way we are and do the things we do in part because of the sign we were born under. Who hasn't at some time used this way of talking to explain something without going into it too deeply ('I know I shouldn't be



so intense, but I'm a Scorpio')? I'm not saying feminists do this routinely, or even necessarily believe it as it comes out of our mouths, but if the need arises, it's available.

If religious and supernatural practices have the function of giving feminists permission to talk and act in certain ways, for instance by acknowledging that we are not perfect and do not always feel in control, it makes me wonder if we are making enough space for these needs to be acknowledged and dealt with in other kinds of feminist discourse. We can surely agree with the editor of *Sinister Wisdom* when she points out that:

individuals need many of the things that religions offer. We need community, and a sense of purpose within community. We need foundations for our morality...we need a way to understand evil—the mass evils of war, our individual experiences of rape and abuse (p.5-6).



But the question is why feminists of all people should need religion or other supernatural belief systems to provide these things. Everything mentioned in this quote as being offered by religion (community, sense of purpose, morality, understanding of evils like rape) is equally supposed to be offered by feminism as a political movement. If women are looking to other belief systems to supply these things instead, it might suggest a serious political failure. Rather than grafting a spiritual component onto our politics, perhaps we should be looking at the way we do politics and asking what has gone wrong.

Rituals and symbols

Another need or desire which may be addressed by religious, spiritual and occult practices is the desire for rituals and symbols: forms of action, images and words which give order and meaning to life, and mark certain parts of it as 'special'. One function of symbols and rituals is to bring together the individuals who share in them, allowing them to feel they are part of a larger community, and that this is something to celebrate. Even (or perhaps especially) the poorest and most beleaguered communities make space for ritual celebrations, religious or secular, that take people temporarily out of the everyday grind.

Frankly I wish there were more of this in feminism. Politics can be grim, and some would say feminist politics has always had a bit of a puritanical streak (I'm not talking about sex here but other pleasures—food and drink, art, a comfortable and visually appealing environment, space for creativity and play). It seems to me I once did more celebrating than I do now. I can't recall the last time I celebrated, say, International Women's Day (which is a dubious socialist invention in any case) in an unequivocally festive manner, as opposed to by doing something politically worthy, or nothing at all. It also seems as if politics itself has become less colourful—fewer musicians and theatre groups at political events, fewer badges and earrings, less spectacular forms of protest, at least among radical feminists.

But even at the best of times, the WLM never succeeded in forging distinctive traditions and rituals that women could strongly identify with. Perhaps it's this gap which some women have filled by re-enacting or reinventing the rituals of other, nonfeminist traditions.

The spiritual is political

Jesus is supposed to have asserted the value of the spiritual and symbolic by saying that people cannot live by bread alone. Feminists agree: this is also the thought behind the old socialist-feminist anthem 'Bread and Roses'. And as I've just argued, feminism should not underestimate the need for 'roses'—a metaphor for everything that makes life meaningful, pleasurable or special, as opposed to just bearable.

But as we consider how best to address this need, we might also agree with Marx, who said that religion was the opium of the people—spiritual hunger disguises what is really political

hunger. It's only when people can't conceive of getting roses in this world that they dream of getting them in heaven. Similarly, feminist immaterialism may console us for not having achieved political goals like freedom, equality and community as fully or quickly or painlessly as we hoped, but it does not alter the material facts, and it should not divert us from the continued pursuit of our goals.

No form of politics can be entirely rational. Believing that we can end something as historically and culturally pervasive as the

subordination of women requires not only reason but passion too: feminism demands courage, imagination and, let's not deny it, faith. It takes faith to work all your life for goals you know will not be achieved in your lifetime.

But faith in a feminist context is not the same as religious faith or faith in the supernatural. It means believing that ultimately our situation is not mysterious and our destiny is not controlled by higher powers. It means believing the world can be changed, but knowing it will not change by magic. □

Is this common land
or a spiritual enclosure?



Angela Martin

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religion: questions of faith and
community

FMS:

Fraudulent, Misogynist and Sinister

Most radical feminists will be aware of the controversy surrounding False Memory Syndrome, but fewer will have a full picture of who is behind this new 'syndrome' and why. Beth Follini traces the details of the story and explains how survivors of abuse are fighting back.

The sexual abuse and exploitation of children has been a social and political issue since the end of the nineteenth century. There have always been those who deny that sexual abuse of children is a significant problem. Feminists however believe that abuse is widespread in our society. Lately the argument has come to revolve around the concept of 'False Memory Syndrome'.

False Memory Syndrome is a term used by its proponents to refer to memories of sexual abuse that they believe are not real and which they claim have been implanted by a therapist or which have been 'borrowed' by the person from hearing accounts of sexual abuse from the media, books or through personal contacts. The term was coined by the founders of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF) in the US in 1992. The Foundation was born and is maintained mainly through the energy of Pam and Peter Freyd, its founders, whose 33-year-old daughter Jennifer, a psychology professor, had

told them she believed her father had sexually abused her.

The story of the Freyd family and the founding of the FMSF is an interesting one which reveals much of the history behind the growth and popularity of the False Memory movement. When Jennifer Freyd informed her parents that she believed that she had been sexually abused by her father, they (both academics) responded by founding the FMSF. By engaging the help of sympathetic and prominent academics such as Dr Martin Orne, psychologist Elizabeth Loftus, Harold Lief (who was Pam and Peter's therapist in the early 1980s) who sit on the FMSF board, and by launching an efficient and well-funded media campaign in the US, they have managed to have an enormous impact on discussion around child sexual abuse in terms of how the prevalence of child sexual abuse is now viewed, both in terms of legal issues around survivors of sexual abuse claiming compensation and in terms of therapeutic practice. From two parents' denial of the

sexual abuse of their daughter has sprung a highly visible movement of the denial of the voices of many survivors of sexual abuse.

The FMSF experienced some controversy when an interview with one of its prominent board members, psychologist Ralph Underwager, appeared in a Dutch paedophile magazine in which he said:

paedophiles need to become more positive and make the claim that paedophilia is an acceptable expression of God's will for love and unity among human beings (Grant, 1994:9)

Although he was not referring in this interview to his beliefs on False Memory Syndrome (where he believes that the abused parents did not abuse or have sex with their children), his denial that sex with children or paedophilia constitutes abuse underlies what perhaps is a hidden agenda for his involvement with the FMSF. Tellingly, other connections can be made between the False Memory Syndrome Movement and those advocating adult-child sex. The British False Memory Society favourably reviewed a book, 'First, Do No Harm' on false memories in their July 1994 newsletter which contains a chapter advocating sex with children. In an article on False memory Syndrome, Richard Gardner discusses the 'hysteria' over sexual abuse saying,

sexual activities between adults and children are a universal phenomenon... such encounters are not universally traumatic... there are many women who have had sexual encounters with their fathers who do not consider them to have affected their lives detrimentally.

Underwager has made more than 200 appearances in court in North America as a professional witness for the defence in criminal and civil suites involving sexual abuse. He publishes a journal, along with his wife Hollida Wakefield, called *Issues in Child Abuse Accusations*. Their cynicism about the widespread nature of sexual abuse is reflected in articles they publish such as 'Why believe that for which there is no good evidence?'. They also first published Pam Freyd's (written under a pseudonym) version of events within their family in an article entitled 'How could this happen? Coping with a false accusation of incest and rape'. Although Underwager was asked to resign from the FMSF board, his wife still remains on the board.

In 1993, a group calling itself the British False Memory Society (BFMS) was set up with founder and spokesperson Roger Scotford giving

interviews to newspapers, magazine and television programs. Like their American counterparts, they have been able to mobilise an efficient and widespread media campaign which appears to have cut across the diversity of print and broadcast journalism. Scotford recently appeared on 'Good Morning' on BBC1 and was given a sympathetic hearing by hosts Anne and Nick. The most reputable coverage that has been given to the BFMS was an Inside Story documentary broadcast on Channel 4. Testimony was given by parents who had been shocked at their children's accusations of sexual abuse as well as from several women who claimed that they had been made to remember abuse they now believe had not occurred. Psychologists Michael Yapko and Martin Orne, both connected with the FMSF in the US (this connection was not mentioned in the documentary), gave their evidence on the prevalence of False Memory Syndrome. However, no views critical of the concept of False Memory Syndrome were given, nor were views of therapists or researchers who were not connected to the FMSF represented. The BFMS have also mobilised the support of academics and researchers such as Elizabeth Newson at Nottingham University. They have also lobbied MPs on a range of issues including discouraging MPs to support any change in the law to enable more survivors to claim compensation.

The Ramona trial

In the US the Ramona case, tried in spring 1994, provided a focal point for the debate around False Memory Syndrome. In the trial, Gary Ramona sued, for a total of eight million dollars, the therapist of his daughter Holly Ramona, who he claimed had memories of sexual abuse implanted by her therapist. He claimed that as a result of the 'false' accusations his wife had left him and he had lost his job.

Gary Ramona was awarded \$475,000 at the end of the trial and members of the FMSF claimed that the decision of the court proved the innocence of many parents accused of sexual abuse, and the guilt of many therapists who they claim implanted memories of sexual abuse. Certainly the reporting of the trial seemed to support the Foundation's views. Often media reports such as 'Inconsistencies arise at abuse trial' focused on 'evidence' that Holly Ramona had loved her father prior to going into therapy and that the Ramona family had been a 'typical'

happy family. For example the fact that Holly had sent her father a Father's Day card saying 'You're the Greatest' was reported with much fanfare. It was often implied that anyone who loved their father, who had sent him such a father's day card, could not have been at the same time sexually abused by him.

Yet what the newspapers failed to report was evidence that did point to the likelihood that Holly had been abused. Stephanie Ramona, Holly's mother, testified to her belief that Holly had been abused by him giving a number of reasons for her belief: memories of hearing Holly cry out in the night and finding Gary in her room, sometimes in Holly's bed, Gary's insistence on her going out and leaving him to babysit. Other incidents included:

Coming home one time to find Holly, then four or five in a sun dress wearing no underwear and Gary washing the sheets from their bed. 'This is a first', she had said sarcastically and they had fought. Later, when she took the sheets out of the dryer, she found her daughter's underpants in with them.

At the Ramona trial, many of the leading experts in the False Memory debate took sides. Elizabeth Loftus testified for Gary Ramona, claiming that Holly had been subjected to 'an outrageous degree of suggestion' and that her memories had probably been confabulations from other events in childhood such as urethral examination. Lenore Terr testified in defence of the therapist Richard Rose and concluded that the sexual abuse had left other traces on Holly Ramona:

her terror of men, her habit of sleeping with her knees tight against her chest, her high school nightmares of snakes entering her vagina, her terror of gynaecological exams...

However, in the end, the jury found in favour of Gary Ramona although they did award him a sum considerably smaller than what he had originally asked for. Afterwards, many of the jury admitted to biases such as not understanding how Holly Ramona could tell her tale in such a flat unemotional voice and the defence attorney claimed that 'the jury couldn't believe that someone they had sat with for 35 days, who wore a coat and tie could be a sex abuser'.

The impact of False Memory Syndrome

In a relatively short time, False Memory Syndrome has gained media attention which has influenced public awareness about sexual abuse as well as the awareness of policy makers. Tam Dalyell MP in his column in the *New Scientist*

stated that he believed that False Memory Syndrome should be an issue for the courts and that the Lord Chancellors Department should give guidance to the courts to inform juries about False Memory Syndrome since, 'False memories are common enough for judges and juries to be wary of trusting this sort of evidence without corroboration'. In Britain, a case of sexual abuse was recently thrown out of court due to 'fantasies' or false memories of the daughter.

In April 1994, a group founded by Marjorie Orr called Accuracy Against Abuse was set up to counteract False Memory Syndrome. Through press releases and information packets they have managed to receive some media attention although not to the same extent as the BFMS has. Despite the existence of this group the lack of critique of False Memory Syndrome from establishment institutions has worrying implications for the ways in which survivors of sexual abuse will be treated. Will we see a return to the time where it was widely acceptable to disbelieve and/or minimise a survivor's account of sexual abuse?

Survivors of sexual abuse formed the Survivors Coalition in August 1994 partly in response to FMS backlash, and they have tried to combat the falsehoods spread by the BFMS. In January 1995, the British Psychological Society (BPS) published the results of an examination of the debate around FMS and recovered memories. The BPS working party on recovered memories surveyed members of the BPS, examined the records held by the BFMS and reviewed the relevant scientific literature. Although the working party acknowledged the possibility that false memories could be created, they supported the idea that memory loss is a consequence of traumas such as child sexual abuse. They concluded that the forgetting of certain kinds of trauma is often reported and that there are high levels of belief in the accuracy of recovered memories of child sexual abuse among the psychologists they surveyed. They also concluded that the documentation held by the BFMS did not prove that FMS is a widespread phenomena as many of the cases held by them did not involve people who had accused their parents after recovering memories from total amnesia. □

The Survivors Coalition meets the 1st Sunday of each month at 1pm, at Manor Gardens Community Centre, 6-7 Manor Gardens, N7.

Shades of Meaning

Questions of identity and difference have become central to feminist politics, and problems can arise around the language we use to talk about them. Drawing on her work with women who emigrated to Scotland from Pacific and South East Asian countries, Magdalene Ang-Lygate argues that current conventions of language—and thinking—do not fully address the complexities of women's lives, nor place enough emphasis on 'the feminist commitment to moving out of oppressive ways of living'.

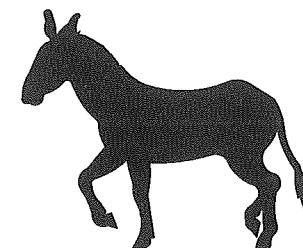
Suniti Namjoshi tells an amusing story about a blue donkey who lived beside a red bridge. The donkey was considered aesthetically unsuitable because the pinkness of the carrots she ate and her own blueness clashed horribly with the red bridge; the townfolk wanted her to do something about it. It seemed that a white donkey would have been more acceptable to the town councillors. The donkey's refusal to change colour or move away led to long debates over whether her blueness was inherent or intentional. In the end, most got used to her colour and did not notice it anymore. Some would occasionally bring her 'a bunch of blue flowers which she put in a vase'.

This story appeals to me because it highlights the absurdity and arrogance of some people who go around telling others what they

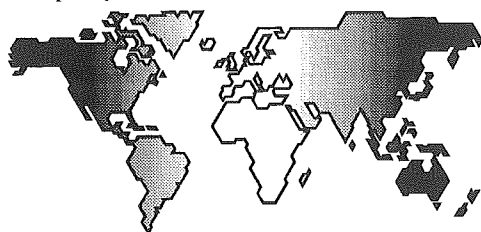
should be in order to fit in. Further, the blue donkey's resistance to such pressure pleases me because she refused to play that game. Not once did she suggest that the bridge be repainted blue to fit in with her. Nor did she attempt to justify the worth of blue when compared to white. If she had done this, she would have been complicit with the irrational colour-based logic that prompted the initial request. Instead, she refused to engage on the basis of colour insisting that she was only different because she was a donkey.

The Identity Game: Where are the meanings?

For some time now, in both my academic work and in my feminist activism, I have been



concerned that the debates and practices surrounding 'black' issues, particularly women's experiences, have been largely unproblematised and complicit with what has been called the IDPOL game. Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge coined this term to describe a currently popular game where identity politics is combined with ideological policing. They observed that in recent years, identity politics has changed from a neutral term used by social scientists to describe the various methods that social movements have employed to 'alter self-conceptions and societal conceptions of their participants' to that of attempts by particular groups 'to gain political advantage from whatever makes it identifiable as a (usually disadvantaged or oppressed) group'. I want to query the usefulness of adopting 'PC' language and terminology as a resistance strategy without understanding what is actually at stake when we neglect to see the implications of possible complicity.



Most of my research work is centred around the immigration experiences of Chinese and Filipina women who originate from Pacific and South East Asian countries and who have settled in Scotland. I listen to the oral accounts of these women, paying particular attention to their notions of 'home', community, sense of Self and sense of belonging. I had initially expected this process to be a straight-forward study because I am an immigrant Malaysian-Chinese myself and the women were willing to speak to me freely, but one of the main problems I have encountered is in the inadequacy of available terminology. I try to write about women like us and place us within a feminist/anti-racist or womanist context. (Alice Walker coined the term 'womanist' to represent an identity that has been informed by issues of racism/sexism, to distinguish it from 'feminist', an identity she saw as mainly appropriated by western white women.) In writing from this perspective, I have had to use permutations of words such as 'black', diasporic, immigrant, migrant, visible

minority, ethnic, women of colour, 'Third World' women, native (female) Other—all of which are individually wanting and inaccurate. Often, I have identified with the Ancient Mariner's predicament, 'Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink'.

Amidst this curious abundance of unsuitable terminology, it has been tempting to cut corners and simply revert to less verbose forms of description—using for example, the more familiar British term 'black' women or 'Third World' women instead of adopting longer styles like diasporic women of colour or whatever. However, each of these terms are themselves problematic and tinged with ambiguous meanings.

Problems of language and identity

The issue of 'black' women and the critique of 'white' feminism has gained prominence in recent years but what do we mean by 'black' and who counts as 'black'? For example, the term 'black' has different meanings when used in different academic and cultural contexts. In the USA, Black has a more specific reference to skin colour and peoples of African descent whereas in Britain 'black' is used more loosely as a political category that includes all people who are not 'white'.

I accept that in certain circumstances, identity politics as a political strategy has been used extensively and successfully. For example, in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, the category 'black' provided us with a critical location from which to speak. Yet, the usage of the term 'black' other than with specific reference to black skin colour falls into a binary opposition trap that artificially separates 'blacks' from 'whites'. What worries me is that when this colour IDPOL game is played, we are actually being complicit with a structure that is built on the self-other principle which inevitably undoes the possibility of difference. Thus the possibility of theorising difference as diversity is denied. Translated into anti-racist discourse, there is no room in this particular game plan for mixed-race peoples, nor is there any space available for admitting the possibility of 'black'- 'black' or 'white'- 'white' racism—e.g. between South Asian and Afro-Caribbean or between English and Irish peoples.

The privileging of 'race', colour, descent over and above other social categories, say of class, sexuality, etc. also obscures the experi-

ences of 'hyphenated' identities; like that of the proverbial 'black'-lesbian-working-class-disabled woman who, under binary self-other systems of political strategy, cannot help but appear to be vacillating in her loyalties to any one political cause. As Bev Smith puts it, 'Women do not lead their lives like, "Well this part is race, and this is class, and this part has to do with women's identities"'. Everyday experiences and realities of diasporic women of colour are not easily dissected and separated. Adopting 'black' identity may force such women to pretend that they do not engage in life on multiple and sometimes conflicting levels. Yet, this is often what IDPOL insists on.

An unwritten assumption is made that goes like this. If you are non-white, then you are 'black'. If you are 'black', your oppression is racial and you will testify to your racial victimisation. What womanism did was expose the impossibility of such simplistic rules of play. The processes of racialisation or privileging 'race' or descent are complex and not confined merely to skin colour. Other social differences such as class, common culture, gender, language, sexuality or beliefs, which may be more pertinent, are overshadowed. For example, in a sexist society, where males of whatever 'race' or colour are privileged and females marginalised, the experience of racialisation is different for 'black' men and 'black' women. Yet the political category 'black' will present a different social division based solely on a singular perceived primary identity—'race', itself a socially constructed identity.

To add to the confusion, the popular images



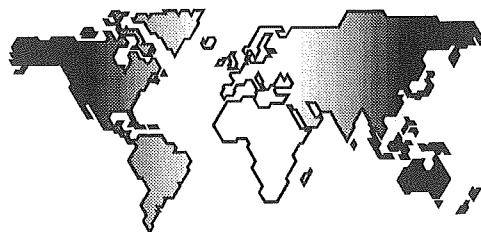
presented of 'black' people resident in Britain are dominated by peoples from the African and Indian subcontinents or of African descent from the West Indies. Although it is true that their populations are larger than other groups, these images distort and exclude peoples of other ethnic origins. Hence, the term 'black' renders many women, who are often unpoliticised and thus cannot visibly identify as 'black' (or 'white'), invisible.

During the course of my research work, only one Chinese woman interviewed identified herself as 'black'. She happens to be an active anti-racist activist and highly politicised, familiar with the kinds of words she should be heard using. In such ways, some immigrant women, e.g. Chinese, Filipina, Malay or Japanese, unfamiliar with British anti-racist language, are denied spaces from which they can voice their own rights and concerns. Furthermore, in practice we have at times been excluded from the category 'black', and 'black' groups have not always been welcoming because they do not see us as being 'black' enough. Being excluded from the category 'white' and its privileges and not accepted as 'black' by other black women is a dilemma that colour IDPOL poses for women like us.

The Name Game: Who makes the rules?

Likewise, the concept of one distinct 'Third World' is problematic. This term actually describes regions and individual countries of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Middle East. Although these countries share

a common predicament with respect to their economic status in a competitive world economy having suffered the after effects of colonization, the differences and variations between and



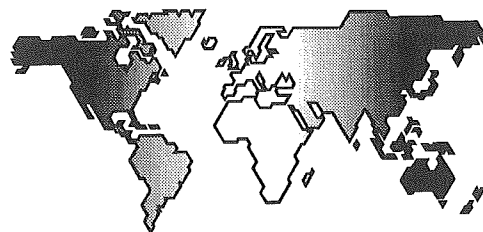
within 'Third World' regions is enormous—such as in religion, political systems, culture and class structures. 'Ethnic minority' is another difficult term as it is often used as a blanket term for all peoples of colour inclusive of 'white ethnic minorities'. Apart from its eurocentric imperialist overtones and the fact that globally, Caucasians are distinctly in the minority, its usage also draws attention to a curious anomaly whereby we all know what we mean when we use the category 'minority' to apply to an empirical majority. More recently, in the European context, in order to distinguish between 'white minorities' and 'non-white minorities', the term 'visible minority' is being used to mean all non-Caucasian peoples. In addition, on the strange assumption that black and white are not colours, the preferred phrase in the USA for non-Caucasian, non-African peoples is 'people of colour'.

Similarly, in Britain the term Asian is used to describe peoples who originate from the Indian subcontinent (themselves widely varied culturally) and there seems to be no distinction between Asians who are British subjects and those who are not. In the USA, the category Asian usually applies to peoples from the Indian subcontinents and from South-East and Pacific Asian countries such as Japan, Korea and the Philippines. Upon obtaining citizenship, these groups of peoples are then referred to as Asian-American, Chinese-American or Japanese-American and so on. The status of 'immigrant' seems to be more transient in the USA than it is in Europe. In Britain, we have no words to describe British-born 'immigrants'. The British 'black' identity as a strategy does not convey notions of belonging and community because it obeys the self-other principle that sets us apart and places no emphasis on commonalities such as the struggle for decent housing, good jobs,

secure futures for our children. Subsequently, such peoples—whatever their length of stay or national status—are automatically viewed as permanent sojourners rather than as active citizens who participate fully in society.

Postcolonial feminist theorists such as Gayatri C Spivak, Trinh T Minh-Ha, Chandra T Mohanty, Shirley Geok-Lin Lim amongst others have repeatedly asserted that under western eyes, the identities of immigrant women who are seen as outsider-incomers are products of dominant-insider imagination and hence categorisation. It is worth noting that post-colonial theorists generally agree that western eyes are not always 'white' eyes. It is possible for 'black' peoples resident in the west to view immigrants with eurocentric eyes too. Colonial/imperialist mentality continues to construct imaginary enclosures within which immigrant peoples are racialised.

For example, in the 1991 Census, members of the public were asked to indicate their ethnic origin. In previous counts, reliance was placed on birthplace as an indicator of racial or ethnic origin. Seemingly, such reliance was not accurate because the count included those white people born in former colonies and excluded 'black' and ethnic minority people born in the UK. After consultation with the Commission for Racial Equality among others, nine separate categories—White, Black Caribbean, Black African, Black Other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Any other ethnic group—were decided upon. Far from being a progressive step towards the recognition of difference within a multicultural Britain, this kind of structured racialisation actually highlights the racist legacy of a neo-colonial society



obsessed with demonising the 'natives'. In 1984, the third Policy Studies Institute survey estimated that 40% of Britain's 'black' population was British born; moreover it estimated that 50% of those who came to Britain as immigrants had lived in Britain for over 15 years.

Also, 'immigration' as a word is often

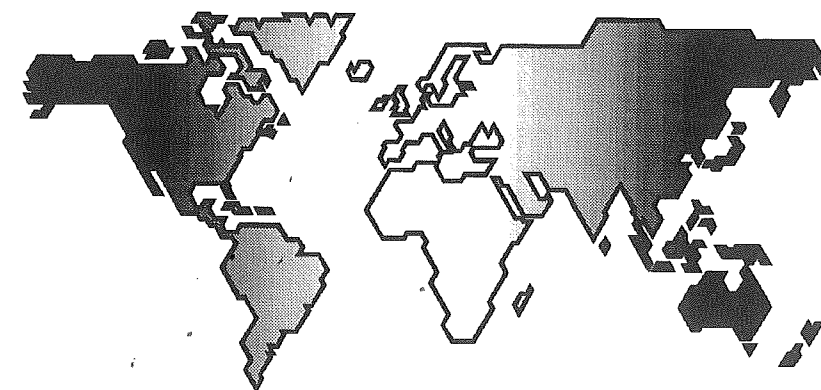
wrongly linked only to 'black' people. The majority of immigrants are actually white—from Eire or the Old Commonwealth (Australia, New Zealand and Canada) or from other European countries. For example, the 1981 Census Country of Birth Tables revealed that nearly 3.4 million people in Britain were born overseas. The majority of these 1.9 million were white—607,000 were born in Ireland, 153,000 in the Old Commonwealth and about 1.13 million in other countries including Western Europe. Surely if greater accuracy were to be reflected in the 1991 Census, categories such as Australian, Canadian, Italian, French, Spanish and so on should also have been included to reflect ethnic differences amongst Caucasians resident in Britain. Instead, in so-called postcolonial times, it would appear that the same name game is still being played such that colonialists remain in control of how other, meaning non-white, people are categorised.

In contrast with the one Chinese woman who identified specifically as 'black', all the other women interviewed insisted that while they may have assumed Scottish identity, they were definitely Chinese or Filipina. Although each woman addressed the problem of racism at the level to which she experienced it, there was no indication that they were even aware that the category 'black' might be applied to them. Accordingly, it strikes me as ironic that British anti-racist discourse has adopted what was originally an imperialist enterprise when colonial powers imposed identities on colonised peoples and refused them the power to name themselves.

In writing of her immigration experiences in the USA, Mirtha Quintanales drew attention to her own similar ignorance of her 'black' identity:

We need to keep in mind that in this country, in this world, racism is used both to create false differences among us and to mask very very significant ones - cultural, economic, political. ...All Chinese American women are non-white. But ask any of them what her identity is. She will not tell you 'yellow', she will tell you Chinese, or Chinese American. Many African peoples are 'Black', but ask a Nigerian, an Ethiopian etc. what her identity is and she will tell you 'Nigerian' or 'Ethiopian', or whatever... Obviously 'Black Culture' is an American phenomenon. Many of us don't really understand this.

Although Quintanales was writing about immigrant experience in the North American context, her observations about the problem of



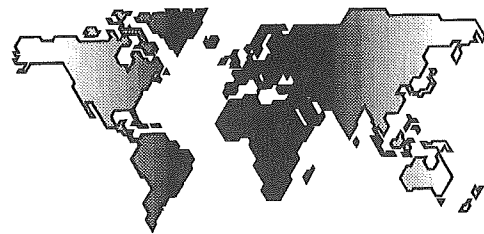
racism and the anti-racist struggle is equally relevant to diasporic immigrant experience in Britain. It is a mistake to fall prey to a racist/sexist mythology that insists that our 'black' experience as non-white women puts us all in the same category as victims of racism; that social inequality and injustice is ultimately reducible to 'race' or colour differences. Likewise, in the British context, it would appear that the 'black' identity that anti-racist discourse promotes is a British phenomenon which is in fact alien to many immigrant women who may not realise that they have been identified and categorised as such.

The Myth of Authenticity

Whether or not a Chinese woman is 'black' enough, even the term 'Chinese' is itself problematic. When used as a unifying category, it forces a unilateral homogeneity on Chinese peoples and fosters the myth of authentic ethnicity. Dominant racialised stereotypes whether manifested as 'true native' or 'typical immigrant', encourage essentialist identity that ignores the materiality of other social factors such as class, ethnicity, sexuality—all negotiated historically and geographically. Hence in terms of Chineseness, a Chinese woman from Hong Kong has a completely different ethnic makeup from another Chinese woman from Singapore or Mainland China and their Chineseness alone cannot be automatically assumed to be a source of commonality.

Moreover, in my sample of Chinese women, when encouraged to speak about their friendships and personal support structures, only one woman admitted to having mainly Chinese friends. It was interesting that the others not only spoke warmly of their white friends but

gave no indication that they had any close Chinese friendships in their locality. One woman in particular described how she depended heavily on her white friends when she suffered a family bereavement but received no emotional support from her own kind—her Chinese friends. In terms of community, she was clear that she belonged with her Chinese friends and spoke of her white friends as if they were outsiders—reflecting dominant modes of thinking. However if we were to interpret her testimony in a non-racialised way, and listen to her perspective as a woman who transgressed racial boundaries in her friendship circles, we can argue that she did in fact receive support from her own kind—newly married women with



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young school-aged children. Apart from common Chinese descent, she had nothing in common with her Chinese friends whom she saw only once a week. The commonalities we share as women are not always overridden by 'race'. Other social attributes such as shared experience of childbearing, childrearing, mothering, marriage, beliefs and lifestyles are equally significant in the construction of social relationships and to our social location as women.

Moving beyond self-other

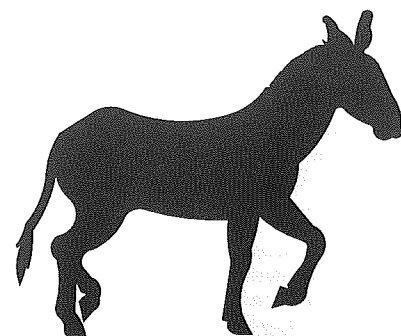
I would like to think that the ability to deal with difference is at the centre of feminism's survival as a movement for social change. In retaining the term 'women', we are not insisting on universal homogeneity because we are learning to recognise differences and diversity along other social lines of class, 'race', sexuality, nationality, abilities. Solidarity amongst all women is an utopian ideal and so long as it remains one, it would be strategic for us to continue to struggle together as 'women'. Yet

this is no longer an unexamined strategy because the space is there to examine complexities and contradictions without losing sight of feminist ideals of sisterhood, social justice and freedom from oppression. In the same way, I believe the time is here for 'black' identity to be similarly unmasked as only a useful strategy but no more. Too much effort has been wasted on ideological policing at the expense of neglecting feminist commitment to moving out of oppressive ways of living.

Sometimes the indiscriminate adoption of 'PC' language closes down ways of thinking rather than opening them up to the possibilities for understanding different women's experiences. Hence terms like 'black', Black or black are to be used with care not only for reasons of political correctness and political strategy, but to enable us to appreciate the complex, multi-dimensional aspects of women's identities. More importantly, in doing so we must not lose sight of our aim of working together towards social transformation—the meeting of women's needs. What was interesting in Namjoshi's story of the blue donkey was that at the end, even those townfolk who accepted the blue donkey as she was, continued playing the colour game and brought her blue flowers. Personally, I suspect the blue donkey would rather they brought her carrots—of any colour. □

Note

I use the term 'black' in quotation marks only within the context of anti-racist discourse and the term Black, with upper case B, to specifically refer to peoples who originate from and identify with the African continent. The word for the colour black remains as it is.



Free Emma Humphreys:

An update on the Justice for Women campaign

Harriet Wistrich explains the background to Emma Humphreys' conviction for murder, and reports on progress towards her appeal.

In December 1985, Emma Humphreys was convicted of killing the man she was living with, Trevor Armitage. Her defence of manslaughter on the grounds of provocation failed. Armitage had subjected Emma to extreme violence during their six month relationship, and wanted to control of every aspect of her life. On the night that Emma killed him, with a single stab wound, she was in a complete state of terror. He was about to rape her and she thought he might kill her. She was 17 years old and therefore sentenced as a juvenile to be detained 'At Her Majesty's Pleasure'—an indeterminate sentence.

Emma's Story

Emma was born in Britain but moved to Canada at around the age of 10 to live with her mother and stepfather. Both were alcoholics and as young children Emma and her sisters witnessed many violent assaults on her mother by her stepfather. On a number of occasions the family had to move into refuge to escape the stepfather's violence. On one occasion, Emma's mother slit her wrists; after that when she got very frightened or depressed, she would say to

Emma, 'If you don't sit up with me all night, I'll slit my wrists again.' Emma found her chaotic home environment very distressing and took to running away from home. As a teenager she lived partly in care and partly on the road, getting drawn in to a world of drink, drugs, prostitution and pornography.

At the age of 15, Emma returned to England to live with her father in Nottingham. This didn't work out, and she soon became homeless, working as a prostitute. At 16, Emma met Armitage, who was a client, and she moved in with him when he offered her a place to live. At first Emma believed that Armitage loved her, but she found this hard to reconcile with the extreme physical, sexual, and emotional abuse he subjected her to. Armitage was extremely possessive and controlling, he constantly checked up on her movements and even nailed down the windows to stop her running away.

During the period of her relationship with Armitage, Emma was gang raped, after which she could no longer face sex with him. He continued to rape and abuse Emma, and her fear of him grew. Three days before his death, Emma's mother telephoned the Nottingham

police from Canada, insisting that they check up on Emma. She had spoken to Emma on the phone and feared for her daughter's life.

On the night of 25 February 1985, Emma had been out with Armitage, his 16 year old son and two friends, that evening he had 'jokingly' threatened Emma with a 'gang bang'. Emma came home early, awaiting his return terrified that he was going to attack her again. She decided to slash her wrists to divert his attention from the inevitable rape, a tactic that had worked on a previous occasion. However, when Armitage returned, Emma panicked, hid the kitchen knife and her bleeding wrists. Armitage undressed and lay down beside her. Emma was terrified he might use the knife concealed under her body on her, and in a sudden movement she took the knife and stabbed him once. He died shortly afterwards.

On her arrest, Emma was in a state of shock, and unable to explain to the police why she had killed Armitage. She allowed them to construct her statement. She found it hard to describe in any detail Armitage's abuse of her, either to the police (all male) or to the male duty solicitor



who was subsequently appointed.

Emma received no counselling during her 11 months on remand. When her case came to trial she felt unable to speak in a public courtroom about her experience of abuse and consequently gave no evidence on her own behalf. The only defence witness was a male psychiatrist who had interviewed her while on remand. The police statement, which omitted any history of violence and abuse, effectively convicted Emma of murder.

'The help she badly needs'?

Justice Kenneth Jones said, on passing sentence, 'Perhaps it is the best possible sentence that could be passed on her in her own interest. It gives room for her to receive help which she badly needs.' In June 1994 (nearly nine years later) the Parole Board rejected granting Emma a release date or of moving her to open prison. This was in spite of the favourable reports presented to the Board stating that she is not a security risk and that her suitability for release must be tested in open conditions. Emma has now spent over ten years in custody, a great deal longer than most convicted rapists and many men who have killed women known to them. Justice for Women argue that someone who has been through what Emma has suffered should never have been placed in prison in the first place.

Emma contacted campaigning group Justice For Women (JfW) after seeing news features on other women in her situation such as Sara Thornton, Janet Gardner and Kiranjit Ahluwalia. We agreed to work with her to help bring her case to the Court of Appeal. After nearly two and a half years of campaigning and supporting the non-legally aided legal team, her appeal is now due to be heard on 29 June 1995.

The remainder of this article describes the work involved in bringing Emma's case to the Court of Appeal. Many of our ideas and campaigning strategies came from working with Southall Black Sisters (SBS) on their campaign to free Kiranjit Ahluwalia.

First, we found Emma a solicitor, who was experienced in the area and willing to work free of charge. Rohit Sanghvi, who represented Kiranjit, Sara Thornton and Janet Gardner at appeal agreed to take up her case. I, as a member of JfW, volunteered to act as a main liaison person and visit Emma regularly. In order to assist with building up a case for the



defence, I took a very detailed statement from Emma, getting her to describe to me her whole life history, focussing particularly on her six month relationship with Armitage and the events leading up to the fatal stabbing. The statement which was compiled over a period of about 5 months was then transcribed into an over 70-page typed statement which has proved a useful source of information for solicitor and counsel. Meanwhile the campaign produced a 'Free Emma Humphreys' leaflet and started publicising the case with the media. Early articles appeared in *The Observer*, *Sunday Times* and a short item on Radio One. Later we collaborated with BBC Nottingham on a small news item and Yorkshire TV's hour long documentary for Network First, 'Women Who Kill', which in its turn generated some more national news coverage (*Guardian*, later *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Telegraph*).

On a grass roots level, we have organised demonstrations outside the Home Office, given talks to various organisations, held two fundraising benefits and a public meeting. Both (women only) fundraising benefits were very well attended, packing Conway Hall to beyond

capacity and providing a very enjoyable line up of poets, musicians, circus and magic performers. The public meeting also attracted in over 100 people to hear speakers including Gareth Peirce, Hannana Siddiqui from Southall Black Sisters, Jean Corston MP, Kiranjit Ahluwalia and Jill Radford from Rights of Women.

Legal hurdles and loopholes

Grounds of appeal were finally submitted around June 1994. This was almost 18 months after Emma first contacted us. The length of time in getting to that stage only seems to me quite inordinate, particularly when that amounts to another 18 months inside for Emma. By choosing to fight her conviction, particularly at such a late stage in her sentence (she had served seven and a half years when she first contacted us), Emma came into conflict with the prison service. The parole board rejected giving Emma a release date despite the fact that she had surpassed the Home Secretary's tariff date of eight years. To gain the respect of the parole board, a prisoner is expected to have come to terms with their conviction, the fact that Emma was now fighting that conviction and attracting a

lot of media publicity for that fight, seems to have made the prison service very inconsistent, if not punitive.

The delay was in part due to the length of time since her original trial which meant that various legal papers had gone missing and the Court of Appeal took about five months to find the transcript of the judge's summing up.

Once grounds of appeal had gone in, we wrote to all MPs and selected Lords asking for their support. We now have a decent list of supporters for the campaign, including a range of voluntary organisations and unions, a smattering of celebrities and over 50 MPs and Lords, though not a single Tory. One of the Lords we wrote to knew personally the original judge and QC in the case, and took it upon himself to write to them. As it turns out this may have played a crucial role in winning Emma leave to appeal.

When Emma was originally convicted at trial for murder, her legal team said they would put in for an appeal. Emma, at that point had little faith in her legal team or indeed in the whole court process. She had received no counselling or support for the experiences she had been through and had become severely

anorexic and regularly self-harmed. When the single judge at the Court of Appeal rejected the grounds for appeal, Emma's legal team could have taken her case before three judges in arguing for leave to appeal, however there would no longer have been legal aid for this stage. Emma's solicitor did not bother to visit her in prison after she was convicted or after the grounds for appeal were rejected to explain what options were available. Instead, she was called up by the prison authorities to be informed that grounds for appeal had been rejected and asked if she now wished to abandon the appeal process. Egged on by a friend and without having the implications explained, Emma signed an abandonment of appeal.

In order for Emma therefore to succeed eight years on in getting an appeal, we had first to get a nullity of the abandonment, then to get an extension of time in which to renew the application for leave and then to actually be granted leave to appeal.

On 16 January 1995 the Court of Appeal heard arguments, put forward by Emma's counsel, Vera Baird, that Emma's 'abandonment' of the appeal process eight and a half

years ago should be treated as a nullity. At the opening of her submission, Justice Stewart-Smith stated rather irritably, 'My first reaction to this is that it doesn't come anywhere near to a nullity'. My heart sank when I was hit by the realisation that this was not a mere procedural step, Emma might not even get to the Court of Appeal if we could not overcome this hurdle. There are, I was to learn, very limited legal grounds on which such a nullity can be granted. The legal authority is a case called *Medway*, which states that there must be evidence of fraud, mistake, misinformation or misapprehension as to what was being signed. The opening which the court were prepared to consider, after Vera Baird's submission, was that Emma may not have understood the two-stage process in getting to an appeal. In order to support this view, we were given an adjournment in order to collect affidavit evidence from Emma's solicitor and two counsel at original trial testifying to Emma's state of mind at the time.

The original QC at Emma's trial, David Clarke is now a judge in Liverpool. His memory of the case had been recently jogged by one of the Lords we had contacted earlier writing to him about the case. Possibly, as a result, he wrote a very sympathetic letter to the court, in which he said:

I feel that this was a classic example of the difficulties faced by defendants whose provocation (in the non-legal sense) consists of a long history of appalling violence and/or sexual abuse but who cannot point to a specific item of conduct giving rise to a sudden loss of self-control.

It is certainly a tribute to the feminist campaigns that some of the problems with provocation and violence against women are now recognised by members of the judiciary. It was undoubtedly his letter that shifted the attitude of the judges at the Court of Appeal from a fairly cynical position to a much more positive one the following week. On 23 January the Court granted Emma a nullity of her abandonment, an extension of eight and a half years to renew her application for leave to appeal (which may well be a record) and they went on to grant her leave to appeal with legal aid for a barrister and QC.

Justice for Women has also had an input into the formulation of legal grounds for appeal. We are concerned, for instance, that defences such as 'battered women's syndrome' do not become adopted as a strategy for these kind of

cases, because of the way they pathologise the woman rather than the focus on the abuse she suffered. We are trying to get the courts to consider the testimony of a feminist expert witness who, using the knowledge we have from our own activism, experience and studies around violence against women, can help explain the state of mind Emma was in at the time of the offence and why she was unable to speak in her own defence at trial. We can unfortunately only push this as far as the very narrow legal loopholes will allow. At the end of the day, as far as legal arguments are concerned, the primary concern is to get Emma's conviction quashed, but if, in any small way, we can shift the way in which the legal system understands the issue of violence against women then that is also our aim.

The date for the Appeal has been set for 29 June and it is to be heard by Lord Chief Justice Taylor. It was Taylor who delivered judgment in the Ahluwalia case, where the grounds for provocation were shifted slightly, we are hoping further movement will be made in Emma's case. JfW is gearing up for a massive publicity campaign. Emma now has a good chance of success. To help influence the result of her appeal, we need to make it very clear that there is massive support for her around the country. Please attend the demonstration outside the Court of Appeal on June 29. Please join the campaign and send us any donation. Help us win Emma's freedom, help shift attitudes around violence against women, help show the world that the struggle for women's liberation is alive and kicking! □

To join Justice for Women contact:

London: 55 Rathcoole Gardens
London N8 9NE

Manchester: 28 Eaton Road
Manchester M33

Norwich: The Women's Centre
36 Magdalene Street
Norwich

Leeds: c/o Inter-Agency Project
CHEL
26 Roundhay Road
Leeds LS7 1AB



A HUNGER FOR CONTROL

*Here we reprint an edited extract from Morag MacSween's study **Anorexic Bodies**, in which the author takes issue with the common tendency to 'add on' social and feminist explanations of anorexia to psychological or familial accounts, instead of placing women's contradictory and subordinate position at the centre of our understanding. In this extract, Morag MacSween considers what anorexic women's eating rituals tell us about the struggle between appetite and control, compliant femininity and individual agency.*

Thirty years ago, very few people had heard of anorexia nervosa, an obscure psychiatric illness which seemed to confine itself almost exclusively to teenage girls. Since then anorexia has risen from its psychiatric obscurity to take its place in 'tabloidese'. Any woman who is well-known as well as thin has a reasonable chance of being diagnosed anorexic by journalist pop psychologists. New theories about aetiology and incidence—'zinc cures' and anorexic yuppie men—are reported in the serious press. 'My triumph over anorexia' stories are common in women's magazines. Popular interest mirrors evidence of a real rise in cases of anorexia, with some estimates claiming that one in every hundred teenage girls is a sufferer. Many more are thought to develop the more covert disorder of bulimia, or teeter on the brink of anorexia.

For the sociologist and the feminist, too, anorexia is interesting. The anorexia 'boom' at precisely the time when feminism was again

challenging the oppression of women, coupled with the evidence that almost all anorexics are women, that anorexia has a strong middle class bias and that it is virtually unknown outside the developed West, suggest that the illness has some relationship to the social situation of middle-class women in modern Western culture. Most discussions of anorexia, whether psychiatric, feminist or popular, include at least some reference to the social position of women. Few, however, develop this suggested linkage into a fully sociological analysis of anorexia.

In trying to develop such an analysis, I wanted to avoid two common features of other writings on anorexia. The effects of the politics of physical appearance and the strictures of femininity on feminine psychology are frequent explanatory features in analyses of anorexia. However, with a few feminist exceptions this sociological perspective is simply 'added on' to explanations of anorexia as individual, or

occasionally familial, pathology as though these two types of analysis were totally compatible. What is suggested is that while, yes, there are 'social pressures' on young women which impinge on their becoming anorexic, in the last instance it is a deficiency in the 'pre-anorexic' girl's psychology which explains anorexia. Arguing against this, I suggest that in the anorexic symptom, women try to synthesise contradictory elements in their social position through the creation of an 'anorexic body'.

Individuality vs femininity

Individuality is presented as gender-neutral but it is fundamentally masculine. The social construction of gendered subjectivity conditions our perception of sexuality and of the body. My contention here is that just as 'individuality' and 'femininity' are understood by sociologists to be social constructions rather than naturally existing facts, so too are masculinity and femininity and the masculine and feminine body. The self, the body and desire are socially constructed in the same structure of meaning: masculine is both masculine and neutral, and is active; feminine is only feminine, and is responsive. The superficial gender-neutrality of individuality masks its fundamentally masculine character.

The social construction of masculine and feminine means that being a man is about 'not being a woman'; being a woman is about 'not being a man'. Women who aspire to non-gendered subjectivity undercut this structure of difference but rarely perceive it directly. Reconciling the hidden incompatibility between individuality and femininity is the central task of growing up female in contemporary Western culture. It is this hidden incompatibility which lies at the heart of the anorexic symptom. The specific class and gender position of the 'anorexic population' addresses the dilemmas of individuality and femininity particularly acutely. Her class position places expectations of educational and career success on the 'pre-anorexic' girl's shoulders. She must act in pursuit of her own interests. Her gender membership imprisons her within the constraints of femininity. She must respond to the needs and desires of others. The mutual exclusivity of these demands remain submerged in the ideology of gender-neutral individuality: their resolution, thus, is covert, subconscious, indirect.

In anorexia women take gender-neutral individuality seriously, working with the social constructions of feminine desire and the feminine body in an attempt to construct an anorexic body which resolves gender contradictions in being truly neutral. The anorexic 'solution' however, is an indirect and individualised response to a social issue. Anorexic women cannot, in their isolation, produce a real or lasting solution to the degraded social construction of the feminine. Their 'solution' is at best temporary and is always precarious.

Appetite as enemy

In anorexia, feminine self-control takes on new dimensions. 'Weight-watching' becomes the major and eventually the sole activity of the anorexic woman. Anorexic rituals attempt to create secure defences against appetite, and the ultimate goal is the construction of the body as desireless and inviolate. Eating nothing—allowing nothing into the body—is the end towards which anorexic rituals aim. The enemy of anorexic control is appetite. Appetite is the chaos which makes the discipline so necessary; appetite is the danger from which ritualised eating tries to protect the self; and appetite is the force which undermines and makes so precarious anorexic self-control.

In anorexia the body and its appetites are transformed in an attempt to eradicate desire. This splitting process is defined by anorexic women in a variety of ways—either the body, food or appetite come to be seen as alien to the self. The bodily alienation and objectification of all women are transformed in anorexia with the construction of an absolute opposition between appetite and 'self'. Here the body is split into two: the desiring body in which the appetite is lodged; and the desireless body, which needs nothing and wants nothing.

The ultimate aim of anorexia is the destruction of the body as desiring, the body in which dangerous appetite is lodged, and the ascendancy of the object-body. The aim to create the body as an absolute object—inviolable, complete, inactive and initiativeless—wholly owned and controlled by the self. The irony of anorexia is that the object-body comes to control the self. The anorexic woman feels powerless to stop a process she herself began. The conscious strategy of not eating comes to control and oppress its creator. This sense of control by an external force is further mirrored in hospital-

isation, where the anorexic woman becomes the object of medical control.

Control

Women explain being anorexic against a background of uncertainty not infrequently amounting to bafflement. However, the need to exert some control over something in an environment in which they felt powerless is a dominant explanation:

The only independence I could have was to be independent of food and no-one could make me change.

I became anorexic as a result of dieting which I couldn't stop. However much weight I lost I just wanted to lose more. I am 5 ft 6½ ins tall, and my goal weight was 6 stone (I never achieved this weight). I felt more attractive the slimmer I became, and felt more confident and controlled. I felt I was displaying supreme self-control. The slimmer I became the more successful in everything I felt.

I needed to have something in my life which I was in control of... I felt that by limiting my food intake I was gaining a sense of power.

Once a need for control has been identified, then, how is that need acted on? For the respondents to my survey, diet was the *obvious* arena of control for women; their responses simply take it for granted, and not surprisingly also take for granted thinness as a feminine ideal.

The concern with eating and the body shows what areas of their lives women can control. Women's involvement with food shows the extent and the nature of the responsibilities of the female role. Food is women's responsibility but women's responsibility as subordinates. For women, cooking is primarily a service for others, principally men and children. Food for women expresses the priority of others' needs and wants rather than personal desire. Cooking is for others, the dictates of personal tastes unimportant, and dieting normal.

With this in mind, the 'choice' or anorexic women to seek control through eating is not surprising. Once diet has been 'chosen' as the way to achieve mastery and success, a complex set of rituals around food and eating specifically, and the body and its environment generally, is developed.

Anorexic rituals

In her book *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas defines ritual as 'an attempt to create and maintain a particular culture, a particular set of

assumptions by which experience is controlled'. Ritual frames experience: 'the marked-off time or place alerts a special kind of expectancy... framing and boxing limit experience, shut in desired themes or shut out intruding ones'.

Three features of her analysis of ritual are especially relevant to anorexic rituals: ritual, she suggests, frames and controls experience through the inclusion of what is safe and valued and the exclusion of what is dangerous or polluting; it does this by defining as polluting/dangerous that which crosses the line between order and formlessness; and in modern societies, rituals express the fragmented experience of discrete social groups. In anorexia, the ritual practices with which women surround the act of eating function to allow into the body/system 'safe' food and exclude 'dangerous' food. The restricted list of allowed food, the control of time, place and manner of eating impose order on a threatened chaos of appetite which is most frequently present in the act of eating.

Douglas argues that 'transitional states' are dangerous because transition is 'neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable'. Eating in anorexia is precisely such a transitional state—between emptiness and purity and fullness and shame, between the denial of appetite and surrendering to it. The order which anorexic rituals impose on each act of eating attempts to control the formlessness of appetite. Whilst it would be wholly inaccurate to define 'normal' or non-anorexic eating as 'unritualised', it is clear that anorexic eating is much more densely and consciously ritualised than the three-meals-a-day status quo. While 'non-anorexic' eating is certainly not determined by response to a 'natural' appetite—we do not eat only when we are hungry and exactly what we want—it does allow for some 'responsive' eating—snacks or eating between meals, or eating something new or different. For the anorexic woman *all* eating is dangerous and transitional, and ritualisation is an attempt to make it progressively safer by divesting it as far as possible of spontaneity and response to desire. It is, in fact, *appetite*, the desire for food which is dangerous, which represents formlessness; the anorexic woman fears that once she starts to eat she will be unable to stop. The daily plan of eating the same food in the same place at the same time in the same way reduces the possibility that appetite will break into her order.

Safe and dangerous food

If it were as simple as all food being wholly negative, however, the anorexic dilemma would be simple and fatal. Appetite, however, is both dangerous *and* pleasurable. At the start of the anorexic process only certain foods are defined as polluting—usually 'fattening' or 'forbidden' foods. The distinction here is between food as *fuel* and food as *pleasure*. But the category of 'safe' food is hard to maintain.

For the anorexic woman, purity in food categories is never wholly possible, for it is not the inherent properties of the food itself which are dangerous, but her desire for it. She can reduce the danger of that desire by eliminating the foods she desires most, but she can never totally eliminate the desire entailed in hunger. As she eats from a more and more restricted list of foods, appetite attaches itself to originally *less* dangerous foods which themselves must then be eliminated. The aim is to reduce the danger by cutting out more and more foods; the 'dangerous' category, therefore, continually expands while the safe category contracts.

The ultimate aim of anorexia is to eat nothing at all, and the fact that few women ever attain this does not make it less of an ideal. For most the rituals are far from perfect; they *lessen* the danger of appetite rather than abolish it. Most anorexic women are forced to accept that not eating at all is not a real possibility: the aim of anorexia is not death, but living with a complete physical integrity maintained through the absence of desire. It is the anorexic woman's integrity which desire will destroy, since that integrity rests on desirelessness. Operating *against* social definitions of the female body as incomplete, this construction is forever precarious. The anorexic system is a system at war with itself. The struggle takes place inside one body which represents both danger and order.

Douglas argues that in small persecuted minority groups, 'social conditions lend themselves to beliefs which symbolise the body as an imperfect container which can only be made perfect if it can be made impermeable'. This is precisely what anorexic women are trying to do, but appetite continually undercuts the impermeable body.

The central anorexic categories are 'safe' and 'dangerous' foods, expressed in the restricted list of foods. The categories for the most part fall into line with what is currently considered nutritionally good/healthy/whole-

some—i.e. fruit and vegetables, bran, whole-meal bread, yoghurt—and bad/unhealthy/'empty' of nutritional value—cakes, sweets, fried foods, fats, fizzy drinks, sugar. As well as the discourse of nutrition, or food as duty, the discourse of diet, or 'slimming' goods, is important in anorexic categorisations—diet coke, low-fat cheeses, crispbreads, skimmed milk, Outline and that staple of all diets, black coffee, all figured prominently. Although reliant on wider social categorisations of food, anorexic categories are both more rigid, and subject to erratic transformations.

The safe category contracts as the dangerous category expands; the hunger/appetite distinction loses its force as the category of forbidden food expands to take in all food. The ultimate aim, usually unfulfillable, is to eat nothing at all. When I asked anorexic women how they would feel if they could eat nothing at all and stay healthy they responded with 'wonderful!!', 'clean', 'fantastic', 'a great relief', 'I would feel in control and not guilty'.

However, most anorexic women do eat, at least a little, and cope with the anxiety of eating in variety of ways. Some get rid of the food as soon as possible by exercising, taking laxatives, purging or vomiting. Food that stays in the body is hemmed in and controlled through ritualised eating patterns. The most common ritual which emerged from my survey was eating exactly the same foods, in the same amount, in the same order and usually at the same time and in the same place every day. The actual process of eating is also ritualised: food is separated into tiny and precise quantities, eaten in small mouthfuls, chewed with extreme thoroughness or timed:

I cut my ryvitas up into 5 bits each slice. Each bit lasts while I read one page of a book. I then eat my vegetables followed by fruit. I only eat in bed.

I tend to eat things in exactly the same order and I do cut up bread into fingers. I have the same plates, cup and cutlery.

I used to eat at set times and cut my apples in quarters, then take each piece and cut paper thin slices to eat as slowly as possible.

Rituals of content, time, place and method impose order on potential chaos and act to contain the threat. These rituals also postpone the act of actually swallowing the food.

Protected zones

Although food, weight and eating are the principal areas of anorexic ritualised control, the



body as a whole is treated as a 'protected zone'. I am indebted to Caroline O'Toole of Glasgow Anorexic Aid for her suggestion that I ask women for their feelings on sexuality and physical intimacy/touching as a whole. The avoidance of sex is borne out both by the literature as a whole and the responses to my survey in which 30 out of 35 respondents either disliked or feared sex or had no sexual feelings during anorexia. Some women saw their avoidance of physical contact as imposed on them by the illness and others wished that they could let people get close to them:

I have become very cold and hate being touched, I have no sexual desires.

[Anorexia] complete numbs those feelings.

I cannot cope with anyone coming close or touching me even if someone touches me on the shoulders or back, the emotional pain hurts, I cringe so much I want to curl into a ball and hide, I feel like barbed wire.

If the elimination of physical pleasure is the central aim of anorexia, and the body is created at the symbolic level as need-less and inviolable, then physical detachment is necessary. In anorexia, eating and food become symbolic of all desires and their objects. Desire as a whole is crystallised into the desire for food, the arena in which satisfaction/fulfilment of desire is most possible for women. Although the desire for food is the focus of anorexic ritual, no desire is comfortable.

Bingeing

Fear of bingeing is an ever-present worry reinforcing anorexic control. The progression from anorexia to bulimia which many women make could be explained by the realisation that the immense difficulty of maintaining anorexic control means the longer the illness, the more likely it is that control will periodically slip. And since control of appetite is the central aim of anorexia, it is not surprising that depression, anxiety and guilt accompany its loss. With food inside them anorexic women feel: 'afraid, dirty and weak', 'bloated, guilty, greedy and a failure', 'greedy and as though I am guilty of some misdeed'.

Furthermore, if we look at psychiatric intervention from the anorexic perspective, we can argue that bulimia could well be a response to the disruption of control which hospitalisation entails. Bulimia, defined as bingeing and vomiting, is better seen as an expression of the

'disturbing impulses' of controlled appetite than relief of those impulses.

The main characteristics of binge eating were *speed, animalistic manner* and a sense of *compulsion*. The women ate as fast as they possibly could, in a manner they described as irrational, usually animalistic—'like a scavenging animal', 'like a wolf'—and with compulsion but not pleasure. Although they were giving themselves what is usually denied them, indulgence did not equal pleasure. Rather, they feared being at the mercy of their appetite, which they feel unable to control. The binge is unstoppable; it ends only when the food runs out. Cooking, preparation, laying the table and relishing the meal are all conspicuous by their absence. The opposite of denial in anorexia is compulsion and chaos, not pleasure.

The end of anorexia

The end of anorexia is objectification: either appetite or the symptom itself come to control the anorexic woman as a force simultaneously internal and alien. She is responsible for it, but cannot control it: she is its object, powerless to change course:

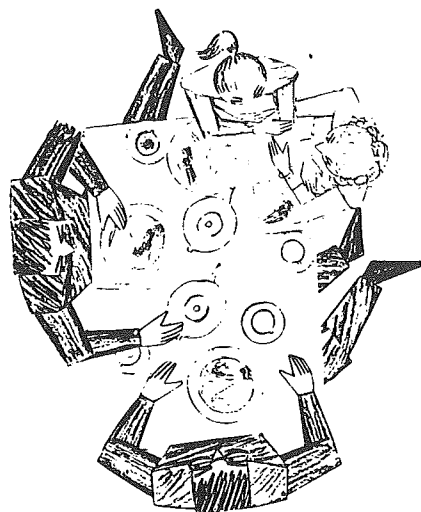
It felt completely out of control. I was trying to control it, but it felt as if it was controlling me instead.

[I feel] like I'm in a war. Knowing I shouldn't really eat but wanting the food, its comfort, its taste, etc. It's like fighting an addiction. I'm constantly battling with myself, like having one part of my mind arguing with the other all the time.

When I eat normally I feel I am not Eleanor but somebody I don't even know myself. I am someone I hate when I eat normally... there is something frantic takes over—truly not *me* then.

I feel totally at the mercy of anorexia, like a cancer which has grown in me, and at times seems to be winning.

The end of anorexia is precisely the reverse of its original aim to transcend feminine appetite and eliminate the threat to 'self'. The anorexic woman intends to be a fully individual subject acting on her environment through the vehicle of the needless and inviolate anorexic body. Instead, the anorexic body remains a mirage which she continually sees in front of her but never reaches. In the end, her individual transformation of social meanings of the feminine body is no such thing; the object-status of femininity is reasserted. It returns with a vengeance. □



Morag MacSween *Anorexic Bodies: A Feminist and Sociological Analysis of Anorexia Nervosa* (Routledge, 1993)

Stealing a Woman's Life

Bandit Queen, the biopic about Phoolan Devi, was hailed by liberal Western critics on its release a few months ago. But as Arundhati Roy reported in The Independent, Phoolan Devi herself feels very differently about it.

On 9 September 1994, lawsuit number 2,000 (*Phoolan Devi vs Shekhar Kapur, Channel 4 Television Corporation and others*) was filed in the Delhi high court. This time Phoolan Devi, India's best-known bandit, hopes to make a law, not break one; a law that says that a film-maker does not have the right to depict the rape of a living woman without her explicit consent.

When she filed the suit, Phoolan Devi hadn't seen *Bandit Queen*. Her suit was based on two detailed affidavits describing the film. It took five months and a court order for it to be finally screened for her earlier this month, and it has made her even angrier than she was before.

In her suit she has accused Channel 4 of invading her sexual privacy by depicting her being raped for commercial gain and of prejudicing her trial (at which, if she is found guilty, she could be hanged) by implicating her in a mass murder that she denies having committed.

To the film-makers it must seem like a bad dream: to have the woman that they've deified in their film suddenly step off her pedestal and haul them off to court; to have to defend themselves against the myth that they helped create. 'She's changed', they tell us sadly (as though they knew her well). They suggest that she was once keen that her story be filmed, but now that she's married and about to enter politics she wants to rewrite her past.

This sounds perfectly reasonable. But is it true? Three judges in two courts have looked for, but haven't found, any evidence of the 'consent' that Phoolan Devi is supposed to have given. Now that she has persisted with her legal action, the film-makers have thrown caution to the winds. Don't believe her, they say. She's a bandit, not a revolutionary (a fact that she's the first to admit).

Meanwhile, in the West, *Bandit Queen*

moves from strength to strength. It has been hailed as the first film of its kind to come out of India. In fact, it is only an arthouse reincarnation of the rape 'n' retribution theme that has been done to death by the commercial Hindi film industry. The big difference, of course, is that none of the others claimed to tell the 'truth'. So-called 'truth' from the Third World, however spurious it may be, sells like few of our other exports. For its success it relies wholly on the ignorance of its audience.

The director, Shekhar Kapur, never met Phoolan Devi once before he made the film. The contracts were secretly smuggled in and out of prison, where she had no access to legal opinion. They were written in English, though she was illiterate and couldn't understand them. And although they clearly state that the film would be based on the 'prison diaries' that she dictated to fellow inmates, it depicts several brutal rapes that she doesn't mention or even suggest.

But, given the film's bald, shrill, ethnic politics—the story of a low-caste woman who is forced to become a bandit because she was oppressed upper-caste Thakurs in her village, a woman who is raped, gang-raped, paraded naked by Thakur dacoits and who murders 20 Thakur villagers in revenge—what liberal Western critic would dare question it?

At foreign film festivals and to the press, the film-makers initially dismissed all criticism as the protests of 'upper-caste people' who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. India was portrayed as a banana republic wherein (to quote *Time* magazine) 'brave directors become Untouchables'. People who criticised the film were called 'pro-caste anti-woman ayatollahs'. It's as ridiculous as suggesting that anyone who doesn't like *Silence of the Lambs* is pro-cannibal.

Take a closer look. *Bandit Queen* manipulates the viewer into wholeheartedly sympathising with a woman who is supposed to have murdered 20 people whose only crime was that they belonged to the same caste as the dacoits who raped her. The real culprits get away and surface later on to humiliate her once more. Yet the film applauds the massacre.

As for its depiction of rape (lauded by critics for its 'restraint'—though it's hard to see what's restrained about a naked backside pumping in and out between a woman's legs), it has the ethics of a wildlife documentary in the way that

it candidly probes its animal subjects. Since she wouldn't provide the details, the film-makers had to look for them elsewhere. For their main rape—the 'centrepiece' of the film—they appear to have relied on the vicarious account reported in Mala Sen's book on Phoolan Devi. Would they have dared to take such liberties with a woman of their own class and background?

Phoolan Devi's big mistake was to imagine that men would be interested in her story if she had not been raped. Hers is a story full of desperate poverty; of family feuds over land; of inter-gang rivalry that often ended in bloodshed; of looting and kidnapping. She describes her own brutality, but she doesn't mention rape. Or massacre.

Phoolan Devi is remarkable for many reasons. After she was kidnapped she spent three and a half years in the ravines: for the first year and half she was a moll. The film dwells at length on this period. For the next two years, until she decided to surrender, she led her own gang. These were the years in which she controlled her own destiny, yet *Bandit Queen* tells us absolutely nothing of this time: of how she baffled the entire Uttar Pradesh police for; how she played daring games with them; how she negotiated her surrender on her own terms.

There is not a single scene in which Phoolan Devi makes her own decisions. If men are not raping her, abusing her, selling her or buying her, they're telling her what to do, teaching her how to walk, comforting her when she cries and appearing to her in her dreams. Even her acts of retribution are supervised by them. It is nothing short of astounding, the way they've managed to turn this gritty survivor into another pathetic, snivelling victim. Yes, they've made some superficial concessions: they've put her in trousers, given her a gun and some four-letter words. But, essentially, *Bandit Queen* just transforms Phoolan Devi from being India's best-known bandit into history's most famous victim of rape.

So when it opens in your neighbourhood theatre and you decide to go and see for yourself what the fuss is all about, remember that Phoolan Devi is a proud woman. She is prepared to stand trial for the crimes she has been accused of committing. But she does not want you watching her being raped and humiliated. There must be other ways for you to spend an evening. □

Matters of Life and Death

Eva Lundgren is a Norwegian feminist, who is now Professor of Sociology at the University of Uppsala in Sweden, researching and writing about sexual violence. She began her career in theology, going on to carry out pioneering research with abused women in christian communities, making links between religious and misogynistic practices, and later on with ritual abuse. She is also unusual in having interviewed violent men as well as women. Her work is influential in Scandinavia, but also controversial. Here she discusses her experiences and her challenging theoretical ideas with Liz Kelly.

Liz Kelly: Can you begin with how your research on violence against women developed because it is different from how a lot of other work has been done.

Eva Lundgren: I am an old theologian and my first research on violence was within theology. In a way it was quite a coincidence because I did work on exorcism—modern exorcism—and interviewed a lot of women getting at this diagnosis 'obsessed by Satan'. During the field work I got a lot of good contact with the women, some of them told me about experiences of domestic violence, connected to exorcism, that was the first time I met it in my research. There were two patterns I found then. There was being exorcised—getting that diagnosed, so the violence from the husband was what you deserved when you opened yourself to Satan.

That was how the batterer justified what he did. The other pattern was being battered and women going to their religious leader, where they were met by 'Battered why? You shouldn't be a tool for the devil'. I was surprised by this, and I understood that I had to work in a special way to make it possible for women to talk about those things. So that was how I started.

As I far as I knew nobody—at least not in Scandinavia—had done anything about violence which was motivated or legitimized by religious ideology. So I was in contact with 75 women for a period, and then I interviewed 22 of them, in what I call 'a process'. That work became very important for me afterwards. At first I did not read research on violence, because in a way I knew that I would get 'special glasses' and I didn't want that. So I learnt from the women. Methodologically it was important too, because



that's where I began to develop this interview process in which we had to have a lot of contact before, in the interview process, and afterwards. I understood that the interaction was very very important for the knowledge that developed.

Liz: *So when you say interview process do you mean more than one interview?*

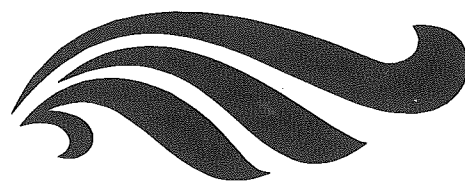
Eva: One main interview, with shorter ones following up; then a gap of time and a new interview process. I have now followed four groups of women over a number of years. The first was the religious one, and later three others put together in other ways. Methodologically that's been my approach, to *dare* to develop the interaction, and to deal with all the moral and political dilemmas. I think I managed in a way to do that. Many people say about my work 'how can they say such things?' or 'how do you make them say these things?'. It has nothing to do with making anyone, it has to do with a process where you trust each other.

The third important thing in my work was when I constructed this concept of 'normalisation'. Simply understanding that there is a difference between talking with a woman who has had an experience three times and one who has lived with it for twenty years. This was what I worked with in the next studies, trying to understand this normalisation and internalisation process. Because when we are trying to support women we need to be able to understand what is going on in the different phases of violence.

My early work was very important for me. The reactions from the church to it were quite strong. I was a doctoral student at that time, I was written to by the bishops saying they wanted to take me to court because I hadn't cleared the material with them. There were also accusations about the women being crazy, me being crazy and so on. That was also a lesson I learnt a lot from. There was a book from that work which only contains interviews and not much analysis and that sold a lot in Norway. The reactions from women were very interesting to me, they would say 'I recognise it all, but I am not violated by my husband and I am not a Christian'. That made me think OK I am on the right track here.

At that point in Norway a research programme was proposed by a group of women which was funded by the government and the research council. It was very radical—saying

that we needed to create new knowledge, because most of what we think we know are myths, that women have been pathologised and that this has to stop. The new knowledge had to begin from the experience of crisis centres and the new feminist studies. Heaven knows how but it was accepted and we had a big research programme which financed 22 projects. I was one of the project leaders then, so I was able to broaden my research, that's when the three other groups of women were interviewed. Also during that period I began to have contact with their male partners, and I interviewed them.



Becoming men by destroying women

Interviewing the men meant I could analyse the normalisation process from how they saw it. I began to see it as an arena in which they construct the way they want to be men. Because in my opinion that is what is going on. The violence arena is an arena for constructing being a man, and they decide what kind of a man they want to become. Discovering how they are able to take control over more and more aspects of the woman's life was very important in this. The norms for femininity become important and connect with how they want to become a man. It also has a lot to do with the erotic kick the men say occurs around the violence—or in my interpretation the experience of total power over the woman's life space, the way she is allowed to become a woman and her life and death—in the moment and over time. From what men said to me the way they interpret this erotic kick becomes more and more important. Very few people have looked at this, so it became very important for me to study this as a arena for shaping gender, and what it gives men, and for how we can understand some of the violence. For example, when a woman has been supported and managed to leave, why does he follow her everywhere? Why it is the most important thing in life to have *her* back? Why is it only *her* he wants? Because it is so linked to his becoming a man, he has to have her at any cost. So that is

one example of how you can use this perspective to understand what is going on.

Then I saw that the logic of this process is that she dies physically or in other ways. So what happens then? Because in the men's head it then becomes empty. From how they spoke to me, they are quite dependent upon women's resistance, in the sense that he has to take control each time through the experience of conquering her, her space, her femininity, her life and her death.

Liz: *That challenges some of the ways in which women have been represented as passive, not standing up for themselves. I have always thought that violence turns around a conflict between the woman and man about gender—that she resists some of his attempts to control her. This is what is what is going on, it is not that the woman is a 'doormat'.*

Eva: A doormat? What's that?

Liz: *Someone you can treat however you like and they will not resist.*

Eva: No. But you must remember that I have followed women through this over time, and I saw how it is this process which breaks them down, how active it is. How she has tried to resist and what happens then when it becomes dangerous. She tries to change so that the violence will stop, because that's what he says. Her experience is then that it doesn't stop, so she tries to change to survive. The limits move all the time, and she ends up accepting more and more to survive. Perhaps in the end she no longer can see the boundary between life and death, but that is the mechanism in this normalisation process.

My key material is 40 women and their partners who I have followed through this for a lot of years. So I had looked at how violence becomes normalised over time combined with other control mechanisms such as isolation, the man changing between being nice and hurting her. My analysis has been to look at the consequences of living in torture—not that women don't stand up for themselves! When I look at women who have escaped, and all of them have, who are they now? They are who they were—fantastic.

Liz: *So all of the 40 women you have followed are not in those relationships any more?*

Eva: No. Either they are out or on their way out. And that I think is why it possible for me to handle it today. Of course I have been impatient, but what I have tried to do in every case is establish support around the woman. So participating in this research with a lot of interviews at periods of time and a lot of support around her, this has been good for the women.

If I go back to the husbands, when she is dead in the sense that there is no resistance, when that day comes, then there is nothing more and in a way he has got what he wants. But here is the paradox, because there is nothing left he can take control over, there is no erotic kick any more. In my research there is a certain pattern, at this point he moves over to daughters and/or other women, and the process begins again.

Liz: *Does he still remain her 'partner'?*

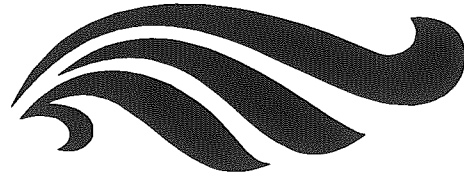
Eva: Yes but there is no interest there. So in a way you can say that to become a man in this arena means to diminish and take everything from first one woman and then maybe some others. The women become nothing whilst he grows to become a God, and that is why I use that metaphor in my writing, because here to become a man is to become a God, governing life and controlling death. These men do not present this as a problem or a frustration. I think this is a problem with some of the literature on men because it is based on those very few men who have sought or been pressed into therapy. Some of them do present the violence as a problem. But the men I interviewed have no such problems, they get so much out of it. That was my crux question, I asked them what do you get from it.

During the last three years I have interviewed at least one of the children from each couple as well as a lot of children in Sweden, because I now live here. Most of the very clear ritual abuse material is in the Swedish material.

Liz: *What proportion of the children from the couples were also being abused by the man?*

Eva: Abused in some way, 60%, perhaps more depending on how you define abuse. That was one of the things I realised in the first study that I had to do something for the children, because it was so painful for the woman to even think that her children were being brought up as they had been. That was in the Christian couples.

Working closely with the women meant I got these terrible suspicions, of course children were abused in that context, but that some were being sexually abused too. My contact with the children began when some of them started to write to me. So over time I realised that I had to try and find out about incest too. It was then that I got some cases of ritual abuse.



Ritual abuse

In my thinking ritual abuse is sexual abuse occurring in a frame where some kind of ritual has been developed. Of course some of my interest in this was because of my background in theology. I was interested in ritual as a space for changing, because that is what ritual is for—to change people. I was asking myself what is the secret? A group of women from Umeå and I have analysed parts of children's interviews from different approaches, and I have focused on trying to understand the ritual, which includes not very complex kinds to very advanced and organised forms. Whilst the ritual differs the secret is the same. From the children being abused by the father, to the priest together with his friend the bishop where they make a simple ritual, but they repeat it, combine it, this can have a very powerful effect on the children. Because when God has said 'look at your beautiful arms, body', God has said it. It is very important in ritual that the actions and words are repeated, often combined with some symbolic tools as well. In the case I mention here it was a cross in her vagina.

I have also been interested in the way a ritual is composed, using all the senses—you look, you hear, you smell. So your experience of it is very very strong. The way rituals are composed explains how it possible to change people over such a short time. Because it is so repetitive. It is a form of mind control which activates all the senses, and that influences you in a particular way. Some of the symbolic tools are also very important. Blood—what is the

meaning of blood? It has to do with life and death, and they almost always use blood. Sacrificing, what does that mean? It means that to have life you have to give life. This is very important in our culture, it is how we interpret the life of Christ, and how the wine and the bread is used. These things were used in many of the rituals, from the most simple to the most complex. I have seen it from ordinary christians using it in another context through to more clearly satanist connections. I can also see how the satanic ritual can inspire those who do not identify themselves as satanists, since the ritual itself is oh so exciting, so they take elements of it.

Liz: And does this connect to your idea of erotic kicks and erotic power?

Eva: Yes, it very much strengthens it. That is some of the thinking too, this is in a way magical thinking. 'I drink blood and I become omnipotent' 'I take her blood'—most commonly it is women and girls who are the mediums. So first you take their sexual power when you rape them, then you, for instance kill them. Literally sometimes, or in other 'magic' ways which involves taking their life power out of them, so you get it yourself. That is when they use blood, drinking the blood. Using the heart and the eye, as they are considered very powerful substances. So this ritual around sacrifice in various ways always contains the same elements and gives an enormous erotic kick. Having studied the 'ordinary' men before I can see how you become high from participating in this. I have met a lot of young men who have told me how they came to participate in groups because of the excitement, and as some kind of protest. But this kind of ritual changes them so much, and they get so much from it that they don't want to stop. That is the same lesson every time, the men don't want to stop.

I think that the ritual frame is important to understand that changing process. And also to understand why so many people say it's too incredible. But why not? Why not move the limits when it gives so much? Barriers that were important before can be pushed away when the project gives you so very much.

So these interviews with young people and grown up children has broadened the connections. Ritual abuse is going on in very different places and ways. From the christians to

the satanists, and satanism is not all the same either. Satanic abuse and rituals by young people are not the same as by organisations among the top level in society, or in families where it has continued for generations. These contexts are not the same, but perhaps there is something common about the ritual we can understand.

In trying to understand what groups say and do I have observed two groups. I was invited to do this when I was in Norway, but I had to stop because it became too dangerous. The two groups were very different, one was an academic group and the other totally opposite. It taught me a lesson about how it is possible to lose any sense of responsibility through these ritualised processes, so that you come into the control of some other influence. What they wanted to do was to rape or to kill, that was what they talked about all the time, the kicks around this. In the more academic group they used drugs to strengthen the experience, and they of course had much more historic knowledge.

Liz: So when were you observing these groups?

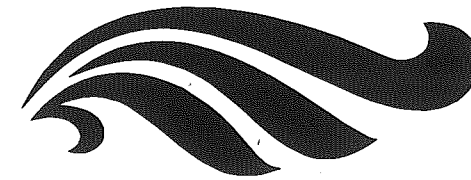
Eva: That was towards then end of the 80s before I left Norway. I learnt a lot from it, but I had to stop. It was me and another researcher and we understood gradually that we were transformed from being researchers to become mediums. The last time we participated in one of the groups it was dangerous. I'm glad we managed to manipulate things so that we could run away, it was not a second too early!

Liz: What do you think might have happened if you hadn't?

Eva: If we had been lucky we would only have been raped, but I'm not sure that they would stop there.

Liz: So are you saying that they thought they could pull you into being part of the group?

Eva: Yes I think so. I don't know if they thought that in the beginning. In one way it's a paradox because we were asked to look at that group, and why were we asked? It was one of the women's partners, one of the men, that asked us, she had had an exorcism experience and he contacted us to help her. We did that, and she needed that. That was a christian group.



Taking the flak

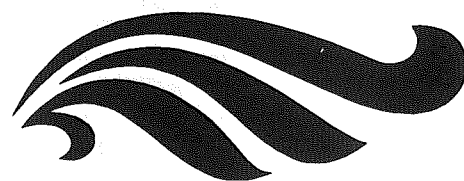
Liz: Can you tell us a little about the reaction to your work?

Eva: The reaction to my first book on sexual violence was tremendous from the church in Norway, but not from academics. Some of the christian newspapers wrote that I was a danger to every social scientist's reputation in Norway. So really there was a war going on, and I had to take the biggest paper to court. I had to do that because of the women, what would it mean if they read everyday that the woman who they had told everything, their most humiliating things, was crazy. That was very interesting because what was said in court was that I was a good researcher in spite of my feminist approach. I think it was good for the women that I did that.

When I continued and expanded to 'ordinary' women and then the men, then some in the academic society were not so happy any more. I was asked to change subject. I understood one day that I was regarded as so bad for the university that I would not get the permanent job I was promised. It got worse from there, and I felt that anything could be said about me. What was so strange was that I was attributed so much power within the academy and politically outside too, because I worked hard for the Labour Party then, and we had a lot of success. I think it was some of the same people in the university and the party that screwed it for me. By then the normalisation and internalisation process had developed so far! I remember when I got an evaluation for a professorship, I read it and it said my work was rubbish and that I was an immoral person. I withdrew from life for a long time, I needed to then. Then I got a research position in the Swedish research council in the theology department here in Uppsala. I was then noticed by two men in the sociology department, who thought I would be good for them. I don't know what I would have done if I had had to stay in Norway.

I have had a good time here in Sweden, but I have been very strategic. I have had a bad experience with the media, and I know if they create an image of you it is very hard to shake off. So I tried to be anonymous until I got this professorship, of course I wasn't but.... Once I got it then I thought now I can do what I want to do. But probably this book on the children's experience which we published in Norway is too much; the reaction in Norway is that it is too much. Of course part of that is that is talking about ritual abuse, but also it is the very explicit feminist approach and analysis that is too much. In a way I am already established in Norway, they know I am a professor and there are so few women professors. So on one level they do take it seriously, but at the same time it is as it always has been 'she is exaggerating so much', 'her interpretation is quite wrong' and so on and so on. But they are at least discussing it. But I'm not sure whether I want to publish it in Sweden now, the press coverage of several cases just recently suggests that this is not the right time here. It isn't possible at the moment here to have a serious discussion on ritual abuse, because in Sweden they have decided that ritual abuse does not exist. That's for the moment. Except when you come over from abroad!!!! So that's another lesson.

Liz: Yes because I'll be talking about England and not Sweden, and the reverse would be true if you were in Britain.



Making a real difference

Liz: I'd like you to say a little about this idea in one of your articles about the way feminists sometimes confuse real change with surface change, just a different gloss.

Eva: That's difficult in English. I have developed a concept around this because I think it is important for feminist researchers today, when everyone seems to be saying the limits for gender are now so flexible, all this 'post'

influence so that everything disappears. And the official politics in Sweden are these equality politics. On one level I have to say it has broadened, but there is another level too of unofficial norms which tell quite another story. Perhaps it is this unofficial level which is still what is sitting on our necks. I can see it when I interview people about violence what kind of norms are most important.

What I have said is that you can use the flexible norms and show how women are allowed to do this and this and this, but what is the limit? By just using these flexible norms you can also end up just cementing the stable norms underneath, which are more hidden. This is important in Sweden, when I talk about it outside the academy women recognise what I am saying. I ask 'what do you do in your life?', 'what are you allowed to do?'. I am trying to discover here whether he keeps the fundamental 'constitutive' norms as I call them. I have tried to identify what I call 'constitutive' and 'regulative' norms are; to find what I think the constitutive rules are for gender, ones which are stable and don't change. I explore it more through questions; is it the right to exercise power through violence, the right to define women's lives? And I ask if these stable rules determine the more flexible 'regulative' ones. Men's access to women sexually, is that another example of the limit. Can we interpret rules which dichotomise gender, which in reality hides a hierarchy.

So I use these concepts also when I try to interpret the 'switching hand'; when the hand is comforting and loving can be interpreted as the norm for love and that's how men behave in our modern society, and women interpret it as 'that is how he really is'. She doesn't interpret the hand which strikes her as how he really is. But perhaps the power to do this, the switching hand, the hand that can do both and decide when he switches and how he switches, perhaps that is the symbolic category which shows the fundamental level. And perhaps that is a way of understanding how he really is, how he is allowed to be in our culture. I use a lot of examples like this, and I have good reactions when I talk about it. These ideas are in a book that has been translated into English and will be published by Avebury Press—the title is *Feminist Theory and Violent Empiricism*. One of the books about the men is translated too, but there is no publisher for that yet.

Liz: So how would we use your idea of regulatory and constitutive rules to think about feminist strategy, what fundamental, rather than surface change would be?

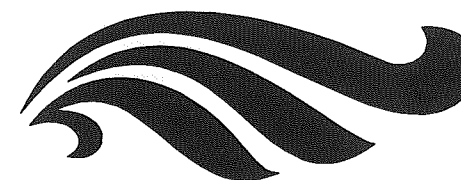
Eva: For instance in Sweden the debate on sexualized violence, which has been driven very much by the shelter (refuge) movement here. That is an example of threatening a very fundamental level, because you cannot any longer make a boundary between the public and private, because we have shown that the home is the most dangerous place. And it is real empirical men doing it, they do it at home and then they go to work and they have to have an attitude towards this. What women have done here collectively is define an area in their own way based on their own experiences, challenging the privilege of interpretation that men have had. If we compare that with other examples, such as women and wages, that's another matter. That's a kind of justice and fairness which can be discussed in public with no private aspects. In the same way as the discussion here currently about political representation, that women are 51% of the population and it is only fair and so on that this is reflected in public life, but that too doesn't touch private life. The way feminists have discussed sexual violence as a collective matter, is in my opinion, an example of how we are touching this fundamental level, and that is why it is so threatening. Here is the possibility of some real change. What we are fighting for is the privilege of interpretation, that we want to interpret our own lives and experiences. And we have not been allowed to.

I am also sure that the day women on a more collective basis refuse to be sexually available, that will be another example. There is a very interesting piece of research being done by two sociologists in Norway on sexual harassment in lots of workplaces. They argue that to be a woman at work means to be available, either sexually available or in a nurturing emotional way, and that those two ways are clearly connected to each other. The best example they give is the interviews with lesbians who are

'out' at work, which means not available to men. But they stressed that they were 'nice' women, and the men then responded as if they couldn't be lesbians, and therefore they were sexually available. This is the best example of how it is connected, if you are nice you are expected to be sexually available, and the other way, if you are interpreted as being sexually available then you are expected to be nice and a mother and so on.

Liz: And heterosexual.

Eva: Yes. So then one can say that to be a woman is to be available in those senses. And I think then you touch a very fundamental level when you start to do something about that, collective actions on this interpretation. I also think that actions where it becomes visible that gender dichotomy hides a hierarchy, that's also very challenging. You have to talk about difference to hide what is going on. When women move over all limits, and do it so differently it then becomes impossible for men to have their own areas for their own masculinity. Then you cannot talk anymore about this specific difference, what is left then? Only power. It becomes so obvious, and that is very dangerous. So if we do actions which make these things visible it becomes dangerous for us, wherever we are. I have talked about this quite abstractly but the empirical examples are everywhere if you look for it. When I talk with my students they can provide examples all the time. Some of my students are using these ideas in their own research, one on sexual harassment at the university, but it is also about heterosexuality and the way it is organized in academic work. So when that thesis is finished ... □



Organised and Visible: Lesbians In Thailand and Taiwan

Here we reprint extracts from a newspaper feature interviewing Anjana Suvarnananda of the Anjaree Group in Thailand and an interview with the Asian Lesbian Network's Taiwanese chapter. Both pieces appeared last year in the US journal Connexions.

The 1995 NGO (non-governmental organisation) forum and United Nations World Conference on Women is being held in Beijing, China. This location has caused some debate among feminists in the west, because of China's poor record on many issues, but less attention has been given by westerners to the attitudes of feminists in Asia itself.

Some groups of Asian lesbians see Beijing as an event to organise around and an opportunity to place their concerns on the agenda. While lesbians and lesbian groups are not new in many Asian countries, it has been difficult for them to organise in a public and visible way—few women feel able to come out. But now things are changing. In Thailand, for instance, a lesbian group called Anjaree went public for the first time in 1994 in an effort to make sure that lesbian rights would be raised by Thailand's delegation at Beijing. Anjaree was instrumental in organising the first conference of the Asian Lesbian Network in 1990, and this international network will hold its third conference this year in Taiwan, another country where several lesbian organisations have recently become much more visible.

There are obviously important differences among Asian lesbian organisations—it would be inaccurate to speak of a single Asian lesbian perspective, or to report on what happens in any one country as if it represented the concerns and priorities of an entire continent. It does seem, though, that many of the activists who have spoken out recently share a concern with visibility. Motivated in part by the location of

the UN forum in Asia, they are determined that Asian lesbians should not be silenced—either by western women or by Asian governments who would prefer to present lesbianism as an exclusively western phenomenon.

Anjaree

The Anjaree group was first established in 1986 by a small group of Thai lesbians calling themselves 'women who love women'. Today the group has about 150 members.

'Most of us women who love women are obliged to live in disguise', said Anjana Suvarnananda, 36, one of the group's founders. 'Many of our lesbian friends are obliged to hide the nature of their sexuality; sometimes without asking themselves why they need to do so.'

In order to draw a picture of lesbianism in Thailand, Anjana talked about her personal experiences.

'As far as I can recall, I was fond of women long before I knew there were verbal terms to categorise people by the nature of their sexuality. It was long before I knew humans could be called heterosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian.'

The activist also argued against a common Thai myth that regards homosexuality as an aspect of modern culture imported from the west.

'I can't recall any western influence that pushed me in the direction of other women. The only thing I learned about sexuality I learned from western films and novels as a teenager was about relationships between heroes and heroines, men and women. I would say that any influence from western culture led me to think

that I should be interested in men, not women'.

Numerous historical sources show that lesbianism has existed throughout Thai history, says Anjana, who adds that historical evidence exists for lesbianism in many other Asian countries too.

Supot Chaengrew, a contributor to *Art and Culture* magazine, writes in one article that lesbian courtships, referred to as *len phuen* ('playing with friends') were common in ancient Thai royal courts, despite the threat of punishment.

Despite academic work such as this, throughout society at large, and even among some psychiatrists, there is little understanding of lesbianism and it is still often regarded as abnormal and wrong. ...However, positive changes regarding concepts of homosexuality can be traced to changes at the international level.

In Thailand, Anjana says she has observed a difference in the level of social acceptance experienced by gay men and women.

'Ask people to cite just some names of famous gay men, and most of them can do so without difficulty. There are quite a number of Thai gay men who come out and allow their sexual preferences to be known. But this is not the case for lesbians. There must be a good reason for this', said Anjana.

She cites double standards for men and women in Thai society as the reason. Thai women, unlike men, are taught they should not expose their sexual desires or talk about sex.

'Women are taught not to think of themselves as human beings with various facets, including sexual desires. If a woman talks about her sexual preferences, especially for people of the same sex, the chances are that public attention will focus only on this one aspect, her sexuality, as if it is the only thing that matters in her whole life.'

The differences between gay men and women also lie in the unequal opportunities for men and women in general, said Anjana, who has had years of experience working with local NGOs on women's issues. Gay men, as males, tend to be more self-reliant in terms of occupation and income. Thus they tend to care less about the repercussions of being open about their sexuality.

The Anjaree Group was established because 'we believe lesbianism in itself is not a problem. Instead it is imposed social values that

cause lesbians trouble. ...We are a grassroots group set up to attempt to solve the problems caused by social values'.

According to Anjana, several of the group's active members are blue collar workers, and more than half the members live in the provinces.

The Anjaree Group took the brave step of organising the first Asian Lesbian Network conference in Bangkok in 1990. About 40 lesbians from 15 countries attended. It was the first ever formal co-operation between Asian lesbians.

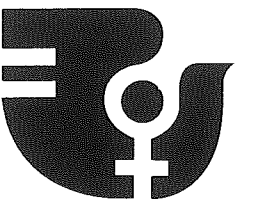
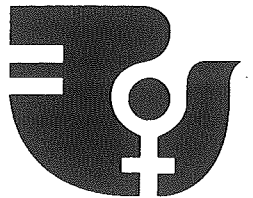
To date, the group has been successful in organising bimonthly meetings and newsletters in which members have the opportunity to share their experiences, feelings and ideas on various issues. However, the group does not intend to stop there. It is fighting to put lesbian rights on Thailand's proposed agenda for the NGO forum in Beijing.

'We feel it is necessary to correct social misconceptions regarding lesbianism. We want people in our society to understand homosexuality is not a matter of abnormality. It is the right to choose one's path in life. ...The people of our society are already bowed down by established social values, and I'm going against the tide now', says Anjana. 'Those who never stand up against the mainstream will never understand how strongly social values press down on us.'

Asian Lesbian Network, Taiwan

Martial law was lifted in 1987 in Taiwan, and since then a number of social movements have been able to flourish. Feminists had been active in the 1970s, and in 1982 the feminist monthly magazine *Awakening* became an important forum for women's organising. In 1987, however, *Awakening* became a foundation with paid staff, broadened the scope of its activities and has moved to premises shared with a women's bookshop (probably the first in the Chinese-speaking world).

Lesbians also began to organise and become visible as an autonomous group within women's politics. In 1990 the first Taiwanese lesbian social group, 'Women zhi jian' ('between us') was formed; in 1992 a chapter of the Asian Lesbian Network was founded in Taiwan; and in 1993 students began publishing the country's first lesbian magazine, *Aibao* ('Love Times'). The next Asian Lesbian Network conference is to be held in Taiwan this year.



Connexions: What is the history of ALN/Taiwan?

ALN: Two Asian lesbian conferences had been held, one in 1990 in Thailand and a second one in Tokyo in 1992. Some individual women from Taiwan had attended these meetings, but the Taiwan chapter was not founded until late 1992, partly in response to the desire to host the next meeting in Taiwan. There were close to 30 women who became members, but only a core group of seven started the complex process of planning an international meeting with very few resources. We had no office or phone, just a post box. Only a handful of women from Japan had the financial resources to come to a three day planning meeting in 1993. Thus we did not have direct input from representatives of the other 17 member countries at this early stage.

Now in both previous meetings the participation of white women had been a point of contention. In Thailand, both Asian and white women participated in the same meetings. In Tokyo, Asian and white women held separate meetings. About 200 Asian women and 100 white women attended. Apparently there was a lot of acrimony between the two groups. In early 1994 representatives from India, Indonesia and other ex-colonies, as well as Chinese women with diaspora experience, voiced opposition to the idea of letting white women participate in any form. The women from the former colonies objected to the idea of convening jointly with their oppressors. Being subjected to the racism of a white majority on a daily basis, some overseas Chinese women did not want to face the same discrimination in a meeting of Asian lesbians.

However, we, the Taiwan chapter, did not agree with their policy of complete exclusion. Instead we wanted to oppose structural limitations. We wanted to limit white participation to 10% of all participants and subject it to an application process. Furthermore, these women could have voiced their opinion but would not have had a vote. We figured each host country should be able to decide what policies to adopt rather than trying to reconcile conflicting points of view. In our view, strict racial exclusion smacks of discrimination and has no place in lesbian organising.

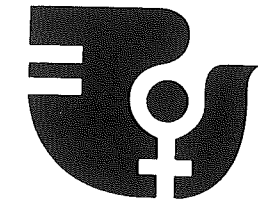
Connexions: Besides planning the Third Asian Lesbian conference, what other activities do you pursue?

ALN: (...) In coming together as a group we pursue two goals. On one hand, as a group we have more public leverage. On the other hand, as individuals, we can affirm and consolidate our own social and sexual identity.

At this point, it is still incredibly difficult to be an open lesbian. For one thing, we are constrained by family expectations. We are supposed to be devoted to our parents, and most parents cannot help but see lesbianism in a negative light. So most families don't know about their daughter's lesbianism. As a student you are financially dependent on your parents, so you cannot really afford to alienate them. And when you work, you could be fired or harassed by your supervisors or co-workers.

Thus I think at this point it is very difficult to come out as an individual. Instead, we need to create a public space in the media. For instance, as a fundraising tool for the conference we put together an issue [of a magazine] on different aspects of Taiwanese culture. We also have to use other media to disseminate accurate and positive information about lesbians, so that when an individual does come out at home or work, she is not solely framed by negative associations.

Perhaps after some time, I might consider coming out in a group to the media. Since there is no self-identified lesbian figure in the media, any individual would certainly be overwhelmed by an onslaught of curious reporters. If there were a group, say 20 of us, the impact would be somewhat diffused. □



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Liberty, Equality... But Most of All, Fraternity

The Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing this summer, is causing conflict in France, where feminists have found themselves excluded from the government's official preparations, and feminist research on women has been openly attacked by leading male intellectuals, notably the influential social scientist Pierre Bourdieu (whose work is also much admired by left-wing academics in Britain). A group named 'Feminists in France for Peking' has been formed to protest.

Here we reprint a version (slightly edited for reasons of space) of an article, originally published in Nouvelles Question Féministes, in which Françoise Armengaud, Ghaïss Jasser and Christine Delphy analyse the arguments and the politics behind them. The authors offer an account of French thought and academic institutions which may surprise English-speaking readers familiar with current theoretical fashions: 'old fashioned', 'naïve' and 'reactionary' are not terms we have been taught to associate with French social theorists. These French feminists may overestimate the degree of official acceptance given to feminist research in other countries; but their account suggests English-speaking academics, including some feminists, have greatly underestimated the strength of anti-feminism in France.

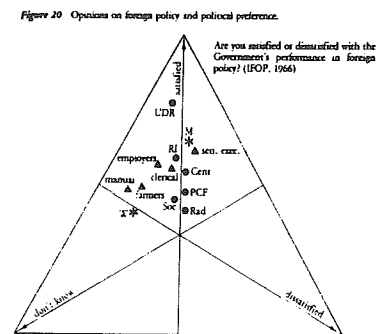
The authors originally titled their piece 'A major offensive against women's studies'. They argue, however, that as men take control of women's studies and their ideas also come to dominate official thinking and policy (as with France's report for Beijing) this is not just an academic issue: it is also a major offensive against feminist activists and ultimately against the interests of women in general.

In 1995 the Fourth World Conference on Women, organised by the United Nations, will be held in Beijing. It is a follow up to the 'Decade of the Woman', decreed by the UN and punctuated by several conferences: Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985. In the intervals between these conferences and ever since then, the work of the UN has not ceased. We might mention, among other activities, the institution of five year plans, the drawing up in 1979 of the Convention for the Elimination of all Kinds of Discrimination against Women, a vital document signed by many countries, including France, and the establishment of monitoring programmes designed to guarantee

that the signatory countries respect their various commitments.

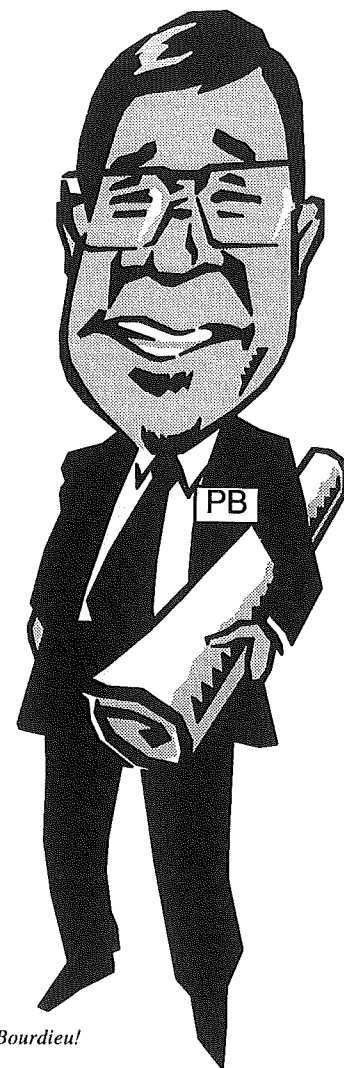
The Beijing Conference is part of these programmes, though its aims are broader. One of the functions of this conference is to convoke the different governments to Beijing and, by requesting from them a written report on the progress achieved since 1985, to remind them that the documents signed at Nairobi and elsewhere must not remain a dead letter. Each government prepares this report in the way it sees fit. Its procedures as much as its words will reveal its determination to abide by its commitments.

Most of the UN documents—for all the conventions incorporate the gains of the



All illustrations are taken from the collected works of Pierre Bourdieu.

At a deeper level, the whole body schema, in particular the physical approach to the act of eating, governs the selection of certain foods. For example, in the working classes, fish tends to be regarded as an unsuitable food for men, not only because it is a light food, insufficiently 'filling', which would only be cooked for health reasons, i.e., for invalids and children, but also because, like fruit (except bananas) it is one of the 'fiddly' things which a man's hands cannot cope with and which make him childlike (the woman, adopting a maternal role, as in all similar cases, will prepare the fish on the plate or peel the pear); but above all, it is because fish has to be eaten in a way which totally contradicts the masculine way of eating, that is, with restraint, in small mouthfuls, chewed gently, with the front of the mouth, on the tips of the teeth (because of the bones).



justification, not requiring the purely scientific work of object construction. And the *women's studies* or *Black studies* that replace today the old populist studies on the 'lower classes' are certainly all the more vulnerable to naive sentimentalism—which does not necessarily rule out an intelligent interest in the benefits connected with good causes—that they feel no need to justify their existence, and moreover confer on the men or women who appropriate them a *de facto* monopoly (often claimed as a *de jure* right), though confining them to a kind of scientific ghetto. In offhandedly converting the social problem of a dominated group into a sociological problem, one is bound to miss, from the outset, all that constitutes the actual reality of the object, substituting for a social relation of domination a substantive entity, an essence, conceived in and for itself, which is equally possible for the complementary entity—and this has actually happened in the case of 'men's studies' (Bourdieu, 'La domination masculine' [male dominance], *Actes de la Recherche en sciences sociales*, 1990).

There is much to be said about this text, on the scientific plane where Bourdieu claims to place himself, and first of all, of course, that he is criticising a 'straw man'—or woman, or Black—of his own invention. Either he knows absolutely nothing about women's studies—and why then criticise them?—or he *pretends* to know nothing; and in that case, why does he pretend? Because he does not intend to know and discuss, nor even to criticise knowledgeably, but to globally discredit the whole approach and the very possibility of such an approach, through a completely negative and totally unfounded description. He gives no examples of the sins attributed to women's studies, no proof or demonstration whatsoever, and for good reason, since these sins only exist in Bourdieu's mind. It is not after an examination of the text that Bourdieu condemns, but before, and without the slightest desire to know them. 'It is out of the question', he says in effect. 'Any approach inspired by revolt can only be scientifically invalid'—especially, he adds, if it tends to exclude *me* from the benefits.

Bourdieu does not seem disturbed by the fact that this theory of 'scientific objectivity' is largely outdated in the philosophical circles concerned with epistemology; it is this theory, not women's studies or Black studies, which is considered naive. He may be unaware of this, clinging sincerely to an extremely old-fashioned theory of science. But then this too may not bother him, because his real aim is political. It is to attack what he sees, mistakenly, as a monopoly situation on the part of women, and to

replace this imaginary monopoly with another, very real one.

A male monopoly

Into the breach opened by Bourdieu—Professor at the Collège de France, one of the country's prestigious intellectual authorities—rushed all the lesser males of the social sciences who have set their sights on the 'field' of women's studies, hoping (as Bourdieu himself has explained) to impose their presence in this area and reap the 'benefits'. For the question can be raised: if the government committed the blunder of naming three men to the scientific committee, why did these men accept? This is another sign of French exceptionalism. In any other western country these three men would have declined the appointment in favour of more competent colleagues: women. This appointment—probably actively sought rather than merely accepted—is part of a career plan that fits into an overall political strategy aimed at taking control of the women's studies field.

These men are not feminists, as is amply demonstrated by their published work. But their opinions and beliefs about gender relations coincide with their designs on the field. Dominating the women's studies field involves discrediting the feminist approach. Having successfully, and with some help from the government, excluded all feminist academics from the preparation of the report, these men anticipate some kind of reaction from the women's studies circles. So they have adopted the world's oldest and surest tactic: co-optation. They are organising an 'international conference' set for March 1995, and are inviting women and feminist scientists to participate in it. They undoubtedly hope in this way to muzzle all criticism about the scandalous conditions under which the report was drawn up and the report itself.

But silencing criticism is only one aim, an immediate aim. Another short-term objective is to continue the work of delegitimising women's studies, denying that this approach is as scientific as their own traditional approach (if not more so). A longer term objective—but not so very long—is to destroy women's studies, to eliminate them from the map. In the US, in England, male social scientists integrate the results of feminist research into their own work, not only as 'facts' but also as approach. The most prestigious male scientists recognise the

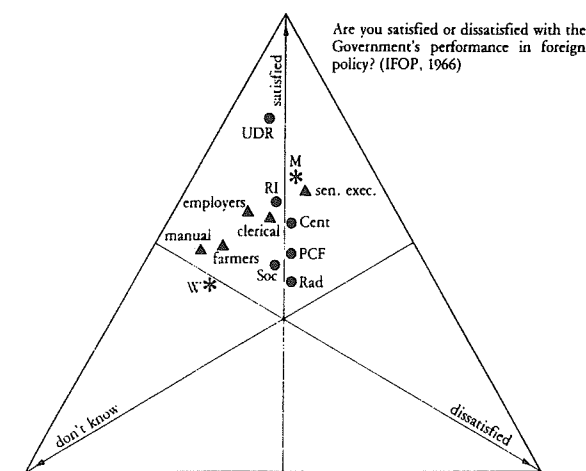
validity and utility of women's studies. This does not imply an absence of debate—even sometimes violent debate. In other countries also, there are men (and women) who hold reactionary opinions and oppose the feminist viewpoint.

Two interrelated phenomena are, however, specific to France. On the one hand there is a shift of opinion to the right of the spectrum. Views that are regarded elsewhere as reactionary are considered 'centrist' in France; views considered 'centrist' abroad are seen as 'progressive' in France. Feminism, regarded elsewhere as an opinion among others, is in France considered beyond the pale—outside the range of views deserving respect and discussion in society at large.

On the other hand, there is a refusal to discuss with feminists. Our male colleagues excommunicate us from science, which they treat, and are permitted to treat, as *their own rightful possession*. They loot our work without quoting us, and at the same time—but it is not contradictory, quite the contrary—they try to make the exclusion of the feminist viewpoint a scientific dogma.

From feminism to the 'feminine condition'

Bourdieu and his followers throw a cloud of suspicion—the suspicion of non-objectivity—on *women alone*. It would seem that men for their part are not involved in the battle of the sexes. Thus labelled 'objective', they are considered best qualified to deal with what they call 'the



Bourdieu on foreign policy

woman question'. In order to impose their leadership on the field, as well as in order to spread their anti-feminist ideas, these men have an interest in invalidating women as authors of studies and research.

For one has only to read them to see that their supposedly scientific theses are political opinions. This should come as no surprise. No woman in her right mind can assert that the political can be easily dissociated from social science, whether on this question or others. Some men claim this is possible, but it is only the better to impose their—*political*—opinions!

The only difference between good and bad scientists is between those who are aware of their assumptions and take them into account, who state their biases and beliefs, and those who are unaware or conceal them. Feminists understand this; they make their choices and their biases explicit and in this sense are more scientific than those who proclaim themselves 'pure savants'.

Our male colleagues act as if women alone were concerned by the 'feminine condition' (their expression for sexual oppression) and as if men as individuals were above the antagonisms—either because men in general live on another planet, and it is the women who oppress each other, or because researchers have no sex.

In this matter, as in every other, the researcher is situated, and this situation is part of the research. And as feminists have constantly repeated, men are situated within the women/men opposition neither more nor less than women. Who can deny it? Although this fact is considered obvious everywhere else, it continues to be denied in France.

Bourdieu's scandalous text did not arouse the protests it deserved. On the contrary, he was invited in 1992 to play the role of 'major witness' in a place where he had no business being, and in 1994 he was invited by the Study Group on the Social and Sexual Division of Labour (GEDISST) to deliver a lecture, in the course of which he declared that he had not quoted any feminist authors for the simple reason that he did not know them. Whoever intends to write in any field normally begins by reading the literature. This is Bourdieu, however, and his shameless admission is considered a perfectly acceptable excuse. Better yet, he puts himself—or is put?—in the position of granting recognition as a participant in the field to one of the teams that created this field in

France. This Johnny-come-lately, who never spoke about gender, is now in a position to crown people who have been working on it for the past 20 years!

'Women' equals 'family'

The same thing is now happening again with Singly, Commaille and Bozon [male academics]. Experts on the family, they have for some time been camouflaging their work as 'studies on women'. They intend to annex this field in order to redefine it and to redefine THE woman and THE family as coextensive and interchangeable concepts—or realities.

This is not merely a backward attitude, the whim of a retarded patriarch, to be dismissed with a smile. It is a political programme rather clearly announced in Commaille's conclusion [to his book *Stratégies des Femmes*]: a conclusion which has inspired the French UN report. The following passage has obvious political implications:

Rather than pursuing what seems to be an illusion—undifferentiated equality—the question is raised as to whether the demand for equality should not take into account the specificity of the woman's condition as it continues to exist in reality—that is, her reproductive function, her investment in the private sphere and in taking charge of children, her aspirations in this area (p.143).

This analysis then boils down to the affirmation that the existing situation is immutable and is furthermore the result of a choice—women's 'aspirations and investment'—rather than the consequence of an unjust division of labour that can be changed.

Back to the kitchen

But if Commaille claims that it cannot be changed, this only means he does not want it to change; he believes in 'the necessity of the special relationship between the mother and her small child' (p.144). And his preference for the perpetuation of the traditional roles is linked to his wish for a future of economic liberalism: a future freed from any remnants of social welfare. 'The crisis of the welfare state can result in a desire to restore to the family the functions earlier transferred to the community' (p.146). In other words, the women, already sent back to their homes, will have to take care not only of their children but of the sick and elderly that the state will also send back home.

Such is the gist of a recent report, according to which 'women's work is not an irreversible

fact', and such are the outlines of what we see emerging in the policies of the present government. This is the logic of extending the parental child-raising allowances and other attempts to establish a maternal wage. Commaille has a right—like any other citizen—to his opinions. But let him lay his cards on the table and not pretend that his opinions are the result of thinking that 'revives the virtues of the great founders' sociology' (p.148). Being in agreement with the government does not mean having no opinions or being apolitical—unless [French prime minister] Balladur can be regarded as one of the 'great founders' of sociology (who, for that matter, were far from being apolitical).

Not just academic

The only angle of approach accepted by these men [Bourdieu, Commaille, etc.] is, from the standpoint of its political implications—or choices—anti-feminist. What is more, this approach poses and requires the invalidation not only of the political positions of feminism, but also of feminism itself as an intellectual method. This taboo has grave consequences, not only for the 'woman question'—in our view, the men question—but for the whole gamut of the social sciences. For women's studies do more than challenge assumptions about gender relations; by focusing the analysis of society on those relations, they upset the whole perspective of the social sciences and create many completely new objects. That is why women's studies exist as an entire special field and not a mere opinion about sex relations, or a specialisation in sociology or history or in one or another of the social sciences.

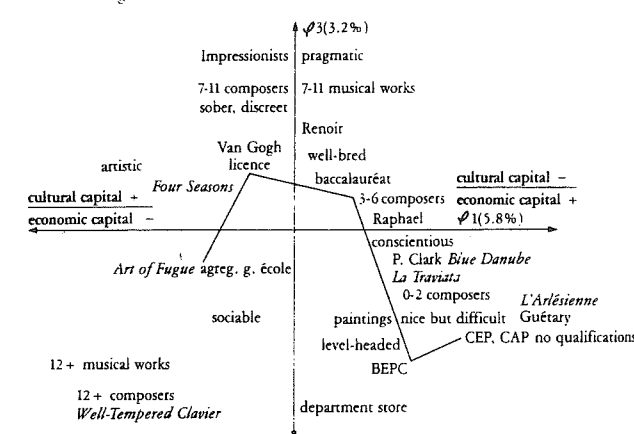
In fact, what is at stake in the invalidation of the feminist point of view is, in the first place, the relinquishing of the perspective of the dominated and the return to that of the dominant: 'women and the family', 'the harmonisation of work and family', etc. What is now being proposed to women scientists is nothing less than a return to traditional issues, where women are viewed exclusively from the standpoint of their usefulness to men and/or the problems they pose for men—men being euphemised or glorified under the label of 'community' or 'society'.

But an equally important stake is the continuation or interruption of the development of perspectives that question the whole society—and therefore the whole gamut of studies and

disciplines—from the gender viewpoint. This perspective frightens the French academic world both as a social institution in its own right and as a beneficiary and ideologist of the established order—a role it does not acknowledge but which is revealed in its fierce resistance to any movement of ideas bearing the promise of social change.

It becomes clear that the aim of all these manoeuvres is not only, as we have warfed, to weaken women's studies, but to eradicate their very principle. And it is not only women's studies that are brought into question, but militant groups and associations. Little by little, it is the right of women to act collectively for their interests that is being threatened. □

Figure 13 Variants of the dominant taste. Analysis of correspondences: simplified plane diagram of 1st and 3rd axes of inertia.



A slip of the plume?

Naming the Collaborators

Alice Vachss' book *Sex Crimes, an insider account of sex crime by a New York prosecutor, caused a stir when it appeared in the US in 1994. Here we reprint an extract from the conclusion.*

The author volunteered as a counselor in an adolescent remand centre before going to law school. She was a public defender for three years, before deciding that what she really wanted to do was to prosecute sex crimes. She was hired as an assistant district attorney for the Borough of Queens in New York City in the Special Victims Bureau, which dealt with sex crimes, as well as domestic violence and crimes against the elderly. During the 10 years she headed the Bureau, she earned a reputation as a tough prosecutor who was willing to take on 'difficult' or 'hopeless' cases.

In Sex Crimes, she describes her work at Special Victims Bureau—the cases and the internal politics and her struggles against what she calls the collaborators. Although the language she uses is sometimes problematic for radical feminists (rapists as 'beasts' and 'sociopaths'), her book, intended for a wide audience, is written out of Alice Vachss' first-hand experience and her anger about the way sex crime is treated by the legal system. Her uncompromising analysis of the 'collaborators' makes clear that she shares with feminists both an understanding of and a critical attitude to what has been called 'rape culture'.

Of all violence, sex crime is the most vulnerable to the politics of prosecution. Few prosecutors are crusaders—and it takes an affirmative determination to raise the stakes for sex offenders to overcome the statistical liabilities of taking on difficult cases.

If we are going to evaluate prosecutors on performance, then we need to develop a template like the Olympics scoring system for diving—that is, according to the degree of difficulty. Conviction rates cannot tell us what

law enforcement is doing about the most dangerous criminal—they can only tell us what is being done about those defendants against whom there is the most proof.

The soft underbelly of collaboration in sex-crimes prosecution will never be seen on Court TV—it exposes itself in the cases that are *not* prosecuted.

When we find evil and violence coalescing within any individual, then the only sane self-protective goal is incarceration. To do that

consistently rather than episodically we need to take the self-interest out of collaboration. And we need to look at what we are doing to spawn such sympathies.

We have allowed sex crimes to be the one area of criminality where we judge the offense not by the perpetrator but by the victim. There is an essential difference between sex crimes and other crimes, but it has nothing to do with victims. Most other crime is in response to a need that the offense itself seeks to meet. (Some) people kill because they are angry. (Some) people steal because they want money. But as each rape is committed, it creates a greater need. Rape is dose-related—it is chronic, repetitive... and always escalating.

Rapists cross a line—a clear, bright line. Absent specific, significant, *predictable* consequences, they are never going to cross back. Too often, instead of consequences what we give them is permission.

Collaboration is a hate crime. When a jury in Florida acquits because the victim was not wearing underpants, when a grand jury in Texas refuses to indict because an AIDS-fearing victim begged the rapist to use a condom, when a judge in Manhattan imposes a lenient sentence because the rape of a retarded, previously victimized teenager wasn't 'violent', when an appellate defense attorney vilifies a young woman on national TV for the 'crime' of having successfully prosecuted a rape complaint, when a judge in Wisconsin calls a five-year-old 'seductive'—all that is collaboration, and it is antipathy toward victims so virulent that it subjects us all to risk.

When collaboration is judicially supported, it is a grave error to conclude that it is an individual aberration of a particular judge. Since judges are picked on a political basis, we have to expect their conduct to be reflective of the larger norm. Judges who get their positions by life-times of obeisance to the local clubhouse are going to go with what got them there. We should not expect leadership from such individuals—but we can certainly impose consequences for their performance.

A judge with a demonstrated record of being anti-Hispanic, or anti-Italian, or anti-Semitic—any bias against any particular class of defendant—would be subject to penalties up to and through removal. But if that same judge shows an overwhelming bias against victims, there is no remedy.

What 'double jeopardy' has come to mean in American criminal justice is this: The victim only gets one chance.

There are always going to be rapists among us. We need to stop permitting it to be socially and politically acceptable to give them aid and comfort. We need to recognize rape for the antihuman crime that it is. Rape is neither sexual nor sexy; it is an ugly act of dominance and control. Just as rapists generally prefer knives, they use the sex act itself to make their abuse of power more personal. We need to start judging sex crime by the rape and by the rapist... not by the victim.

No political ideology 'owns' the war against rape. Everybody uses rape for their own ends, and it is rare for the focus to ever be on blaming the rapists. Those who want to say that society is too permissive say that we have rape because of pornography. Those who want to say that society is too repressive say that legalizing prostitution would decrease rape. The truth is, society doesn't 'cause' rape—but society's reaction to rape promotes it.

People can be collaborators even when that is not their intent. Legalizing prostitution doesn't reduce rape any more than pornography causes rape; sex offenses are not a function of excess hormones. But pornography that degrades women may very well cause collaboration. Any time we send the message that sexual violence is acceptable, we feed into the support system for sex offenders. Anti-female pornography may not motivate rape, but it does validate the rapist's self-perception as a member of a large, societally endorsed group.

We have a unified attitude towards all other types of crimes. We have recognized that an armed robber poses a potential risk to each of us. Whether he sticks up a bank or a bodega, whether the victim is running numbers or selling church supplies, we have a sense of universality. We understand that we could be robbed next. Until we have the same unified attitude toward sex crimes, we will continue losing this 'war'.

Sex offenders are experts in justificatory language and concepts. We have to stop believing their lies.

- Kiddie porn is not a victimless crime.
- Fondling is not a nonviolent offense. No child's conduct invites molestation.
- Same-sex pedophiles are not homosexuals any more than different-sex pedophiles are heterosexual—they are *criminals*.



- Sexual violence is not part of the marriage contract.
- The rate of sex crimes cannot be reduced by dress codes.

The Supreme Court has struggled for years with a definition of obscenity. I'll give you one: letting a rapist go free... giggling behind his mask, confidant of his endorsements... and committed to recidivism.

There is no greater stigma to poverty than the reality-based perception that violence is more tolerated within one's own community than it would be elsewhere. Racism is never more self-destructive than when it says that the color of a woman's skin determines whether she was 'really' raped. There is nothing more damaging to the soul of an abused child than the belief that his or her molestation is sanctioned by the adult world.

We can't afford our prejudices against victims. Sex offenders exact too high a price for our tolerance.

If 'rapism' were a disease, it would be an epidemic. When sex offenders are caught, and if they perceive serious consequences, they demand 'treatment', even though no one is claiming to have found a 'cure'. The only viable 'treatment' for rape is quarantine. There is a lot of talk about sex-offender therapy, but there is only one functional diagnostic criterion: dangerousness. We spend too much time trying to 'understand' rapists from a treatment point of view. If rapists are to be studied, we should study them from a combat point of view; we need to understand the enemy. Most fundamentally, what we need to know about rapists is how to interdict them, and how to put them down for the count once they are finally captured.

We are finally beginning to recognize the inadequacy of our current systems to protect us against a specific type of predator—one who is dangerous but not crazy. Faced with the parole eligibility of Larry Singleton, a rapist who kidnapped a teenage hitchhiker, cut off her hands, and left her to die in the desert, California rallied against the danger his release represented. Granted parole, he could not find a community in the state willing to accept him as a parolee. More recently public outcry in Florida gained an extra five years incarceration for a rapist already granted parole after having served only a fraction of his thirty-four-year sentence. In New Jersey the town of Wycoff keeps twenty-four-hour surveillance of Donald Chapman, a

rapist who completed his maximum sentence, thus requiring his release after twelve years incarceration despite universal diagnoses (and his own promise) that next time he will rape and kill. The state of Washington has enacted controversial legislation, now being debated by at least five other states, permitting post-sentence incarceration in exactly such circumstances. While all of this represents a welcome growing intolerance for the rapists among us, each case represents a failure of law enforcement. Known, dangerous, convicted sex offenders have received such leniency from the criminal justice system that they are parole-eligible within a shockingly short amount of time.

We could use better weapons. New York is typical in that its sentencing structure is hopelessly inadequate. If sexual psychopaths (like predatory pedophiles and serial rapists) are going to commit themselves to a lifetime of sex offenses—we need to commit them to life sentences. We say that we grade theft offenses by the value of what is stolen and the force and violence used. If we judged sex crimes the same way, virtually every rapist would get a life sentence.

We need laws that recognize that child molestation can be an ongoing crime, not just an isolated incident. We must revise the statute of limitations to recognize that sex offenders can traumatize victims into years of silence. We enhance the penalties for robbery depending on the use of weapons and/or violence. We need to use the same formula for rapes that involve the abuse of a 'power relationship', be it father-daughter, teacher-student, minister-congregant, or any other permutations of that dynamic. We need to enact laws against rape-by-extortion, whether it occurs in a sweatshops against an illegal alien or on a psychiatrist's couch against a patient.

Prosecutors now have statutorily created 'discretion' with which to betray victims. The charge of 'sexual misconduct' serves no function other than to give a district attorney the option to treat rape as a minor crime. Because incest is the lowest class of felony, prosecutors have the option of treating intrafamilial abuse as less of a crime than a stranger-to-stranger molestation. Either rape and incest should be the same high level of felony or we should take incest off the books and simply treat it as what it is: the rape of a child.

Some of these defects in the law may be unique to New York, but they are representative of the obstacles to sex-crimes prosecution throughout this country. It may be that anomalies occurred when the penal law failed to change at the same pace as societal values. But it is nonetheless intolerable that there is still a state in this union that requires a child victim of molestation to be 'previously chaste'.

Although individual states have made legislative advances in this area, they remain unsupported on a nationwide level. We do not even have a national registry of convicted sex offenders, which would allow us to check the records of rapists and molesters before giving them access to children in our schools, in our child-care and child-protective agencies, and as foster parents.

The federal government declared a 'war on drugs' when its citizenry finally recognized that even people who are not dope fiends are harmed by narcotics traffic. All the children caught in the cross fires of drug-dealer wars proved that the most innocent can still be victimized by dope. The federal government has never declared a war on rape.

I am not suggesting that 'just say no' is effective—that transparent PR slogan is now a national joke. If there is a war on drugs, then we are all POWs to it. But unlike with heroin, whose poppies don't grow in this country, we do grow our own rapists. We could win at both ends, dealing with both the current and future crops of rapists. We could succeed even if we didn't rehabilitate a single rapist, by heading some off at the pass and dropping the rest for the count.

It is axiomatic that children are damaged by child abuse. Some overcome that damage. Some become life-long victims. Some limit their destructiveness to collaboration. And some become full-blown predators. We could intervene in that assembly line if we devoted sufficient resources to properly trained, funded, supported, and scrutinized child-protective services.

As to the rapists who already walk among us, our only recourse is to fight. This is no politician's euphemism—a rapist is a single-minded, totally self-absorbed sociopathic beast... a beast that cannot be tamed with 'understanding'. We need to stop shifting the responsibilities, to stop demanding that victims show 'earnest resistance', to stop whining and start winning. The battlefields are many—too many. The courthouse and the jury room, the back alley and the bedroom, the school curriculum and the voting booths. And one of our strongest weapons must be fervent intolerance for collaboration in any form.

We need to go to war. The enemy has already opened hostilities. The casualties are already far too high. And our ranks are already depleted by friendly fire.

Each time a trial of mine came to a close, when it was time for a case to be handed over to the jury, I felt the way I do now, as this book ends. Most of my summations began with some variation of one single theme. This is what I told the jury, and what I am telling you:

You have heard all the evidence you are going to hear. After I finish speaking, the judge will instruct you on the law, and then it will be up to you to decide the truth in this case. *You* decide... not the judge... not the defense attorney.... not the defendant... and not me.

No one can control what you do in that jury room. You can choose to be narrow-minded and prejudiced. You can choose to ignore or misinterpret the evidence. You can choose to abdicate your own responsibility and defer your judgment to that of your fellow jurors. No one can stop you.

All I can do now is ask you not to do that. I am asking that when you are in that jury room, you use your hearts and your minds and your lifetimes of accumulated knowledge to look at the evidence in this case. If you do that, there can be but one result. It is a profound responsibility that you take with you and a rare honor that this country bestows upon its citizens. You have the opportunity to create justice.

Do it. □

Alice Vachss *Sex Crimes*
(Arrow Books, 1994)

Bordering on Useless

In Scotland, legislation on the use of sexual history and sexual character evidence in rape trials was framed to avoid the problems encountered with English legislation. But Marian Foley points out in this review of a study of Scottish rape trials, Sex Crimes on Trial, that the real problem, on both sides of the border, is prejudice against women.

In English law, rape is considered to be the most serious sexual offence and this is reflected in the maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The reality of rape trials, and indeed the entire legal process prior to a case reaching the courts, provides us with a very different picture. Whilst a particular type of rape committed by a 'deranged stranger' on an 'innocent' and 'defenceless' woman involving extreme acts of violence may indeed be viewed as a heinous crime, the overwhelming majority of rapes are generally treated as far less serious. How seriously an attack is taken will depend a number of things, including: the relationship between the woman and her attacker; where the crime occurred; and the 'blame' attached to her actions, words, dress code and lifestyle. These issues have been highlighted in recent debates and rape trials of so called 'date rape' in which the trauma of rape is minimised on the grounds that if it happens to so many women, committed

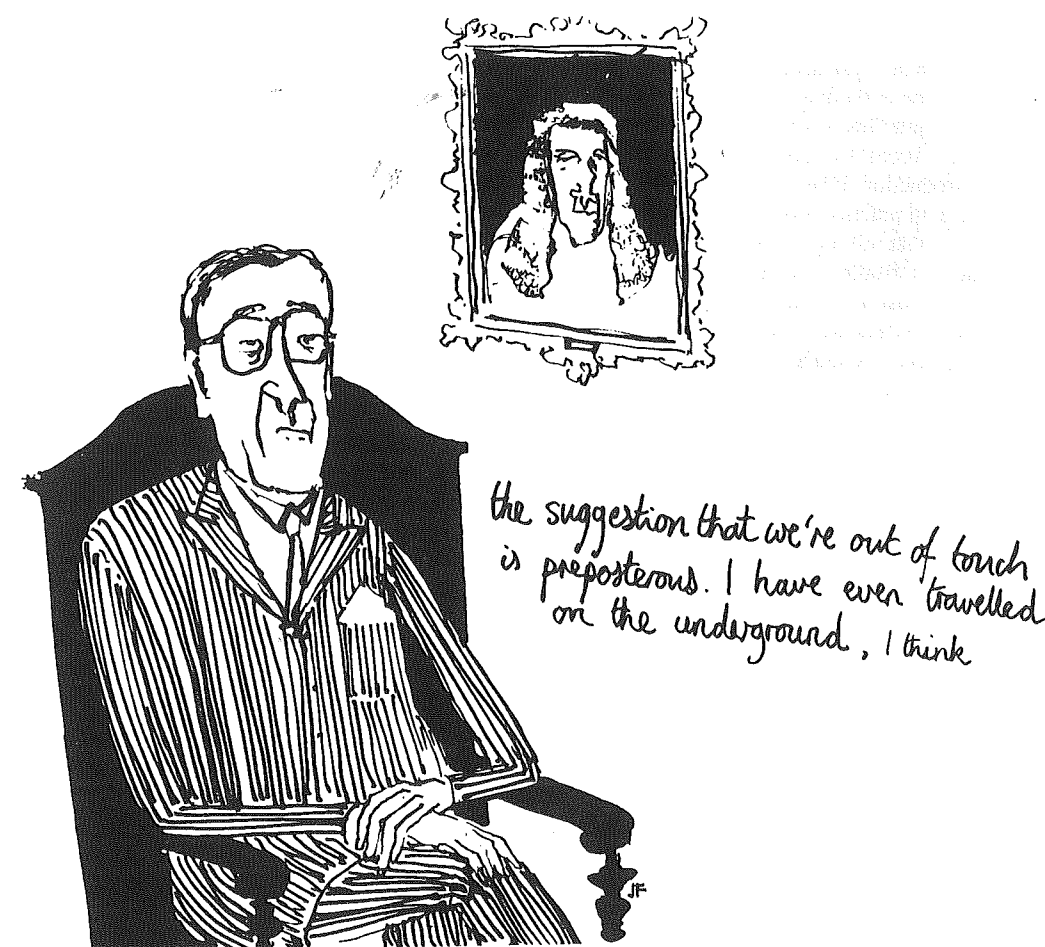
by men they know, it doesn't constitute a serious crime.

The majority of women involved in a rape trial either as a witness, supporting a witness or as an observer will be well aware that justice is the last thing likely to be dispensed in court. After sitting through ten rape trials at the Old Bailey (seven of which resulted in a not guilty verdict) and witnessing the distress and humiliation meted out to women on a routine basis, Sue Lees, like many of us, came to see rape trials as simply a 'cruel hoax'. Whilst we would all like to see men punished for what they do to women (and for the individual women concerned a guilty verdict is a powerful public recognition of their ordeal) this is the most unlikely outcome. A recent study by Sue Lees and Jeanne Gregory of reported sexual offences, including rape and attempted rape, in the Borough of Islington found that despite recent changes in police practice and procedure, police

officers still clung to the belief that a high percentage of rape allegations are 'false'. Many reported incidents were still 'no crimed' (cases which never get recorded as a crime for a number of reasons—those classified by the police as false allegations, where women are unable to go through with the legal process, insufficient evidence) and others were re-defined which usually involved down-grading them to a lesser offence, and women were shocked and insulted at the lenient sentences meted out in court. Only a quarter of all cases initially classified as rape ever reached the courts and only a third of these resulted in a conviction for rape or attempted rape, leading the researchers to conclude that it has become even more difficult to secure a conviction for non-stranger rape than in the past. The likelier scenario is that the woman will go through the horrific ordeal of giving her evidence, having the most intimate parts of her life exposed and

ridiculed only to witness a not guilty verdict.

In England the ordeal of women giving evidence in court and the law on rape became the subject of much public debate after a number of judicial rulings. In response to public concern the Heilbron Committee was set up specifically to consider the problems surrounding the law on rape and the use of sexual evidence in relation to the wider aspects of rape offences. The Heilbron Committee gave consideration to how the court ordeal could be lessened for women by recommending that (a) specific criteria should be laid down to determine what type of evidence should be allowed in rape trials on application by the defence and (b) any character attack on the witness should warrant an equally spirited counter attack on the character of the accused. These recommendations were dropped in favour of a much weaker formula which relied on judge's discretion. Under the 1976 Sexual Offences



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There are of course many reasons why DEFINING rape is not a simple process - had she perhaps been pleasant towards him, was she attractively clothed, had she consented on PREVIOUS occasions, had she been breastfeeding in his presence...

Amendment Act, the defence could make an application to cross-examine the woman in relation to her past sexual history and it would be up to the individual judge to grant permission. Despite this Act's attempt to lessen women's ordeal by curtailing (not outlawing) the introduction of her past sexual history by the defence, in practice little has changed. The reality is that relying on the discretion of judges to allow or disallow the introduction of the woman's past sexual history is part of the problem. Judges are open to the same sexist assumptions, prejudices and double standards in relation to men's and women's behaviour as anyone else. The only way to avoid this and protect women is to tightly define what type of evidence can be introduced and under what circumstances (Zusanna Adler, 1987).

The Scottish road to reform took a different route—sexual evidence and sexual character history were considered by the Scottish Law Commission (SLC) but only as part of the revision of the law of evidence as a whole. But the English legislation, combined with agitation from feminists, victim support and the general public, which came to a head in 1982, forced the SLC to prioritise sexual evidence reforms. Within a year the SLC had produced a report on sexual evidence and the recommendations for a draft bill were circulated, commented upon and amended. The amended bill, which became law in 1986, was an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of

English legislation by defining what evidence should be excluded and under what conditions such excluded evidence could be introduced. Has Scottish legislation had more success than its English counterpart? A recent study, *Sex Crimes on Trial*, by Beverley Brown, Michele Burman and Lynn Jamieson suggests not.

Scottish legislation is broader than most because, although framed with rape and rape related offences in mind, it covers almost every sexual offence: heterosexual as well as homosexual offences, where the crime concerns age-of-consent or legal capacity to give consent... as well as crimes of indecency. The only omissions are incest and clandestine injury (sexual intercourse with a sleeping woman) and some crimes such as brothel-keeping.

The legislation covers both heterosexual and homosexual offences, although 90% of complainants in the trials covered by this study were female. As the researchers point out:

'sexual evidence' has many facets and goes by many names—evidence of prior sexual activity, sexual experience, sexual history, sexual character and sexual reputation. Here we draw the distinction between 'sexual history'—specific information about particular facts, individuals and events, which may sometimes be occurrences after the time of the alleged crime itself—and 'sexual character'. Sexual character by contrast, involves the typing of a person, usually in moral terms of 'good' and 'bad'.

Modern law has tended to oppose sexual

character evidence but accept the relevance of sexual history evidence, which is a deeply problematic distinction to make as sexual history evidence can clearly be used to intimate sexual character. So even when not officially sanctioned 'sexual character is implied by innuendo and implication'.

Scottish legislation, like legislation in other jurisdictions, doesn't seek to bar sexual character and sexual history but to limit when and under what circumstances, such evidence is relevant and therefore permitted. The purpose of such legislation is not to discriminate against the accused (as some would have us believe) but to prevent bias against the complainant (in English law the equivalent term is complainant) by ensuring that such evidence is only introduced if it is relevant to the charge. The legislation is an attempt to balance these two positions by excluding evidence which shows that the complainant is not of good character in relation to sexual matters, or is a prostitute or associate of prostitutes, and any general discussion of sexual behaviour which is not part of the charge. These types of evidence can be introduced only if they fall under the following exceptions:

- 1 Explaining or rebutting evidence produced by the Crown;
- 2 Evidence concerning behaviour taking place on the same occasion as the behaviour in the charge;

- 3 That relevant to a defence of incrimination (that someone other than the accused was responsible for the offence);
- 4 In the 'interests of justice'.

If the defence wishes to introduce such evidence they must make an application to the judge or sheriff (Scottish equivalent of a magistrate) seeking permission and stating which exceptions the evidence falls under. If the evidence does fall into any of the exclusions it can be admitted, but the judge/sheriff may limit the scope and the extent of questioning permitted during cross-examination. The Crown is not covered by these exclusions on the grounds that they are unlikely to introduce evidence which would undermine their case.

This may sound very laudable in theory, but when it comes to applying the legislation Brown, Burman and Jamieson's research uncovered a number of problems which rendered it practically useless. The defence still generally sought to establish a past sexual interest between the complainant and the accused to show that relations between the two were friendly and therefore the woman was likely to have consented. This was backed up by the general judicial view that if a woman has consented in the past, then it is reasonable for a man to assume she will continue to consent, unless he is met with resistance. All defence lawyers interviewed as part of this study (bar one), said they would in some circumstances



...did she say NO in such a way that it could be understood as YES, did she fight him off in a manner which could have implied consent?

All these things make it very DIFFICULT for a man to understand the messages he's being given

seek to introduce evidence to show that the complainer was 'easy' or of 'bad repute'. They would do so by referring to character evidence, not necessarily sexual, to build a general picture of immorality, for example drinking or staying out late. Thus it was possible to introduce the very type of evidence relating to the general issues of credibility that the law reformers had sought to exclude.

The problem was compounded by the lack of consensus among legal practitioners as to when and why evidence was relevant, and confusion

sheriffs were not in agreement as to whether this indirect evidence should be covered by relevant exclusions. The defence thought it shouldn't, and although most believed that only recent past sexual relationships were relevant and would limit questioning to those, in reality they were far less vigilant when it came to past sexual history not involving sexual intercourse, e.g. flirting. However, views differed on this; a minority thought it didn't count as sexual behaviour and therefore was not prohibited, but while they agreed it was covered by the

legislation, they were divided as to its relevance.

Sexual character and sexual history were introduced without application on many occasions, particularly those involving young or adolescent girls in an attempt to typify them as sexually promiscuous or pre-coercive. The tactics used by the defence were the same regardless of whether or not an

application had been sought. This involved using past sexual history to suggest consent, or in cases where no past liaison between complainer and accused existed to show general disposition to consent. Much of the evidence suggested consent by besmirching the character of the complainer and undermining their general credibility as a witness. Although much of the evidence introduced without application would probably have been allowed if an application had been made, circumvention of the procedure meant that the defence were not questioned about their intentions and there was no possibility of limiting their line of questioning. The findings also suggest that the prosecution is implicated in practices which allow more sexual character and sexual history evidence to be introduced than legislators intended, by introducing such evidence themselves and by not intervening or counter-attacking when the

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defence introduced sexual character and sexual history evidence prejudicial to the prosecution's case and of dubious relevance to the trial.

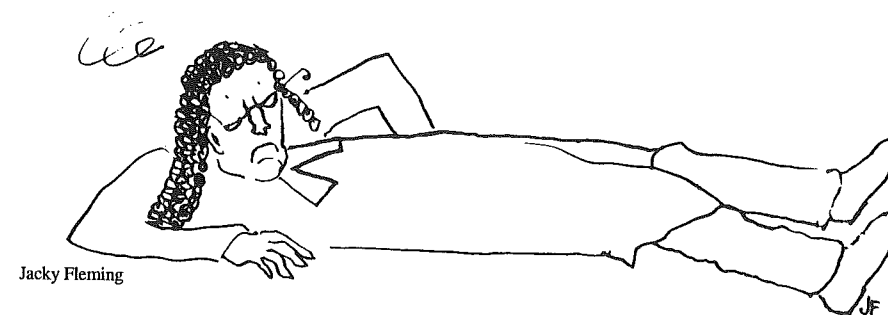
There are many other issues which make rape trials such an ordeal to women under both Scottish and English legislation, especially those which focus on limited definitions of resistance and force as proof of lack of consent. Under Scottish law the definition of rape does not require the proof of force and yet the absence of injuries is frequently used to demonstrate consent, and even where there is proof of force or excessive violence the defence will still argue that women simply like it 'rough'. It isn't good enough that women say 'no', they must physically resist their attacker, and women's evidence that they didn't physically fight back out fear and men's threats of violence are played down and usually ridiculed by the defence. Underlying all of the above are stereotypical sexist assumptions of sexual conduct which are heavily relied on by the defence to challenge the reliability and credibility of the woman, i.e. is she a respectable woman? Did she in some way provoke the attack due to dress, demeanour, behaviour? Is there some reason as to why she should make a false allegation out of revenge or spite?

These issues usually raised by the defence (but not exclusively) are rarely challenged by the prosecution which implicitly accepts them as valid and rarely challenges the defendant's character. The prosecution persistently fails to adequately cross-examine and to use this process to challenge the man's version of events, what caused him to believe she consented, why did he lie to the police, to question where it took place, his views on women, sex,

violence, is he a reliable and credible witness. Yet as the research on Scottish rape trials demonstrates when the prosecutor/prosecution took a more active role in challenging both the defendant's version of events it had a positive bearing on the trial, which should lead us to ask what is it about the nature and role of the prosecution in England and Scotland which produces such ineffective cross-examination of defendants. The answer must lie in entrenched sexism combined with a number of other factors such as their careers/reputations don't depend on successful prosecutions and the woman's status as chief prosecution witness means they have no feelings of obligation to her.

Since the early 1980s the police have made attempts to improve the way in which women reporting rape are treated, the number or officially recorded rapes has increased but it appears to have become even harder now than in the past to secure a conviction for rape in cases where women know their attacker. It is also clear from the evidence both North and South of the border that the legislation to protect women from character attacks and to lessen the ordeal of the court case have been largely ineffectual. Sexual history and character are still used very successfully to attack the credibility of a woman's character either directly or indirectly through inference and innuendo. What *Sex Crimes on Trial* (like Adler's work) clearly documents is that having laws which seek to protect women is no good if those applying them—judges primarily but also prosecution lawyers—continue to be so prejudiced against women. □

as Judge Senile not only BLATANTLY FLAUNTED his stupidity and incompetence, but was also PROVOCATIVELY dressed in a wig and gown, we can only assume he was inviting violent assault



Jacky Fleming

Illustrations from:

Jacky Fleming *Be a Bloody Train Driver* (Penguin, 1991) and Jacky Fleming *Never Give Up* (Penguin, 1992)

References:

- Beverley Brown, Michèle Burman and Lynn Jamieson *Sex Crimes on Trial: The Use of Sexual Evidence in Scottish Courts* (Edinburgh University Press 1993)
- Sue Lees 'Trial by Rape' in *New Statesman and Society* (24 November 1989)
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Wilful Resistance

In her book The Will to Violence, Susanne Kappeler challenges the assumption that individuals, even those who are oppressed, are not responsible for the violence they commit and the violence they fail to condemn or resist: 'violence is a possibility wherever there is freedom of action, however limited'. Feminists have analysed the ways in which women are objectified, but we need to acknowledge that we are also active subjects. If we want to relate to one another as equals, argues Susanne Kappeler, we must face up to the 'politics of personal behaviour'. Joan Scanlon and Julia Swindells agree.

This is not the first time Susanne Kappeler has issued a formidable challenge to our unquestioned assumptions and habits of thinking and how they form the basis for political engagement, this time by extending the use of the term violence to include the here and now and everyday aspects of our personal behaviour.

War does not suddenly break out in a peaceful society; sexual violence is not the disturbance of otherwise equal gender relations. Racist attacks do not shoot like lightning out of a non-racist sky, and the sexual exploitation of children is no solitary problem in a world otherwise just to children. The violence of our most commonsense everyday thinking and especially our personal will to violence, constitute the conceptual preparation, the ideological armament and the intellectual mobilisation which make the 'outbreak' of war, of sexual violence, of racist attacks, of murder and destruction possible at all. (p.9)

Our most banal and apparently innocuous acts and utterances are shown up to be profoundly connected to the forms of violence which we are more likely to recognise as such, particularly where that violence, whether psychological or physical, is perpetrated by others. It is remarkable that we feminists, for whom the personal is allegedly political, have been so unwilling to see the sphere of personal behaviour as the proper subject of critical scrutiny (unless it falls within legal definitions

of criminal behaviour). It is also remarkable that we feminists, who have not been slow to point out the connections between the economic and sexual exploitation of women in the so-called private sphere, have become increasingly self-justifying in pursuit of our 'right' to a version of privacy.

Defining selves, denying others

The privacy in question is not freedom from intrusion and invasion (or even a room of one's own and a bit of peace and quiet), but a personal identity and self-definition gained through and at the expense of other people, even where structural inequalities are not evident. When a person is defined exclusively through their personal intimacy with someone else, as in the horribly familiar practice of lovingly substituting titles such as 'my partner' ('lover', 'girlfriend', 'wife', 'other half', etc.) for their name, this is not only to reduce them to the status of a newly acquired hat or an old bicycle, it is also to be instrumental in the obliteration of their autonomous existence. Moreover, where such relationships are premised on 'need' (even construed as 'mutual need') we coerce each other into responses which remove all scope for voluntary action, and make nonsense of the notion of 'consent'. If this is the way we treat

those we claim to 'love'—and such practices as these are so ubiquitous and pervasive as to be regarded as normal—who needs enemies?

Our most banal and apparently innocuous acts are shown up to be profoundly connected to the forms of violence which we are more likely to recognise as such

The point is not to argue that resistance to these forms of objectification and violation is more or less important than resistance to recognised forms of violence. For central to this book is the conviction that: 'Personal behaviour is no alternative to "political" action; there is no question of either/or.' For instance, Susanne Kappeler's account stresses the continuum between the way in which we allow the structures and values of war to shape themselves inside us, and the full-scale military operation which we call war. She is here running the risk of being charged with neutralising the term violence by the inclusiveness of her usage. However, she is at pains to explain why we need to understand the interconnectedness of different forms of violence, including the violence of state-determined armed conflict and the structures of thought employed in decisions to act violently.

Interconnections

What Susanne Kappeler is *not* saying is that one form of violence is the same as another; what she *is* saying is that one is not possible without the other, and that we share in the responsibility for both. Even where our potentiality to enact violence is limited, we are still responsible for the decisions that we make, within our relative competence to act, if they contribute to the ordinariness of violence in our society. This is the main challenge, the one we are left with in the book's conclusion; the main counter-argument, which is anticipated throughout, rests on invoking the oppression of 'others' to justify one's own refusal to take responsibility for resisting the use of violence ourselves. To argue, therefore, that circumstances of poverty, shit-work, sexual and physical violence, so reduce an individual woman's resources for resistance, her strategies for survival, and her 'will' to make any other decision, is to miss the point of the challenge, which not only recognises such

victimisation, but is precisely aimed at those of us who have the scope to resist violence and decide not to, and who, by our refusal, join the ranks of the perpetrators instead of seeking to dismantle a power structure which creates victims.

While in extremity and under threat of our lives we may not have any means other than violence to secure our survival, most of us most of the time are not in such situations, though we glibly speak of 'survival'. Instead, we would have ample opportunity in situations of no such threat to challenge the legitimacy of violence and to practise alternatives—above all by deciding not to use violence ourselves. (p.258)

The language that we use plays an important part in the process of justifying and rendering invisible the violence that we perpetrate and sanction, simply by calling it something else. One example that Susanne Kappeler offers is the fact that every military force in the world is described as a 'defence' force, creating the illusion that, in present wars as throughout history, there was never an aggressive move by the national 'self' who is represented in this national autobiography. Similar linguistic and ideological stunts characterise the forms in which male violence against women and children is rationalised, in and out of court, whether the 'cause' is represented as a nagging wife, a precocious child, a threat to the perpetrator's masculinity, or the circumstantial excuse provided by the scientific model of a 'cycle of violence'. These forms of violence and their self-justification, whether by individuals or organised in groups against other human beings, along with the 'harmless' torture of animals for medical research and their slaughter for human consumption, are simply, in Susanne Kappeler's disturbing contention, 'the consistent and logical application of the principles of our culture and everyday life'.

'Personal behaviour is no alternative to "political" action; there is no question of either/or.'

Love-hate relationships

We feminists have been understandably reluctant to use the term 'peace' to describe the circumstances of women who, while not in situations of military conflict, are nonetheless subject to the reality or permanent threat of sexual violence on the street and in our homes.

This refusal of the term 'peace' registers an unwillingness to tolerate the levels of violence against women which obtain in conditions we are supposed to consider normal and acceptable.

The ostensibly inclusive language of anti-racism is implicated in this process of objectification and violation.

Taking this logic one step further still, Susanne Kappeler is arguing that we should refuse and resist the tendencies of contemporary Western capitalist societies to democratise, reward and celebrate those forms of violence which are taken as evidence of a competitive state of healthy self-interest. It is no accident that the term 'disinterested', particularly when it is applied to personal behaviour, is increasingly understood to mean 'uninterested', for the classic model of love and desire, which feminists seem to have done depressingly little to dislodge, is one which is defined by self-gratification, ownership and acquisition. In fact these determinants of intimate relationship are so central to a sense of personal identity that the individual believes they cannot exist without one:

Thus it is not unusual to find that individuals consider themselves complete only if they are 'in a relationship', while a time without a partner is thought of as a temporary state of lack and an interim only between two relationships. Alternatively, individuals aspire to 'a relationship' without knowing of a specific candidate for the vacant post of partner. (p.164)

This desire for a relationship in the abstract, with no-one in mind, shows up very clearly (and dismally) the way in which a social relation has been transformed—even in the relationship ideology of contemporary feminists—into a dimension of individual identity. In this it differs not at all from traditional heterosexual marriage, in which the individual male claims his right to 'privacy' by constructing an intimate relationship with the woman as 'other', the object to his subject. This goes some way towards explaining why men's hatred of and violence towards women is perfectly compatible with their need to use them as 'love' objects within the private sphere:

All the more remarkable that today women also increasingly wish to define 'personal identity' through such 'intimacy'. For, to construct such

'intimacy' another person is required... They are required to constitute a 'sexual relationship', that socially determined gender relationship which, in its individual form as marriage, makes the relation between a man and a woman a 'sexual' relation in every respect, even outside sexual activity... Such 'intimacy' with one's 'own' wife or personal 'other' is what constitutes a 'feeling of selfhood' and 'identity'. (p.163)

'Us' and 'Them'

Moreover, the problem of constructing the 'other' pervades the social world over and beyond the personal domain, and one of Susanne Kappeler's most sustained and forceful arguments is in relation to the ways in which the ostensibly inclusive language of anti-racism is implicated in this process of objectification and violation. The use of terms such as 'xenophobia' or 'hatred of foreigners' to describe racist behaviour distract and deflect us from seeking political solutions, because they conceal the full extent of racist violence and reformulate the problem as one of 'nice' or 'nasty' feelings towards 'others'. By the same token this language implies that the solution lies in developing friendly feelings towards 'others' rather than refusing to construct them as others in the first place, substituting for anti-racist political action the aspiration towards what Susanne Kappeler describes as 'love of foreigners', in which 'neither the power of categorising nor the power relations inherent in the categories are at issue'.

'In the integrity of action as the agent's free choice, as opposed to an action determined or commanded by another, lies the difference between freedom and service...'

Whether racism or sexism (or both) is at issue, there is a major problem with the ways in which 'we' and 'us' (and by implication 'they' and 'them') are used apparently 'innocently' by the assumed subject group as a place from which to articulate friendly feelings towards others, while at the same time designating its own members as central. This is the reason why much feminist theory in recent years has at least taken a critical look at linguistic practice, and pointed out that the use of the term 'we' is used to position 'ourselves' in a particular discourse.

Susanne Kappeler, in a crucial note on the term 'we', takes this point about location as given, but also argues that there is a need to retain 'we' as part of the means by which the creation of dialogue, and what she calls 'collective self-criticism', takes place. Thus it becomes a matter for the individual to recognise their collective responsibility, and to decide to act accordingly. There is no such thing as a neutral position, no such thing as inaction, no excuse for regarding the issue as merely theoretical, no excuse for acknowledging the problem and then merely expressing one's regret at being unable to do anything about it, using the notion of powerlessness to abdicate responsibility, even for our own speech.

The consequence is neither that we should avoid the words 'we' and 'us', nor speak of 'us' only universally and all-inclusively. While the former would return us to the feigned neutrality of scientific discourse, which simply hides the discursive structuring, the latter would allow us to speak only of a future utopia of universal equality, where all are included in an egalitarian community of 'us'. (p.21)

Susanne Kappeler's use of the term 'we' therefore inevitably shifts in order to designate a number of different contexts where shared aims and values are significant in terms of political action. 'We' feminists are included in a shared concern with the analysis of violence and its consequences. However, as we know uncomfortably well, it is a fallacy to believe that the label of feminist is any guarantee of a woman's public politics, let alone her politics of personal behaviour. Moreover, there are versions of feminist discourse which this book is profoundly critical of, i.e. those which utilise objectifying scientific language in order to claim authoritative status as knowledge by mimicking 'the prototypical discourse of (white, male, educated, etc.) power in our society'. The attack on scientific discourse is by no means confined to an argument with feminism, for Susanne Kappeler is concerned to connect the more familiar debates which have taken place within the women's movement to a discussion of Western capitalist society characterised by an aggressive and self-interested model of social relations.

Pondering the patriarchs

So concerned is Susanne Kappeler to expose the thinking which informs acts and structures of violence, that she addresses these connections at

every conceivable level, including making critical challenges to some of the more infamous figures of Western European 'thought': notably Sartre, Freud, Hegel, Marx and Kant. Some of these names are at least part of a German philosophical tradition which has tended to engage with politics. But even those whose contribution to politics is at best negligible, and even positively deplorable, are invoked for the purpose of a discussion which is never isolated from considerations of political agency and action.

'We would have ample opportunity ... to challenge the legitimacy of violence and to practise alternatives—above all by deciding not to use violence ourselves.'

However, the fact that some aspects of the book's concerns are served by this philosophical discussion seems at times to override, or perhaps simply take as implicit, both our acquaintance with and interest in these bearded patriarchs (whether appreciative or not). Other debates, for instance about the German nation state and its history, are more easily identified as part of Susanne Kappeler's insistence on making visible and subjecting to analysis every dimension of the context in which she is living and writing. In other words, we (the two of us) found that the German context was invoked most tellingly when it concerned contemporary issues of racism and nationalism, and the problem of substituting the endless reproduction of guilt about the past for urgent political agency in the present.

Who we are or how we behave?

Pivotal to Susanne Kappeler's whole discussion is her preliminary assertion that: 'There are only two major political attitudes to distinguish: self-interest on the one hand, and a responsibility for the whole on the other.' Identity politics is one such form of self-interest, transforming an active 'political consciousness of identity', derived from the necessary recognition of specific historical forms of collective oppression, into a static 'self-image'. Susanne Kappeler here alludes to Kathleen Barry's analysis of the left-liberal 'solution' of a 'cult of victimisation' as a substitute for political action:

It is an 'answer' on the level of culture to a problem of oppression in the real; the offer of a cult as compensation for oppression. After twenty-five more years of this particular heritage, the cult not only continues to be offered, but increasingly is being accepted, cultural representations of oppression identity being regarded not only as adequate compensation for, but an adequate response to, oppression. (p.232)

A debilitating consequence of this emphasis on identity rather than action is that we seek to create political coalitions and personal relationships on the basis of 'who someone is' rather than how they behave. We seek political coalitions with groups of 'others', not for the sake of political exigency but in order to reassure ourselves that we can make friends across 'difference', reinforcing our own identity in the process. Moreover, to maintain this collective identity we resort not only to history but to biology, investing the members of our own group with attributes they may not manifest (or even aspire to).

**'Individuals aspire to
"a relationship" without knowing
of a specific candidate for the
vacant post of partner.'**

More troublesome still is a version of this argument which assumes that, simply by virtue of identity, the behaviour which an individual actually manifests is essentially different in kind. Relationships between women (regardless of how the individual women behave) are thus automatically, rather than potentially, different (i.e. better) than heterosexual relationships. We have been much more ready to seek excuses and explanations for violence committed by women against each other, and much less willing to name abuses of power within such relationships, particularly where the perpetrator of such abuses identifies as a feminist. In this failure to recognise and challenge these abuses we are also implicated in the process by which violence is socially absorbed and condoned.

Choosing to resist

There is no doubt that all this presents a bleak view of personal behaviour and of personal relationships as presently constituted. But what Susanne Kappeler is presenting here is an analysis of the present, not a 'vision' of the future. In fact she is determinedly resisting a visionary account of a future world in which we

would not abuse power because we would not be able to—the ultimate abdication of responsibility for our actions and a megalomaniac's vision of a world in which everyone would be forced to accommodate themselves to our point of view. That does not mean that her argument is not utopian in its uncompromising critique of relationships based, to one degree or another, on commodification and self-assertion. For the possibility that arises from a conviction that we can and should resist our individual and collective will to violence is that of social and personal relations premised on freedom:

In the integrity of action as the agent's free choice, as opposed to an action determined or commanded by another, lies the difference between freedom and service, between self-determination and obedience. And in the experience of a gesture of love as another's voluntary action, as opposed to the designed 'acquisition' of this 'experience', lies the difference between freedom and mastery. (p.213)

Passages such as this, however, are more than likely to be overlooked in the reception of this book, not least because the author's interest is primarily in challenging rather than reassuring us.

Back on the agenda: Personal politics

Susanne Kappeler's earlier book, *The Pornography of Representation*, was met, even by those most in agreement with her general argument, with a level of anxiety about whether the book (or its author) was denying its readers the 'right' to representations altogether (the chief concern being representations of sexual relationships). It is possible to anticipate that a similar level of anxiety will be raised by *The Will to Violence*, this time as to whether the author is denying us the 'right' to sexual relationships and to personal relations in general. Now, as then, Susanne Kappeler, and those of us who share her political aims, will need to keep reasserting that we are not interested in enforcing those aims (even in an absurd fiction which grants us the power to do so). With relationships, as with representations, the question is: What are we so reluctant to relinquish, even where it is patently at odds with our stated political objectives, and why? It is only when we are prepared to answer those questions that we can fully engage in a process of change that restores coherence to the notion of political work and puts personal behaviour back at the centre of our political agenda. □



Has something got right up your nose recently? Have you a bone to pick or an issue you want to chew over? Here, we institute a new feature in T&S where women (under an assumed name if necessary) are invited to bark back at the annoyances which dog radical feminists. This can be a brief yap or an extended growl, on any subject of concern to radical feminists. As a first contribution to the Barking Back feature, Delilah Campbell lifts a leg on the phenomenon of 'maverick feminism'.

With friends like these... the media, the mavericks and the movement

It's not very often the media get their knickers in a twist about the Future Of Feminism (as opposed to the latest loony feminist outrage or the newest celebrity blockbuster), but in May 1995 there was a sudden outbreak of hand-wringing, a brief period when you couldn't open a newspaper or turn on the TV without coming across someone pontificating on the subject. Despite my interest in the future of feminism, my reaction was not 'oh good, finally a discussion I can relate to', it was more like 'what are they talking about?'. Amazement was quickly succeeded by depression, which in turn gave way to outrage.

But what, you may ask, was I getting all steamed up about? The media have been misrepresenting feminism for as long as I've been a feminist. Was there anything different

about this particular case? On reflection, I decided that maybe there was. I was particularly struck by the relegation of the usual suspects—men—to a supporting role. On this occasion, curiously, many or most of the people doing the misrepresenting were feminists themselves.

Feminism's finest

It began with an article in *The Guardian* by the journalist Linda Grant. She was complaining, quite reasonably, about the hyping of yet another young American writer—Rene Denfeld—who had written yet another ill-informed book about the shortcomings of feminism. Why, Grant asked, do British publishers fall for this drivel from across the Atlantic, while ignoring our own home-grown feminist talent? She listed ten of 'Britain's finest' for them to consider: Melissa

Benn, Carmen Callil, Bea Campbell, Ros Coward, Eva Figes, Germaine Greer, Suzanne Moore, Sheila Rowbotham, Lynn Segal and Joan Smith.¹

This list is as parochial as it is predictable. All white, all over 35 and all but one rather noisily heterosexual, these are women who work in either the media or universities, and their politics, to paraphrase Dorothy Parker, 'run the gamut of feminism from A to B'. Most identify as socialist feminists, and if they have any history of activism at all, it is in the context of the Left. In some cases their current commitment seems questionable to say the least: Callil insisted in the piece that she was not a feminist, Coward described herself as 'sceptical' (and organised feminism as 'dead'), while Figes said she had made her point in 1970 and subsequently retired from the fray. Fully half of this 'top ten' took the opportunity to proclaim their opposition to 'anti-sex' puritans and manhaters, but apart from 'sex', they did not say what feminist goals they might be for.

I found myself thinking that if these were Britain's finest then we were in deep trouble. It's not so much the socialist monopoly I mind as the relentless negativity, and the fact that so few of them (I'll make an exception for Bea Campbell) either have or feel the need to have any contact with activists who are actually trying to do anything. I would bet that none of them belongs to any group of feminists which meets on a regular basis (unless it be Feminists Against Censorship) and some of them quite possibly have never been part of such a group.

It was especially ironic that this piece appeared just after the news that Sara Thornton's case had been referred to the court of appeal, and just before the Jordache murder trial on Brookside had the whole country talking about the issues of domestic violence and provocation. Neither of these things could have happened without the collective efforts of Justice For Women and other feminist organisations. But none of 'Britain's finest' gave any sign that they had noticed. Feminism for them was all talk and no action: in their ignorance or indifference about grassroots political struggles past and present, they strikingly resembled the Rene Denfelds and Katie Roiphes the article was meant to be criticising.

'Hair bird's-nested all over the place, f* me shoes and three fat inches of cleavage... So much lipstick must rot the brain'**

Media froth

My irritation returned in full force a week later, when all hell broke loose in the media because of a row between two of 'Britain's finest', Germaine Greer and Suzanne Moore. Moore had allegedly said something Greer took exception to in the *Evening Standard*, and Greer had responded with an attack on Moore, including

insults directed at her hair, shoes and make-up which *The Guardian* refused to print (though the right-wing *Spectator* snapped it up). Greer resigned from *The Guardian*, calling it 'the worst boys' club in Fleet Street', and the newspaper ran two editorials about the row, in which among other things Greer was accused of 'unsisterly' behaviour. This so-called 'Battle of the Bitches' was taken up across the media; it even inspired a report and studio discussion on Newsnight, the gist of which was, feminism is in a terrible state and the sisters are behaving like prima donnas.

Now, you could of course dismiss the whole affair (as Fay Weldon rather surprisingly got herself together to do on Newsnight) as pure 'media froth'. Germaine Greer and Suzanne Moore are, precisely, prima donnas, they have very little to do with 'real' feminist politics, and their name-calling spat is, in itself, of no importance whatsoever. You could plausibly argue that both of them were set up by anti-feminist men, who had employed them to be controversial and then revelled in it when they ran true to form.

But underneath the 'froth', I detected something very peculiar, and potentially much more serious, about the way feminism is now publicly defined. Putting it crudely, no-one who participated in public discussion of this incident seemed to have the faintest idea who is or is not a feminist, or what feminist beliefs and activities might consist of. And when I say 'no-one', I don't just mean men who you would expect to be clueless or hostile. Even among the women wheeled in to comment because they had plausible feminist credentials, confusion reigned supreme.

Total incoherence

The Newsnight report got off to a flying start as a male reporter confidently explained (to an audience whose total ignorance of the subject

was assumed throughout) that the women's movement nowadays was confined to the cultural spheres of literature and newspaper columns. (This, remember, was just after Sara Thornton's appeal had been headline news). The reporter went on to remark that the Greer/Moore spat was not the first time feminists had clashed in this embarrassingly public way: as evidence he cited a celebrated exchange of abuse between Julie Burchill and Camille Paglia.

At this point I really had to pinch myself. If I had to make a list of high-profile women who are not feminists, who have loudly and repeatedly insisted that they are not feminists and who have largely made their names by not being feminists, Paglia would spring to mind instantly and Burchill not long after. Well, I thought, whoever wrote this script probably doesn't know much about feminism. I was a little more surprised that the women in the studio discussion (Fay Weldon and Lesley Abdela) didn't pick up on it. But I began to see a pattern three days later, when I opened *The Observer* to find the same Burchill/Paglia exchange illustrating feminism's public disarray in an article by Nicci Gerrard. Gerrard is a journalist who I imagine would be seen, and see herself, as a feminist, since she was one of the prime movers on the late and slightly lamented *Women's Review*.

The only way I can make sense of this is to hypothesise that 'being a feminist' in mainstream discourse is now equated simply with being a woman who has said something—anything—about feminism. Thus a whole group of women whose speciality is *slugging off* feminism—the Katie Roiphes and Rene Denfelds, Camille Paglias and Julie Burchills—now come under the general heading of 'feminists'; they are treated not as external critics but as (disaffected) insiders. No wonder feminism appears totally incoherent!

But perhaps what the media are picking up on (or getting confused by) is a degree of *real* incoherence, within the feminist ranks as well as outside them.

Certainly it's alarming to find Camille Paglia, or even Germaine Greer, being invoked as the voice of feminism without other feminists challenging this; it seems like an error we ought to be able to correct. But who exactly do I mean here by 'we', and how do I justify excluding someone from 'us'? The question 'who is a feminist?' or 'is so-and-so a feminist?' is remarkably difficult to answer without falling into various traps that feminists have been carefully avoiding for some time.

Who's a feminist?

There have always been disagreements among feminists, and one obvious weapon in an internal conflict is to deny the legitimacy of your opponent's claim to the label 'feminist'. Although this strategy sometimes cropped up in earlier arguments between socialist ('politico') and radical feminists, and between lesbian separatists and straight ('male-identified') women, many feminists were reluctant to use it, since it was so reminiscent of the male Left at its most sectarian. It also violated the non-hierarchical principles of the Women's Liberation Movement, in which there were no leaders or spokeswomen, and no official 'party line'.

In recent years we've become even more reluctant to challenge other women's credentials, because it's become accepted that many disagreements about what feminism is or should be are connected with the differing priorities which arise from differences of race, ethnicity and class. To say to a woman who is differently positioned from you on these axes, 'your politics are not feminist', is intolerably elitist and exclusionary. It's assuming you have the right to police the borders, shut the gates on other women just because they happen not to agree with you or be like you.

In practice, therefore, any woman who identifies herself as a feminist, counts as one. Furthermore, there is no principled way for feminists who are committed to the traditions of the WLM to prevent women who do not respect (or, more charitably, do not understand)

those traditions from setting themselves up as de facto leaders and spokeswomen. This is what I think the high-profile media feminists are becoming, whether by design or by default; and resisting this development is not only difficult *logistically* (their high visibility is a considerable strength), but also tricky *politically*. I cannot deny the label 'feminist' to Suzanne Moore, however remote from feminism her politics seem to me, because she defines *herself* as a feminist. Nor can I say to Germaine Greer 'perhaps you used to be a feminist, but you aren't recognisable as one now'. I can only exclude Camille Paglia or Julie Burchill because they have already excluded themselves.

Or perhaps the confusion is arising because, in a certain way and to a certain extent, even critics like Burchill and Paglia *do* want to be identified as feminists. If you look closely at what they say, it's clear that they vacillate: often they disclaim feminism, almost invariably they attack other feminists, but sometimes they talk as though their mission was to save feminism from the impostors who have hijacked it. Camille Paglia has even claimed to have invented feminism, to have embodied its true principles before it was born.

This is certainly breathtakingly arrogant, but I'm not sure it's totally cynical. I think Paglia, and others of her ilk, actually do see themselves as representing an alternative brand of feminism. And their message is getting through. What struck me quite forcibly during the May controversy was the emergence into the spotlight of something I can only call 'maverick feminism': not liberal, not socialist, certainly not radical, but difficult to dismiss as not feminist at all.

Maverick feminism

'Maverick feminists' are different, and more extreme, than most of the media feminists I have been talking about so far. If the media feminists tend to operate in practice as individuals detached from any wider movement, the mavericks are committed individualists, the kind of women who have a horror of joining anything or being accountable to anyone but themselves.

Mavericks' political positions can be confusing, as they defy conventional classifications. Though they don't necessarily come from privileged backgrounds, mavericks tend to be right-wing, often on the libertarian fringe where there are points of overlap with the left. They believe passionately in women's equality with men, and have a tendency to idealise women who are strong, powerful, outspoken and often sexually predatory. On issues like abortion and sexuality, mavericks have

no time for more traditional conservative views, they think the state should get its hands off women's bodies. They are women who want power (not just feminine 'influence'); but crucially, they realise they are still to some extent being denied it by formal and informal structures of male dominance and prejudice.

In this category I would put not only Julie Burchill and Camille Paglia but also right-wing politicians Edwina Currie and Teresa Gorman, both outspoken critics of Tory sexism; *Spectator* writer Anne Applebaum; the detective novelist Patricia Cornwell, very popular with feminists, whose strong pathologist heroine is constantly struggling against misogyny but who is also a law-and-order hardliner, pro-capital punishment, pro-FBI and pro-guns; and Linda Thompson, 'General' of the American militia movement, who once observed on the subject of abortion that 'foetuses are parasites'.

However far to the right they may be, these are not the right-wing women described in Andrea Dworkin's book of that name, nor the true-blue 'iron ladies' Bea Campbell has written about; and the difference lies in their having some kind of relation with feminism, which means they reject both the privileges and the restrictions associated with a traditional feminine role. Whatever status these women have achieved does not depend on how they look, who they are married to or have slept with; it does not hinge on presenting themselves either as unthreatening 'good girls' or as 'one of the boys'. While their maverick views may appeal to (some) men, they do not hold them in order to pander to male egos: it's their own egos they care about.

'Slugging it out in a lipstick war'

'...it does seem to be a spectacular own goal for feminism that such a well known guru has launched such an attack. And it's ironic that someone who clearly sees herself as carrying the feminist torch has so overtly reneged on the principle of solidarity amongst the sisterhood, and in such a personal and vindictive way'

For this, many of them have suffered ridicule, ostracism and vilification, which—unlike an older generation of women such as Margaret Thatcher and Phyllis Schlafly² who were mavericks but not in any sense feminists—they have neither accepted nor pretended not to notice. All in all, these women's views, aspirations and ways of behaving have more in common with what we usually call feminism than with traditional anti-feminism, and on many issues they are just as threatening to the sexist *status quo*.

The names I've mentioned suggest that maverick feminism has been around for some time, but I would argue it has only recently crystallised into a recognisable and visible phenomenon. This is because, by definition, mavericks do not form a natural group: it takes a particular set of circumstances to bring them together. Recently, an issue has emerged (or been invented) on which they are absolutely united, very eager to comment, and—most important—in agreement with a large body of nonfeminist opinion.

The issue which has galvanised the mavericks is the alleged rise of so-called 'victim culture'.

Victim culture

The idea of 'victim culture' came originally from men attacking so-called 'political correctness', and it remains a key concept in what is being called the 'whitelash', a movement of disaffected white middle class men in the US who are trying to repeal affirmative action laws, stop immigration, overturn policies on sexual harassment in the workplace, etc. The idea is that women and minorities have been encouraged both to claim and to celebrate the status of 'victim', endlessly whingeing about what nasty white men have done to them (and sometimes claiming punitive damages for it) instead of getting off their backsides and taking power for themselves. The idea that feminism in particular makes a cult of victimhood has been endorsed by women such as Camille Paglia and Katie Roiphe, whose book *The Morning After* suggests that 'hysteria' about date-rape is a ludicrous and patronising attempt to protect women from the realities of life, which robs them of all sense of agency and responsibility.

There are signs that this 'stop whingeing' rhetoric is gaining ground on this side of the Atlantic too, and that it is not confined to the libertarian right. It has antecedents in the 1980s split between so-called 'pro-sex' and anti-pornography feminists, when the former charged the latter with seeing women only as victims, and not active sexual subjects. Sure enough, in the 'Britain's ten finest feminists' piece, 'pro-sex' feminist Lynne Segal commented: 'the likes of Roiphe and Denfeld can't be dismissed'.

But it's no longer just in relation to sex that we hear self-identified feminists making this sort of comment. In the same edition of *The Observer* where Nicci Gerrard welcomed Julie Burchill and Camille Paglia to the feminist sisterhood, an essay appeared by Carol Sarler (remember the TV programme *Watch the Woman?*) which was captioned: 'feminism has supported women in their weakness but failed to teach them their strength'.

'Kicked spaniels'

The subject of this essay, topically enough, was women who kill abusive partners. Sarler was arguing that thanks to feminists' desire to

'nurture the victim in her weakness', it had become impossible to hold women like Sara Thornton responsible for their own actions. Why, Sarler asked, had a strong, intelligent woman like Thornton not left the first time her husband raised a hand to her? Didn't she have a responsibility to leave? How had it come about that after 25 years of feminism the whole country was condoning a woman's act of murder? 'It does women no favours to be seen as kicked spaniels', observed Sarler.

Of course there is nothing new about the 'why-don't-they-leave' argument or the 'women-are-getting-away-with-murder' argument. In the past, however, these views have been associated primarily with anti-feminist men, or with women like Erin Pizzey who made use of therapeutic notions like 'addiction' or 'the cycle of violence'. But Sarler does not think Sara Thornton is sick, she thinks she is contemptibly, culpably *weak*. Sarler is suggesting that the activities of 'orthodox' feminists from Justice For Women to Helena Kennedy QC are mis-

"Women who smoke", she added, "let alone women who smoke as much as Moore does, are clearly self-destructive."

'Britain's answer to Camille Paglia'



guided and 'do women no favours' because they pander to this weakness. What women really need is Sarler's own, more bracing brand of feminist self-help.

I'm not sure exactly what Carol Sarler's position is on other things, but this kind of argument goes to the heart of what is different about the maverick feminists. They are all for women's rights, women's strength and women's power, but the one thing they cannot stomach—it amounts almost to a neurosis—is any suggestion that a woman could ever be victimised and

'Lipstick is power'

powerless, incapable of exercising her rights and asserting her iron will. They seem to imagine that even allowing such a thought to enter our heads is colluding in women's oppression.

Victim blaming

Such disgust for 'victim culture' easily tips over into victim blaming. Mavericks believe that a woman *in extremis* must take full responsibility for her own degraded state, and they will blame her if she is finally unable to transcend it. For similar reasons, mavericks have no problem accepting that part of the feminist agenda which is about affirming women's autonomy and control (e.g. abortion rights), but they vehemently reject that part which smacks, to them, of 'positive discrimination' or 'protectionism'. Women, they say, do not need special treatment—even when they are on the receiving end of special and distinctive mistreatment—because *we are not victims*. Whatever the circumstances, women must never claim, or show, weakness and loss of control. So Camille Paglia thinks a bit of rape puts steel in the backbone; so Germaine Greer (also a minimiser of rape) criticises Suzanne Moore's tarty appearance because it suggests 'low self-esteem'.

There are many things that could be said about all this, and one of them, I concede, is that the mavericks are touching on an issue of some importance with their talk about agency and responsibility. But they are hardly the first to have touched on this topic. Radical feminists have in fact been particularly critical of any

tendency towards the politics of martyrdom and victimhood. To the extent anything like 'victim culture' exists at all I think it has been encouraged more by therapists and other 'experts' busy pathologising sexual violence than by feminists.

Empowering women, giving them *more* agency and control, is and always has been the most important aim of radical feminism, and to imply otherwise is a perverse rewriting of history. When I

took part in Reclaim the Night marches during the early 1980s, I was not celebrating my victimhood, I was making myself feel powerful by refusing to be victimised, kept off the streets by fear. Yet at the same time, feminists cannot just be silent about the way many women are, in present reality, victimised: not by their own weakness, but by structures of power and oppression no single woman, however strong, can hope to dismantle on her own.

Here, though, what interests me most is *why* the maverick feminists have this absolute, and as I said before almost neurotic aversion to the figure of the weak, powerless or victimised woman. It's tempting to psychologise: are these women who hate and fear, and therefore deny, the 'kicked spaniel' in themselves and other women? The image of the spaniel is interesting in itself, since actually it is not very apt as a metaphor for women like Sara Thornton, who were 'kicked' but finally turned on their abusers. It does make me wonder who Carol Sarler is really talking about.

Loose cannons

But I think that in many cases, the maverick's insistence on not being a victim has less to do with denying her own 'inner spaniel' than with her extreme distaste for any form of *collectivism*. These are women who set store by their own individuality, their achievements as individuals and their capacity as individuals to rise above every obstacle; they hate to think that they might be defined simply as a representative of the category 'women', or that their position might be dependent in any way on other women (at the extreme, on anyone else at all). For them, not to be recognised as an individual is a kind of victimisation, and they resist it with all their strength.

In their peculiar way, the mavericks are confronting questions which have repeatedly troubled feminists of the non-maverick variety too. The right to be judged by our individual merits rather than simply our sex was always something feminists fought for; if the mavericks take this refusal to be part of a collectivity to an extreme, there is nevertheless a recognisable feminist logic to it. And they are certainly not the first women to feel that feminism itself restricted individual freedom and agency. The WLM discouraged 'stars', it refused to nominate leaders and spokewomen, and some women who later became stars, like Kate Millett and Robin Morgan, have written about feeling undervalued and being treated as 'suspect'. If they were 20 years younger, perhaps they would be mavericks instead of 'movement' figures. Germaine Greer made this choice from the very start.

But the problems with the mavericks' position are manifold and serious. Most obviously (at least, to anyone with any experience of activism) you can't get anything done without collective strength and a certain amount of collective discipline. And without collectivism, there is no democracy either—a matter of some concern to more orthodox feminists, who inherit a tradition where the political process is as important as the product. Maverick feminists are loose cannons: they speak for no-one but themselves (and to no-one but each other). They think nothing of misrepresenting other feminists; they feel no responsibility to any movement or community. This of course gives them a huge advantage in media terms: they can throw out a soundbite while the rest of us are still collectively and democratically deciding what our position is.

The other great problem with maverick feminism is its persistent tendency to construct *other feminists* as the main enemy. I have been trying to argue that this is not always and only what it might appear to be: straightforward anti-feminism, cynical careerism, simple opportunism or loyalty to a male-defined agenda. Rather it is because, from the maverick's perspective, orthodox feminism personifies the two things mavericks define as most threatening to their own interests as (relatively privileged) women: a tendency to deny women agency ('victim culture') and a tendency to restrict their scope for action as independent individuals (collectivism). Their slogan might be: 'if I'm not going

to let men pull my strings, why should I let other women do it?'

But ironically, the result is that they do very often end up dancing to men's tune. Men, if they have any brains, would much rather get women to slag off other women than do it themselves; and the media would rather employ a loose cannon like Germaine Greer than someone more predictable ('feminist attacks sexism' is not news). Mavericks can't see, because they desperately want not to see, that frequently they owe their positions not to their individual talents, but to the fact that they are women with views that can and will be construed—albeit rather simplistically—as anti-feminist.

Feminists without feminism?

In a book about postmodernism in feminist theory, Tania Modleski identified the strange phenomenon of 'feminism without women'. Perhaps what I've identified in this discussion could be called, just as paradoxically, 'feminists without feminism'. As I watched the media circus roll in May, I felt that what had most obviously been lost was any public sense of feminism as something embodied in the political practice of a *movement*, and not just in the sum total of opinions expressed by women calling themselves 'feminists'.

Soon after Germaine Greer attacked her, Suzanne Moore expressed a similar thought in her regular Guardian column, though her attitude was much more positive than mine. Citing the massive public response to the verdict in the Brookside trial, she argued that feminist ideas today pervaded every corner of the culture; they no longer needed to be hived off into a separate 'movement', for every woman now stood in some kind of relation to them—they were the stuff of women's everyday conversation. Implicitly, this was a response to Greer's accusation that Moore 'lacked respect' for 'senior feminists'. Such deference towards a representative of feminist tradition becomes doubly irrelevant when the tradition itself has disappeared, and anything still of value in its content has been absorbed into a new, more diffuse form of politics.

I think, however, that this 'diffusion' argument is somewhat unconvincing. It is not totally without substance: arguably the integration of many feminist ideas into the mainstream means women do now have to define a relationship to feminism (whether positive, negative,

'Thus while many young women are feminist in all but name they remain disconnected from the movement or its leaders.'

lukewarm or whatever) in a way most of them did not 20 years ago, when you were either a feminist or you were not (or else you simply knew nothing about it, which was my own position in 1975). But the Brookside case actually illustrates very clearly that there is and has to be interaction between feminist political activism and feminist currents in mainstream culture—otherwise neither can survive. Without Sara Thornton, Emma Humphreys, Kiranjit Ahluwalia and the feminists who campaigned for them, there would never have been a Mandy Jordache. At the same time, public support for the fictional Mandy Jordache does not, in and of itself, get real women out of jail. Nor does it provide and maintain refuges for all the other abused women who called Women's Aid after Brookside went out on the air.

Ironically, given the anti-hierarchical cast of feminist politics, the issue here is partly one of *leadership*; without a group of active and clued-up women setting an agenda for discussions of feminism, the 'everyday conversation' Suzanne Moore is so keen on will drift and broaden to the point where it becomes totally *ad hoc* and meaningless. That was exactly the problem with the Newsnight film and studio discussion: it was a series of disconnected points (many of them inaccurate or irrelevant) with no overall argument or sense of purpose; no-one involved, including the feminists, gave the impression of knowing why they were there or what needed to be said.

Filling the vacuum

I'm not quite sure where we go from here. But I think we need to avoid the kind of kneejerk response that goes 'oh shit, a new backlash, anti-feminist women are taking over the universe'. This tends to produce a poisonous combination of self-righteousness and resentment ('we're the true keepers of the feminist flame, but nobody gives us the credit we deserve'), and nostalgia for some imagined golden age which does not help us to understand or deal with what is actually happening now.

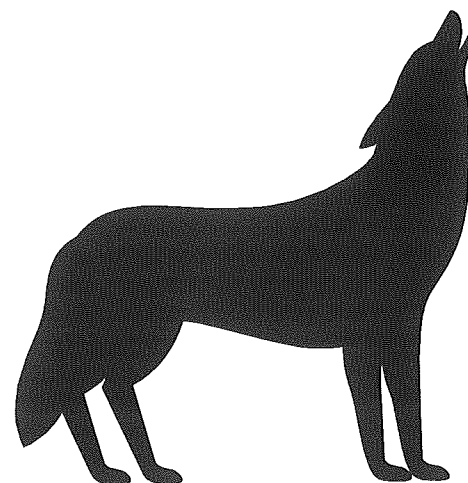
As Liz Kelly has noted in relation to the 'backlash' (see her 'Stuck in the middle', *T&S* 29/30), we have to acknowledge that the gains made by feminist struggle during the past 20 years change the picture: we must expect these developments to produce new forms of patriarchal resistance, and also—as in this case—new possibilities for women to identify as 'feminist'

without subscribing to the principles that have defined feminism in the past. The challenge is to find a response which neither passively accepts unhelpful new developments nor retreats into an equally unconstructive yearning for the good old days when feminism was 'pure'.

Personally I have little desire to engage in more and more policing of who may or may not call herself a feminist. This is a parlour-game we play among ourselves (and I am as guilty as anyone, as the early part of this discussion shows), but the danger is that if we follow its logic too far, we will be compelled to withdraw in the name of purity into an ever smaller, more narrowly-delineated political space. And this, surely, is a dead end. Finally I am less interested in 'keeping the flame' of some idealised feminist tradition than in taking a blowtorch to patriarchy: and that means looking outward as well as inward; forward, not back.

But for exactly that reason, I do want to insist on the continuing importance of *feminism*, of what women, collectively, politically, *do*. Our scrupulous avoidance of grandiose claims about who we speak for—indeed, who 'we' are—has created a vacuum, which free-floating mavericks increasingly rush to fill. We have to find ways of speaking publicly, not just as feminists but for feminism as a movement. Otherwise that movement will not so much be getting off its backside as disappearing up it. □

If you want to bark back, whether under your own or an assumed name, please make it clear when you send in your rant where and how we can contact you.



¹ Melissa Benn is a journalist; Carmen Callil is a publisher and co-founded Virago Press; Bea Campbell is a journalist who has written on poverty, the Cleveland child abuse case and Tory women; Ros Coward is an academic; Eva Figs wrote the early feminist work *Patriarchal Attitudes*; Germaine Greer wrote *The Female Eunuch* and several other books about women; Suzanne Moore is a columnist and 'cultural commentator'; Sheila Rowbotham is a historian; Lynne Segal is an academic; Joan Smith is the author of several detective novels and the book *Misogynies*.

² Schlafly led the fight against the feminist Equal Rights Amendment in the US. Catharine MacKinnon once offered to represent her in a sex discrimination suit; MacKinnon argued that if Schlafly had been a man, her record and talents would have brought her a plum job in the Reagan administration. But Schlafly, an old-style anti-feminist, could not bring herself to acknowledge discrimination against her.

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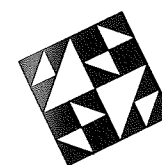
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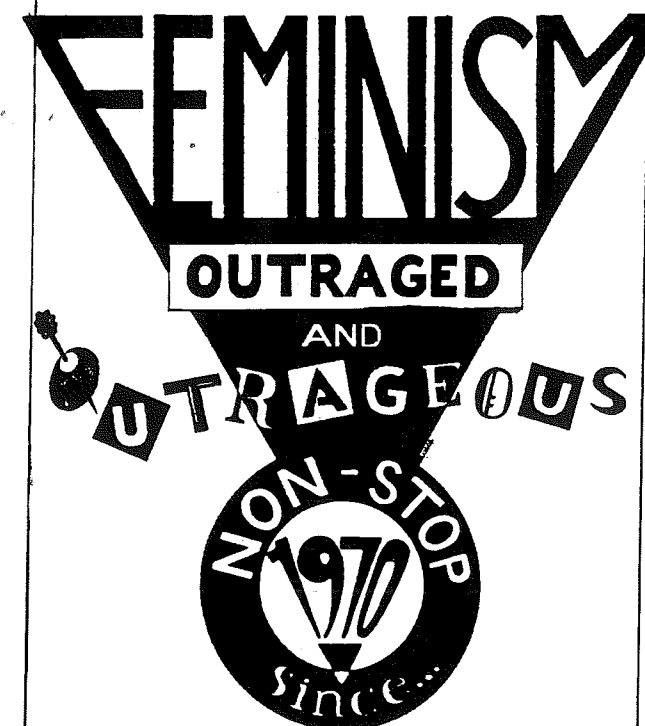
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