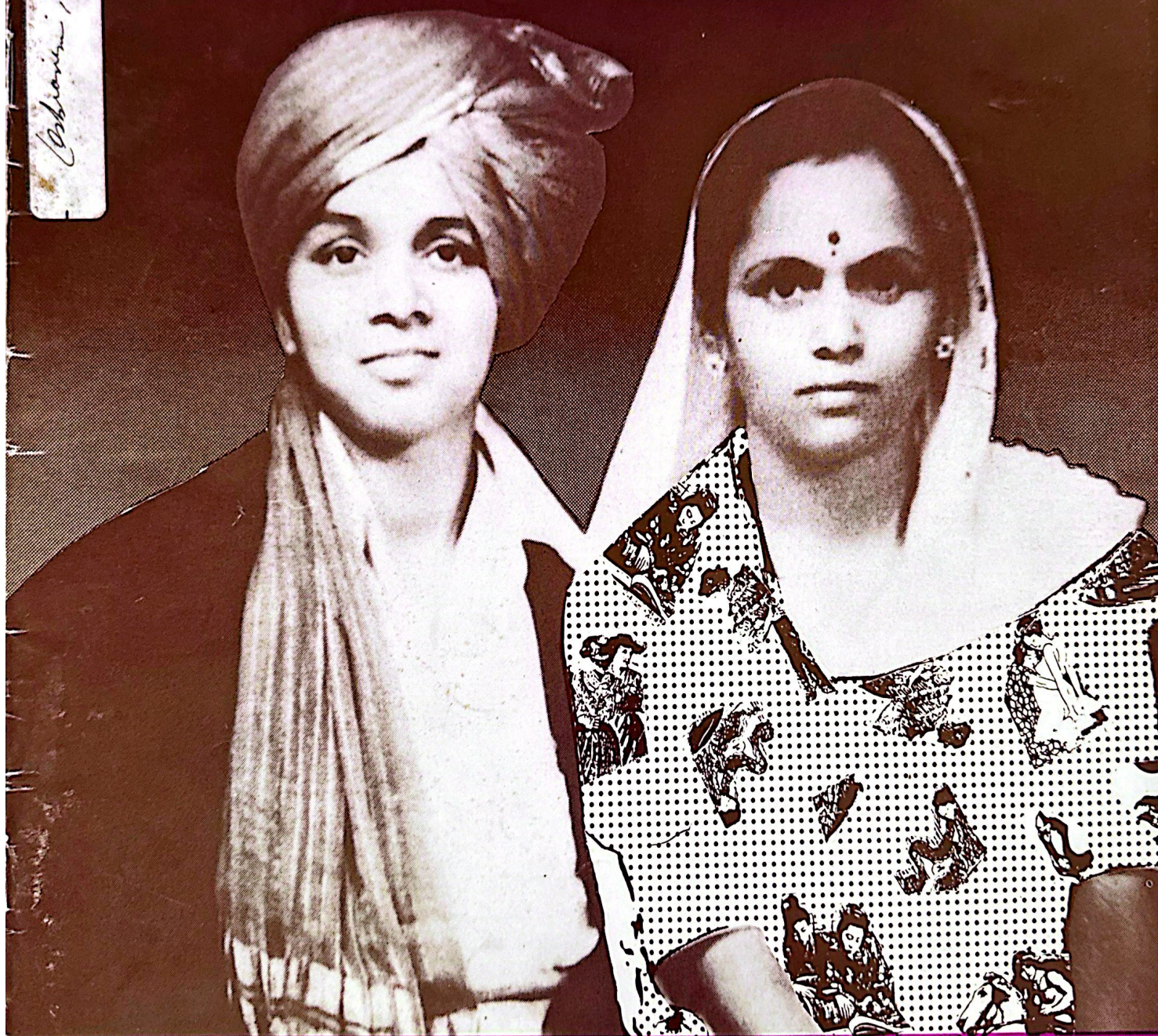


Connections, International

Connections

An International Women's Quarterly
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Global Lesbianism

Wird Zeit ♀♀
daß wir lieben

Connexions is the collective product of feminists of diverse nationalities and political perspectives committed to contributing to an international women's movement.

We want to go beyond merely providing facts and information, and hope that by passing on—as directly as possible—women's writings generally unavailable in the U.S., we will be helping women here to understand and connect

with the experiences and viewpoints of women in other parts of the world. We also want to contribute to the growth of a worldwide network connecting women working on similar projects by researching, establishing contacts and exchanging information with other women's organizations.

To a large extent, the economic and political conditions under which we live determine the issues to which we give

priority. Women do not live in a vacuum, but in what is still largely a man's world. It is essential for us to understand the workings of that world if we are to understand each other. We hope that *Connexions* will be one step toward building an international women's movement.

Connexions is published every three months and each issue focuses on a specific theme.

"It's time for us to love women."

Beyoncé/Kleber/Courage

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Connexions

We set out with great excitement to map the existence of lesbianism globally. Although we believed in our hearts that lesbians are everywhere, getting evidence to document this wasn't easy. We especially wanted to find out about lesbians outside of Europe and North America. We looked for addresses of groups and individuals in Africa, Asia and Latin America by broadcasting appeals on local radio stations, publishing announcements in gay and feminist papers and contacting everyone we could think of who might be in touch with lesbians and/or feminists abroad. We sent off numerous letters—to Jamaica, Singapore, Mexico, Hong Kong, Brazil and many other places. Some of the articles in this issue are responses to our letters, but we were still disappointed at the number that went unanswered. If we had been looking for information on gay men, it would have been much easier. Lesbians outside of certain large urban areas, are barely visible throughout the world.

In rural areas, especially in the third world, a life outside of marriage and motherhood appears materially and socially impossible. Lesbianism lies outside of the imagination. However, we found that in gender-segregated societies, women's strongest attachments, both emotional and social, are with each other. For example, in cultures where marriage partners are chosen by the families, women often live together without the petty competition that plagues the relationships of western women. Women together share an intimacy that we may well envy.

We have had many discussions about what we mean by "lesbian." Can one particular definition be broad enough to cover the vast differences in women's personal lives? We hoped to find information that would lead us to a cross-cultural understanding of lesbianism. We agreed that lesbians are women who love women, who make love with and want to live with other women. Since our cultures define our perceptions of sexuality and romantic love, presenting us with a specific range of choices, some of us remained convinced that the notion of lesbian as we know it in the West is not applicable elsewhere. Others stressed that lesbianism everywhere is a form of resistance to institutionalized heterosexuality, whether this is perceived as a conscious choice or a trick of fate; it confers a social identity that sets us apart, both subjectively and objectively, from other women. We have not found a society that accepts a homosexual way of life, although some do seem to accept transvestism and more "extreme" homosexuals—effeminate men and butch lesbians—who can be regarded as "freaks of nature."

In so-called socialist countries and in the third world, homosexuality and feminism are often regarded as exports of Western decadence and/or capitalist degeneration. In this way the roots of homosexuality and feminism present in most traditional cultures are dismissed. By communicating with Asian and Latin American lesbians, our understanding of the impact of the Western gay movement grew.

An Argentine woman wrote to us: "The growing gay movement in the US and Europe has a positive effect on lesbians and gay men here in that it gives us a sense of solidarity, of struggle, as well as the benefit of a developed analysis of gay oppression (sexual, economic, etc). However, problems arise when this Western model becomes too influential in our own analysis. We often get an unrealistically optimistic view of the lives of lesbians and gay men in the US and Europe; an image of relaxation and ease. We can lose the desire for true liberation and try to adopt this apparent comfort, forgetting that consciousness comes from our own experience. We can find ourselves living or struggling in a manner which is inappropriate to our culture. Lesbian movements, along with mixed gay and feminist movements in the third world will come into their own when we fully understand that our liberation goes beyond imitating lifestyles that allow the continuation of oppression."

The material we present here reflects our intention to trace lesbian existence. We see it as a beginning, flashes of lesbian lives around the world. There were many other themes that came up in our discussions which we were not able to pursue. In a later issue on lesbianism, we want to include articles on topics such as female bonding, prostitution, women in prison and women passing as men.

We hope that this issue of *Connexions* will be used to provoke further thought and research, and to contribute to a growing support network of women worldwide.

For more information:

- "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," by Adrienne Rich from *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 5 no. 4, 1980.

- 'Islam et Homosexualité: un mariage difficile,' from *Homophonies*, French mixed gay monthly, October 1981.

- "Connexions," issue 2, interview with Cuban lesbian, Fall 1981.



Ochiishi, la postcardiste

Spanish

lesbiana
marimacha (slang)
tortillera (slang)
tortilla (slang)

Portuguese

lésbica

Quechua

mamaku (mannish woman)
qharincha (tomboy)

German

Lesbierin
Lesbe (slang)

Italian

lesbica

French

lesbienne
gouine (slang)
goudou (slang)

Swiss

warmi (slang)

Swedish

lesbisk

Persian

همجنس باز homosexual

Japanese

daiku "dyke"
レズビアン lesbian

"Be a Sweetie... Don't Tell Anybody"

For some time now, Xenia, Marion and Ulrike, young lesbians living in West Berlin, have been meeting sporadically. They would like to see their group of lesbian high school students grow. They know each other from school; Marion is now studying to be a social worker.

(Translated from *Courage*, West German feminist monthly, Special Issue #4 on *Mädchen*, "Girls.")

Ulrike: As a lesbian student, what really bothers me in school is that you can only talk about the problems you have with your girlfriend at the moment. I can tell my high school friends who I'm in love with, and that I'm still together with Ilse, and they ask me about these things, too. And I can tell them that I'm very happy today because Ilse and I made love, or they notice when I'm not so happy. But then they start talking about their boyfriends, and I don't really feel like listening to that.

You can never go much beyond the surface. You can take action together and fight back as women. But none of that goes very deep. And that really gets on my nerves.

Marion: Although there are 20 women and only one guy in the class, I don't really know how to act. I am pretty open; I wear lesbian buttons, and if somebody asks me, I say I'm a lesbian. Everybody knows it.

But, for example, there are two women who have been friends for ten years and they are very nice to each other. They used to embrace each other very freely before, but now they give a little glance to the side, and I don't really know why.

Ulrike: When I think of all the activities I initiated in the ninth grade, everything today seems pretty boring in comparison. When guys made contemptible remarks about women, I got really angry every time. Sometimes even the women attack me now,

and then I ask myself, what can I do when even the women support their own oppression.

Marion: If we are talking about women's issues, the class always expects me to comment.

Ulrike: But there are other lesbians, too. I know a woman, she did karate, was into sports and had a guy as a buddy. I always thought she was a lesbian. She had fallen in love with a woman, but she really couldn't imagine it. Then I said to her, "But don't you like Ute?," and I told her about myself and about lesbian women.

Then she borrowed my book, *Loving Women*, and she wrapped it in brown paper so nobody would see what she was reading. She always read it while she was brushing her teeth behind locked doors. And then I got my book back, all wrapped in brown paper and sealed with scotch tape.

Xenia: There was a woman teacher at my school who didn't really want to have anything to do with me. I guess it was because she felt insecure with her own role as a teacher. I was interested in her, and I told her that I would like to get together with her. But she immediately shut me out, although I didn't know she was a lesbian. Maybe she knew about me, I'm not quite sure. She said, "It won't work. We can't see each other; it is not possible; it won't work."

Three months later we talked about it again. She had been my teacher for a while. There were heavy tensions between us. Sometimes I was cynical and nasty to her

during class, or I refused to participate and just sat there, looking away. I was annoyed because I didn't know what it all meant. She was the teacher; I was just a student. Then she came to me and said that she felt that what was happening was not a solution and she did not feel good about it herself. Then, when she told me about her women teachers' group, I finally understood that she was a lesbian too, because I know another woman teacher who is also in that group. She does not want to come out at school because she wants to continue teaching.

Ulrike: I think you really can't afford to come out at school. As a student, you can get away with it, because students are not really taken seriously. But that is not the case for teachers.

It is great if you have a lesbian teacher in high school. Then you really get a different kind of support. Olga was also very scared in the beginning. I met her in the Sub [a lesbian bar] when I went to the bathroom and I said to her, "Hello, Ms. M." And then we talked about the Sub. Olga was very scared and when she was about to leave she came to me and said, "Be a sweetheart and don't tell anybody." I thought, now it's getting complicated. My girlfriends are in her class too, and we talk about everything. It was very difficult to keep it a secret, mainly because I thought it was so great. So I let them know in a more indirect way that she and I understood each other so well and I went upstairs at break to talk to her often.

Everybody knew that I was a lesbian because I wore buttons and I don't keep my mouth shut. "What kind of button is that?" "A lesbian button."

We still liked each other. I didn't think she was in love with me. After we had gone to a lesbian meeting in Karlsruhe



In love



I told my mother I'm in love

What did she say?



oh, all that stuff about being careful....



Yeah, that's what mine always says....



together with my sister, we got closer and closer. But I couldn't handle going back to school and being the teacher's friend and being a lesbian and not being allowed to talk to anybody about it. That was really too much. Only later when there was a certain distance between us again, she told me that she had really been in love with me.

Marion: I guess that older lesbian women are afraid in a way that younger lesbians might not want a deeper, more committed relationship. I want to have an equal relationship. I can have motherly feelings toward an older woman as well as the other way around. In a lesbian relationship, women support each other, hold each other and comfort each other, and at times one is stronger and can see things more clearly than the other. I think I can do that with an older woman as well. And, older women have approached me much more often than women of my own age.

But for us, it is really difficult. I don't look 20 yet, and in the Sub I have often heard other women refer to me as the "little girlfriend." Not because of my height, but because I look so young. But I am as much a lesbian as a woman of 30 is.

The lesbian scene consists mainly of women between 20 and 40. In the Sub you meet women over 25 who just found out four years ago that they are lesbians. What they see at first in us younger ones is that when they were our age, they themselves did not yet know they were lesbians. On the other hand, they really think it's great because so many lesbians tortured themselves for 20 years.

Ulrike: When I dance with a woman in the Sub and we talk and we mention our age and I say I am 16, they nearly stop dancing. Although that's not always they case.

Marion: I had a relationship with a lesbian who was very much influenced against her will by the fact that the others always

referred to me as the "little girlfriend." That made her feel insecure. If you are between 16 and 20 and you behave childishly once in a while, everything is blamed on your age. We are just not grown-up. If a 30 year old woman kids around, then people say she is in her childish phase; she's imaginative and not uptight. But with us, it's the other way around. We have to be serious; I'm not allowed to laugh at a silly joke, and I have to use good language.

Ulrike: If I run around in the flat with a yoyo and a woman comes to visit, the next day people say that I am childish.

But what I really can't stand is when people talk about me and refer to me as Olga's student. I am Ulrike and not Olga's student. Being together with an older woman means problems with my parents, too. They are never quite sure what to make of my girlfriends. Should they see her as my girlfriend? As a rival? As a teacher? As a lesbian? As a lesbian teacher? No real conversation is possible when my girlfriend is there. With her, they are not as open as with me. I do cuddle with her when they are around, but they can't look at us.

It was okay with my parents as long as I was seeing a different woman every few months. But now that I have stayed with one woman for quite a while, they are getting freaked out and can't deal with it. They think it's just a woman, and they are angry because I'm always on the run. They say I just come home to eat and take a bath, and that I'm going to open up a boarding school for lesbians when they are gone.

Marion: Before, when I went with girls my own age, my aunt used to say to me, "But that cannot be your girlfriend, one only has one girlfriend in a lifetime."

But when she met us in the street, she really started in on us: "What is this? Now you're going with such an old woman? What is this supposed to be? Lesb...?" She

could not pronounce the word. Quite a few times when I called home and my parents were out, she would answer the phone and say, "Where are you now? With your lesbian girlfriend, huh?" And then she would hang up.

She is really disgusted with me. She won't even go to the bathroom when I'm in the house with a girlfriend. It's very degrading.

Ulrike: Once I got an infection from a girlfriend. I told people, and they said that happens because you sleep around with so many women and in so many different beds. Two months later, I had another infection. I really suffered because people wanted to convince me that I had picked it up from a certain woman.

Marion: Well, that's not so bad. I had a cyst in my abdomen, and I told my parents I had an appointment to have it removed. Then my mother said, "Well, that's only because you go with women." She said she had the same thing and that it goes away when you sleep with men.

Ulrike: It has even gotten to the point where when I have a cold, they say it's because I kissed and hugged Ilse.

Or they say to me, if she were really my lover, she would be more critical of me and encourage me in my schoolwork. Once they called her and told her to send me home at 11:00 p.m. That's a shitty situation for me and for Ilse, too. She is my lover and not my mother. It is so degrading that you begin to have doubts and even wonder if you are doing the right thing. You begin to believe the things your parents tell you, and all of a sudden, you can see them in your lover.

It's not so bad anymore because they have realized that they're not getting anywhere. But you feel so helpless. They can still hold you back six more months because you're not 18 yet... □



Serpentine

Trial and a Marriage

We were surprised to find information on lesbians in a widely read Indonesian magazine. Despite the questionable perspective of the articles, we found them to be important documents of lesbian existence.



Karni Ilyas/Tempo

Jossie and Bonnie—the first Indonesian lesbian couple to openly acknowledge their relationship.

Insert: At their wedding.

(Translated from *Tempo*, an Indonesian mainstream weekly news magazine, May 23, 1981.)

Judging the lesbian affair of Aty and Nona is difficult for Judge Emin Aminah. The details of the relationship have to be read before a jury. What these women have done, which has already been told to the judge in private, makes Judge Aminah feel in her own words "uncomfortable." The admissions of the accused about their love and sexual relationship are very direct. So direct, in fact, Judge Aminah had to "clean up" some of their testimony.

Twenty-one year old Aty and 15 year old Nona were accused of committing indecent acts with each other. They have been sentenced to eight months in prison with one year and eight months probation.

The two young women were upset at having to tell their tale before the court. Aty, who occasionally sings with a band in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, realized her attraction to her own sex when she was 12. From childhood she liked to behave and dress like a boy and didn't like to play girls' games. According to one of Aty's boyfriends, Aty paid more attention to the girls than to him. Then Aty's mother took her to a psychologist who determined that Aty had too many male hormones, but "she could be cured." Aty, however, felt that she didn't suffer from a disease and, therefore, had no need to be cured.

The situation became more serious when Aty met Nona, who lived in the same housing complex. Soon Aty regularly spent the night at Nona's house. They fell in love and began a sexual relationship. At one point, Nona disappeared from home for 11 weeks. When her parents found her at

Aty's house, they called the police. Hoping to break up the relationship, the parents had the girls sign a written promise not to meet again.

However, their love was not so easily forgotten. Secretly they continued to meet until one day Aty asked Nona to run away with her to Malang. Nona willingly agreed.

From Malang, Nona sent a letter to her family posted by a friend in Jakarta. In the letter she asked for forgiveness from her parents. "Until I die," she stated, "I have chosen Aty as my partner for life." She explained that she and Aty had already pledged their love for each other on the Bible. She doesn't like boys, the letter continued, "because they are egotistical and like to hurt people." Questioned during the court session why boys were like that she replied, "karma."

From Malang they fled to Bali, with Aty paying the way. During this period they continued their mutually satisfying sexual relationship. In Bali, Aty's mother picked them up and Aty was arrested.

Can a mental illness such as Aty's and Nona's be punished by law? According to the defense, Ms. Sri Kusumastuti, there is a doctor's letter stating that they both suffer from psychological problems. Furthermore, the law states that an accused person whose motivations are impure cannot be prosecuted.

Aty's mother has accepted the situation, but says, "We are going to do everything we can so that she will be normal again." Aty's parents have found a doctor who will try to lessen her male hormones either medicinally or surgically.

Nona, who is living at home while certain legal decisions are being made,

seems at ease with the situation. She says she is not ashamed to return to school after a four month absence. Does she still love Aty? Nona smiled and looked demure. Aty, when asked this question, had the same reply. □

JOSSIE AND BONNIE

(Translated from *Tempo*, an Indonesian mainstream weekly news magazine, May 30, 1981.)

Jossie and Bonnie are the first lesbian couple in Indonesia to openly acknowledge their relationship. Receiving blessings and congratulations from over 100 guests, including their families, they held a wedding reception at the Swinging Pub Bar in Jakarta.

After the party, the couple went home and in their living room Jossie and Bonnie told their story. From childhood, Jossie, who is part Dutch, always felt more like a boy. Because her parents actually had wanted a son, they let her alone, allowing Jossie to play cowboys instead of dolls. A medical examination revealed that Jossie's hormones were 75% male. Jossie did not like wearing skirts and would leave home wearing pants, changing into her uniform pinafore at the last possible moment upon arriving at school. At school she was considered a transvestite. However, few students bothered her about this because Jossie, a Judo brown belt, was not afraid to fight with anyone who insulted her.

Jossie often got into fights to show she was as good as a boy, and had girlfriends. Eventually, because of her rowdiness, she was arrested. While in prison, Jossie met Bonnie who had also been arrested for "misbehaving." Bonnie, also Dutch-Indonesian, was just a normal girl before she met Jossie. Her boyfriends were indeed boys. In spite of that, when she met Jossie, she felt she had finally met the person of her dreams. Jossie won her over.

After their release they began to see each other regularly. Bonnie's family initially thought Jossie was male. In spite of their surprise, their families agreed to the union after Jossie proposed to Bonnie.

While the Civil Registrar's Office was not prepared to sanction such a wedding, Jossie and Bonnie feel they have tied the knot officially after their wedding at the Pub. Even though their marriage is considered neither legally nor religiously valid, the couple claims that the important thing is that they are happy. □

For general information:

- "Letters of a Javanese Princess," by Raden Arjeng Kartini, Oxford Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1976.
- "Far Eastern Economic Review," weekly Asian news magazine printed in Hong Kong.
- "Indonesia," by Ruth McVeyged, HRAF, 1963.

Bury Us Together

(Compiled from *The World of Homosexuals* by Shakuntala Devi, Bell Press, 1978, India; *Gay Scene*, Indian gay newsletter, no. 2, November-December 1980; *Manushi*, Indian feminist journal, no. 4)

Traces of Indian lesbians are somewhat more visible in ancient cultures than in contemporary India. In her book, *The World of Homosexuals*, Shakuntala Devi describes this ancient tradition.

"*Kamasutra*, the ancient Hindu treatise on love, a manual on the art and science of sex, includes an entire chapter on *Aupariahtaka*—(homosexual sex). Vasyayna, writing between 400 and 500 A.D., summarized many previous Sanskrit texts in this manual and his book represents a distillation of centuries of experimentation in sex techniques. He observed that the *Anthapura* or harem was a hot-bed of homosexuality.

"Kautilya, in the 4th century B.C., had recorded the existence of *Strirajya*—the kingdom of women—in various parts of India. Again, in the 4th century, Kalidasa refers to such a kingdom where men were completely excluded and all work was done by the women alone. Mutual relations between the women of these all-female realms are reputed to have been characterized by strong homosexual feelings.

"In the *Mahabharata* there are two references to all-female realms, ruled by the female monarchs. Later, in the 7th century, the Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang, refers to a kingdom of women on two islands."

Contemporary India offers lesbians few choices. The traditional family unit, the only social security in Indian society, effectively ties women down. A woman alone, without a family, is an abhorrence. Even if a woman is economically privileged and financially independent, surviving the social stigma of being an unmarried woman is no easy task. For instance, even in the larger and more progressive cities, single, professional women find it difficult to secure housing. Suspicious landlords consider such women bad risks—unreliable and immoral.

On the other hand, women live their lives in a community of women. Until a certain age, young women remain segregated from men. Lesbian relationships are not infrequent among schoolgirls and at the university, although they are not commonly mentioned. However when it comes time, few women can resist strong family pres-

ures and they marry. Still some women do resist. The following stories of young women demonstrate that in spite of the incredibly strong deterrents, lesbians rebel against their inevitable separation.

Mallika (20) and Lalitambika (20)—both students of pre-degree course at Keralavarma College—were very much in love with each other. When the final examination results came out, it was found that Mallika had failed and Lalita had passed. This was too much for the girls to bear; their separation was inevitable. So they decided to commit suicide. They tied themselves together and jumped into the strong currents of the Cochin channel from a ferry, but a sailor and a fisherman were able to reach them in time and save them in spite of a long fight in the surging water.

The police charged them with attempted suicide and found, among other things, a letter and a greeting card. The front of the double-fold greeting card had a silhouette of a kissing couple with the backdrop of a flaming sunset. Inside it had a note from Mallika: "Lali, after all everybody knows about our love, so here's a thousand kisses for you, in public..."

Lalita replied: "Come to me, I shall take you in my arms. I shall cover you with kisses. You shall sleep in my bosom and afterwards, maybe, we shall quarrel a little."

A letter was written before the suicide attempt by Lalita to her parents. "I cannot part with Mallika...Now we are destined to go in different directions. I am not persuaded by Mallika to do this...Bury us together."

It is reported that relatives of the girls are still unable to grasp the implications of the relationship. Mallika's elder brother is reported to have said that the girls have agreed to "try to forget each other."

Lalita and Mallika are not alone. The following letter, written in Bengali by a girl living in Siliguri (North Bengal) was received by the author of a sex column in a Bengali weekly.

"For the last three years I've been in love with a girl. She also loves me a lot. When we first met, it appeared like a friendship, but one day things went wrong—she hugged me tight and a tingling sensation ran all over my body. I tried to keep at a safe distance from her but she wouldn't let me. She came closer and closer until we each found the relationship meaningful. Together we spent nights, she would lie on my breasts. I would kiss and



explore her body and get lost in ecstasy. We found each other irresistible and craved for more.

"Incidentally, I'd like to state that I have had lesbian relationships with a lot of girls before and all of them found me irresistible but for one reason or another I had to ditch them. Krishna is different from the others. She fills me with joy. The idea of separation pains us a lot. We'd like to settle down as husband and wife—but the biggest problem is, how? Since we are both girls, the society would look down on us as perverts. The thought drives me crazy, sometimes I think of suicide. It is really a helpless position. But what can we do? Shall we pass the rest of our lives in such a horrid agony? Our relatives don't like the way we mix with each other."

Another story of women resisting separation was reported in a daily Indian newspaper. "On 30 November, 1979, in Ahmedabad, unable to live in separation after their marriages less than a year before, two childhood friends, Jyotsna and Jayashree, ended their lives together jumping in front of a running train. The police recovered the mutilated bodies of the two young women near the Gandhigram station. A joint letter by the two showed that they had entered a suicide pact." □

For general information on Indian women:

- "Manushi," Indian feminist bi-monthly, C-1/202 Lajpat Nagar I, New Delhi 110024, India.

- "Women of South Asia, a Guide to Resources," by Carol Sakala, Kraus Int'l. Publications, New York, 1980.

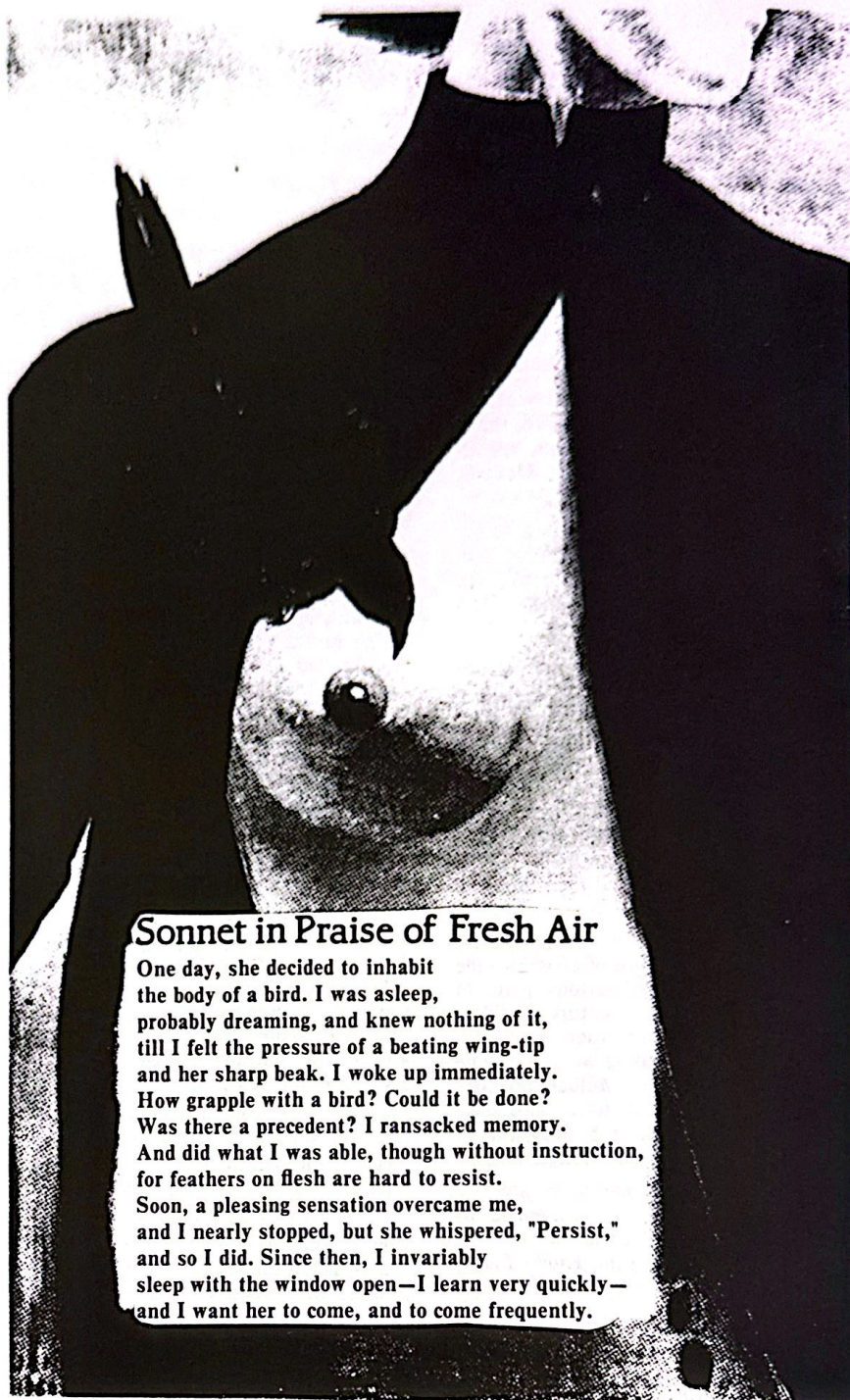
Feminist Fables

Troglodyte

The brutish woman lived in a cave: her hair was unkempt, her legs were hairy, and her teeth were large and strong and yellowish. She hunted for herself, and spent her spare time drawing and painting. She had ability, and her fellow cave-dwellers admired her drawings. These were chiefly of mammoth and tiger, bison and bird, and the occasional fish. Then one day she fell in love. It may not have been love, perhaps it was lust, or friendship. Whatever the exact nature of the relationship, she worked furiously. In the course of her life she drew hundreds of sketches of the other cave-woman. In time, both of them died; and in time also, the cave fell in, the tribe disappeared. By now, it is firmly established that this woman never was, that she never painted, and never lived. □



Suniti Namjoshi, feminist fable writer and poet, has been published in India (Writer's Workshop), Canada (Fiddlehead Press) and Britain (Sheba Feminist Publishers). Born in Bombay, India, she now resides in Canada, a Professor of English at the University of Toronto, Canada.



Sonnet in Praise of Fresh Air

One day, she decided to inhabit the body of a bird. I was asleep, probably dreaming, and knew nothing of it, till I felt the pressure of a beating wing-tip and her sharp beak. I woke up immediately. How grapple with a bird? Could it be done? Was there a precedent? I ransacked memory. And did what I was able, though without instruction, for feathers on flesh are hard to resist. Soon, a pleasing sensation overcame me, and I nearly stopped, but she whispered, "Persist," and so I did. Since then, I invariably sleep with the window open—I learn very quickly—and I want her to come, and to come frequently.

Jane Graver/Masques

The Badge-Wearing Dyke and Her Two Maiden Aunts

In the city of mice, which consisted entirely of mouseholes and labyrinths, two elderly spinster mice had lived together for twenty five years. They were poor, but respectable, had once taught school, and in their small circle were generally regarded as authorities on culture. On a Friday—they distinctly remember that it was a Friday—a niece came to visit and stayed to supper. She wore no make-up—that was unexceptional—she had been to university—they believed in education—but she wore a number of badges bearing such extraordinary legends as: "Gay Liberation is Our Liberation" and "Lesbians Ignite." Fortunately neither of the spinsters could read without spectacles. Nothing untoward happened till after the evening meal, and perhaps not even then. As a prelude to conversation, one of them asked, "And why do you wear those badges, my dear?" The niece replied, "To protest against the discrimination that women suffer who love one another." "Oh," said the spinster, "but we love one another, and have done so for twenty-five years." "Yes," said the niece, "but do you sleep together?" "We have shared the same bed for twenty-five years." "Well, what I mean is, do you prefer women?" "Yes, on the whole, one is so

much more comfortable with one's own sex, don't you think?" The niece was non-plussed. She took off her badges and offered them to the spinsters, "Perhaps you should wear these?" But the spinsters declined, and in a curious way the niece felt glad when she wished them well and said "Good Night." □

Fables from Feminist Fables by Suniti Namjoshi with drawings by Susan Trangmar, published by Sheba Feminist Publishers, 488 Kingsland Road, London E8, England. Available by mail order at 2.25 British pounds (inc. p+p)—please pay by International Money Order. Poem, also written by Suniti Namjoshi, is unpublished.

Latin America's Encuentro Feminista

An open discussion of lesbianism was part of the Primer Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe, held in Bogota, Colombia this summer. This conference was the first meeting of women defining themselves as feminists to address the meaning of an autonomous feminist movement in Latin America.

(A special report to *Connexions* by C. Tinker.)

Bogotá, Colombia, 19-22 July, 1981

Two hundred and fifty women, as individuals or as representatives of feminist groups, came from Brazil, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Curaçao, and other countries; a half-dozen European and North American feminists with an interest in the region also participated.

Most of the participants were involved in grassroots projects in their home countries or in their countries of exile, such as organizing abortion clinics (illegal throughout the region), shelters for battered women, sanitary water supplies in barrios, or participating in feminist film collectives or other cultural work.

The discussions and workshops of this historic *Encuentro* were organized around four themes: women and the political struggle; health and sexuality; women and work; and communication and culture. One woman brought a suitcase full of specula and demonstrated self-help examination techniques; others brought literature from their groups or projects and studies or outlines which were available to everyone in a documentation center at the conference site, a university conference center with housing and meals.

Films by Venezuelan, Mexican and Colombian women were shown, and music, poetry and theater were performed (often spontaneously) throughout the *Encuentro*. The cultural workshops centered on the search for language that can be visualized or otherwise deepened to express women's experience, a language of profound communication that can influence and change society. The debates over political strategies considered whether feminist issues could be adequately addressed within the other goals and priorities of political parties and movements already existing in Latin America. The consensus of the group by the end of the *Encuentro* was that there is a need for an autonomous feminist movement throughout the region. Ongoing discussion

and future conferences will expand the definition of feminism in Latin America and the Caribbean, but participants understood their work and priorities to constitute a feminist movement apart from the work of other progressive movements, although able to work in coordination with others.

In the midst of these discussions, an afternoon plenary was turned over to an open session on lesbianism, the first public discussion of the subject at an international Latin American meeting. When the decision was voted to suspend the plenary in order to give the time and space to this topic, all women were invited to stay and listen or participate; all stayed and drew in closer in a circle as the discussion progressed.

Beginning with a sensitive and personal statement by a Canadian woman who works with the Lesbian Mothers' Defense Fund, the discussion remained on a personal level, one of exploration of attitudes and experiences shared among lesbians and straight women. Many women present related to Francie's story as she described her relationships with men, her long-term relationship with one in particular, her growing awareness of her strong feelings for women, and her first love affair with a woman. She raised many of the contradictions she finds as a lesbian in a patriarchal and heterosexual society and pointed out the additional pressures faced by lesbians with children.

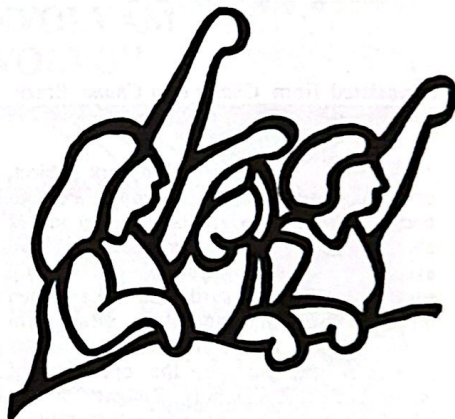
Several women expressed puzzlement as to whether it meant that she hated men if a woman devotes her emotional and sexual energy to another woman. In response, a Brazilian woman felt lesbianism was the freedom to love whomever she chose in whatever fashion she chose, and that it was the complete liberation and consequence of her feminist politics and practice. A Colombian woman was so moved by the desire to speak that she stood up on a chair to announce that, "Yes, of course I have a husband and children, but I love a woman!" A statement which led to applause and a rush of other women ready to share their experiences. The general reaction seemed to be one of excitement, joy, and amazement

that such a discussion was occurring in Latin America.

One Mexican woman was asked how she would feel if her teenage daughter were to become a lesbian. She replied that she would want her to be happy and would be concerned more for the quality of the relationship and the character of the person her daughter chose rather than the sex of her lover. Someone called out, "What about your husband? Does he agree with you?" She replied, "You'll have to ask him—he's a thousand miles away now, so I can speak what I think."

At this stage of the discussion, a few women identified groups working for gay liberation, for example in Brazil and Colombia, and claimed that there was not so far such a complete split between lesbians and gay men as occurs in North America or Europe; nor is there presently a split between lesbian and straight feminists. A Peruvian woman commented that while she herself was not a lesbian, there were lesbians in her feminist group and that she thought everyone respected their position and welcomed them as part of the group.

At the final plenary session of the *Encuentro*, it was decided to keep the dance planned as the close of the conference for women only, thus excluding any spouses and boyfriends and preserving the energy of a women-only space for the celebration. □



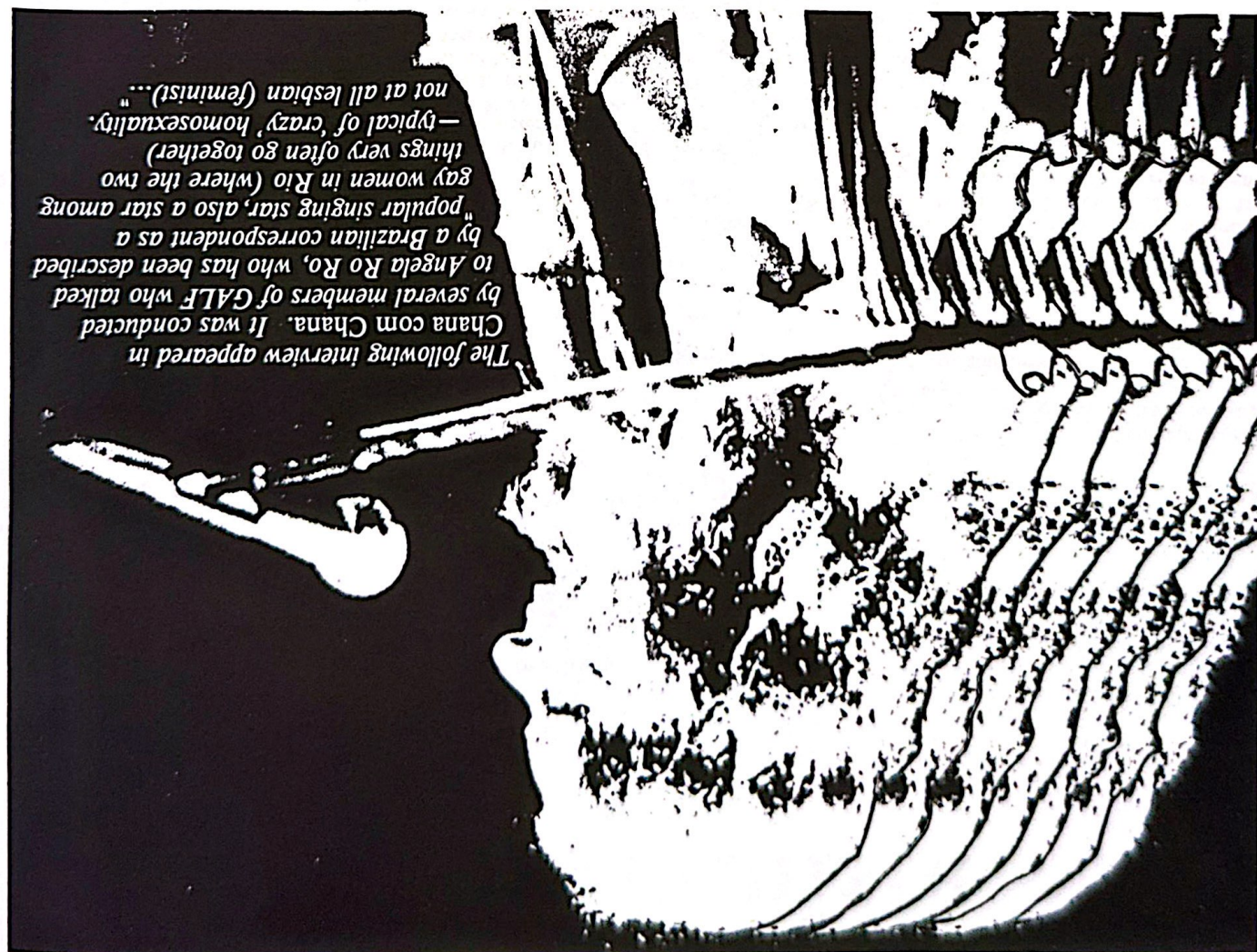
For information about the next conference to be held in 1983:

• Centro para Mujeres, Apto. 2211, Jiron Quilca #431, Lima 100, Peru.

For more information:

• "Slave of Slaves: The Challenge of Latin American Women," by Latin American and Caribbean Women's Collective, Zed Press, 1980.

"Don't Label Me: I Label Myself"



The following interview appeared in *Chana com Chana*. It was conducted by several members of GALT who talked to Angela Ro Ro, who has been described by a Brazilian correspondent as a "popular singing star, also a star among gay women in Rio (where the two things very often go together) —typical of 'crazy' homosexuality... not at all lesbian (feminist)..."

(Translated from *Chana com Chana*, Brazilian Lesbian Journal, Spring 1981.)

Homosexuality is still a dark subject, even damned, for most people. Perhaps because of this, few artists are eager to talk about their sexual preferences. Such an avowal is an opening up of the heart to a society with an absurd and deep-rooted moralist tradition, and which offers firm support to the brutal and arbitrary actions of the police, such as the operation of "super-Richeiti." [Deputy Richeiti of São Paulo police has been in command of a project of repressive and violent police raids against gay ghettos.]

Angela Maria Diniz Gonsalves, known as Angela Ro Ro, is an exception to this personal reticence. In the informal chat from which this interview was compiled, Angela spoke with spontaneity. After all, no one was in the comfortable position of critic. On one side, Angela, on the other,

heterosexual.

Q: Angela, in your shows we see an alternative to the artist-public relationship. There is a whole praxis against repression. Everything is made known; there is an open space. There are even explicitly lesbian settings...

A: Honestly, I don't say those crazy things intentionally (laughing) in the show. When in May of 1979, in front of 350 people, the Ipanema Theatre to start my show, my feet, my hands, my whole body was trembling. I couldn't give anymore. I shouted, "HELPI" and I discovered that conversing helped me relax... One time, I was going to use the term "the person I love," but it was so understood, so gay a term, I suffered through the whole joke, saying instead, "the woman I love." In the end, I'm a person with more homosexual tendencies than heterosexual.

Q: And this fact isn't a constant threat to your career?

A: I stipulated from the beginning of my work that if there was anyone making concessions, it was me, by working. Music is my most sacred thing... If someone doesn't like it, tough. Don't buy the record and don't go to the show...

Q: Do you identify yourself publicly as a lesbian?

A: I don't call myself a lesbian, ever. Don't label me; I label myself. It's not a prejudice, you know, with this word. I think you have a reason for using this term. But I think the reason fails because it's vulnerable. For now it can work, and I hope it does work, but actually I would use other words: woman, person, human being.

Q: But as "persons" we are not discriminated against.

A: But to be a lesbian or to be a faggot or to be black or to be a Jew is a detail about

the human person. Do you receive the rubber stamp and accept it? This only continues the discrimination.

Q: The continued use of this pejorative until its exhaustion...

A: But it perpetuates a quarrel, a sectarianism. The heteros, the homos, you see? Because it doesn't exist...they are all amphibious. Sincerely, I don't know why you would want to identify yourselves, and other people, as lesbians. The island of Lesbos is not visited so much as such.

Q: The word offends you?

A: No, it doesn't offend me. I even think it's pretty, and the island is prettier still. I think you are using a label that was given to you.

Q: How do you see the lesbian movement?

A: I didn't even know there was a lesbian movement. I wish it good luck. It's strange, but valid. Strange, because what I do in bed...does not lend itself to being the name of a movement...If I go to bed with boys, with girls, with cats or dogs, it's just for me and the person who accompanies me on that day of delight. But if there is oppression, and there exists an organization that can go and attempt to end that oppression, then I think that's wonderful. It's a way of fighting things. Nonetheless, more important than to fight the bad things, is to fight for the good. Each person should make her own intimate revolution. I know there really is discrimination. Not just the homosexual woman is discriminated against; women in general are discriminated against so often, in so many ways.

Q: We gay women are doubly discriminated against, as women and as lesbians.

A: A movement...of evolution, of clarification, has to start with the individual but you can encompass the collectivity. Me, what I do in the show, I poke them here, I poke them there. I get up on the stage, and it's not just to romp around or to make money and sing like a crazy woman. I poke them with emotion. Everyone feels emotion—gays, straights, bi-, tri-...The problem is that the world is full of shit.

Q: Feminism is trying to give the world a more feminine face, proposing a break with all power relationships based on oppressed/oppressor. How do you see the feminist struggle?

A: It's all a question of unity. The human being is in the worst condition. Men are not doing well at all; they are not much better off than women.

Q: Men are also exploited?

A: Of course, men are more and more lost, because they got left with the responsibility of being what they never wanted to be, but are. The fault lies with extreme machismo, with fascism. I'm not against men, nor exaggeratedly in favor of women. I'm not for or against...The problem comes with the adoration of the phallus, which is the worst nonsense. The finger could be adored or the nose...Since it won't work to cut off all the existing penises, I'm left here believing in the rediscovery of dignity, the individual

revolution. It does not advance us to assemble a band of people to indoctrinate others... □

Grupo de Ação Lésbico-Feminista

(Translated from material sent to us by GALF; and *Chana com Chana*, Brazilian lesbian journal, Spring 1981.)

The Lesbian-Feminist Action Group (GALF) has been in existence for a year and a half as an autonomous group. Before that, we were part of a mixed male and female homosexual group, from which we separated in May 1980. We have fought to create an organization without authority figures, although we admit that it is difficult to avoid hierarchical structures and yet to maintain the organization necessary to carry out the activities we propose.

Our first priority is self-affirmation. By affirmation we mean the process of publicly addressing our sexuality and discussing with other sectors of society the oppression we suffer as women and homosexuals. Our second priority is study. From the process of analyzing the family, sexual discrimination, sexual roles, socialization, monogamy, motherhood, the myth of free love, etc., we are looking for new forms of conduct and relationships between women, trying to modify the conditioning which society has imposed upon us.

Our third priority is agitation. We work with other lesbians through correspondence, through the distribution of *Lampiao*, a mixed homosexual newspaper, in gay bars and nightclubs, through questionnaires about the reproduction of

roles [the second-class status of women's work in the home] and about the gay movement. Our intention is to maintain contact with the largest possible number of lesbians, to make our work known, as well as the work of the women's and gay movements, to encourage the formation of new, women-only groups, and to discuss and raise consciousness around women's issues.

We are active in the feminist movement, trying to create a space where lesbians can talk about our own needs, and participating in the general struggle of all women. We took part in the Second Congress of Paulista Women (women from São Paulo), in another feminist conference, and in work shifts at the women's shelter, SOS Mulher.

We are active in the gay movement because, as lesbians, it has the most to offer us in terms of work. In this movement, we raise the question of the double discrimination against gay women, emphasizing the connection between the homosexual struggle and the feminist struggle. We participated in the organization of the first Brazilian homosexual conference.

This year, we published an experimental issue of the magazine *Chana com Chana* (Cunt to Cunt), a lesbian journal containing interviews, artwork and material on lesbianism and feminism. The word "chana" cannot be merely defined as the female sexual organ; it is much broader. To some it sounds like "chance" (opportunity), to others like "chama" (flame). The important thing is to free yourself from previous connotations.

Contact:

• Grupo de Ação Lésbico-Feminista, Caixa postal 293, São Paulo, S.P., Brazil.

COMCHANA

ANGELA RO RO:
"NÃO ME ENVOLVAM
EU ME ENVOLVO"



O homossexualismo ainda é um assunto obscuro, digo maldito, para a maioria das pessoas. Ele encontra-se situado no cruzamento do pecado com o preconceito. Talvez por isso poucos artistas se comprometem a falar sobre com tendências mais homossexuais que heterossexuais.

GRUPO — Este fato não é uma ameaça constante à sua carreira?

ANGELA — Estipulei desde o início do meu trabalho, que se havia algum estranho conceito, seria ao meu estar trabalhando. A

Argentina

Shrouded in Silence

I have so many brothers and sisters that I can't count them and a very beautiful sister who is called freedom.

-Atahualpa Yupanki

(The following article was written specifically for *Connexions*; personal accounts are combined with information taken from the unpublished documents of *La Cobra Dormida*, Casilla de Correo 3049, Correo Central 100, Buenos Aires, Argentina.)

Buenos Aires, Plaza San Martín, 1978

The Plaza San Martín is a typical downtown park, a pleasant place with trees and monuments where tourists, couples, children, families, secretaries and businessmen congregate.

My friend and I were there one summer afternoon at five o'clock. We weren't holding hands or embracing or touching at all; we were simply talking. As we talked, we noticed a group of people in the distance, approaching. Among them were several boys, two older men, a woman and two middle-aged men. Several of them were making signs to each other. One of them walked away, accompanied by the boys.

Meanwhile, we were laughing, thinking that maybe they were a group of evangelists, who were very common in Buenos Aires. As two of the men came toward us, we thought for sure they were going to offer us some pamphlet or something. Instead, they showed us their identification as federal police.

We didn't know what to think or say, even though, given the political situation, the police and army regularly detained and questioned people everywhere.

They took us each to different parts of the park, asked for our identification documents and began the routine questions—where do you live, where do you work, etc. The interviews were conducted in a very aggressive way, with the officers acting very macho. They also searched our bags to see if we had any "subversive material," as they called it.

Indignant, one of us asked one of the cops for an explanation. He answered that this was their "job" and that, besides, we seemed different from other women, since at this hour it was normal to be with a boyfriend and it was strange to see two women together.

Fortunately, this harassment went no further. The police silently returned our documents, and they left, for some reason taking the six or seven boys with them.

Each of us went home, terrified lest anyone should approach or even look at us, trying to imagine what our encounter with the police could mean. A few days later, we read in a newspaper that the federal police had begun an operation called "League of Morality."

This is how things were at the end of 1978.

This oppression, exercised by police and other security forces, should be understood within the context of a society that is traditionally erotophobic. Machismo is deeply rooted in the national identity. The tango, which is the best-known element of *porteña* culture [*porteña* refers to the city of Buenos Aires—meaning either a resident of that city or that which characterizes the city], originated as a dance in which only men participated; it remains a glorification of masculinity. Homophobia is also encouraged by the doctrines of the Catholic church, which is extremely powerful in Argentina and much more traditional and conservative than it has come to be in other parts of Latin America. Magazines, newspapers, television, radio and even the shorts seen at movie theaters make it very clear, usually without even mentioning homosexuality, that morality consists of living within an extremely traditional family—and that any other lifestyle is immoral. Besides being immoral, alternative lifestyles for women are nearly impossible, both economically and because women are generally expected to remain in the home until they marry. There are, of course, exceptions, often among upper class women, but the options are not numerous for any woman.

At the institutional level, the homophobia and sexism of daily life represent an attempt to prevent—through the use of force—the deterioration of antiquated social codes.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Historically, there is much more information on male homosexuality than there is on lesbianism. During the 1940s, male homosexuality was the subject of several scandals. The first to receive wide attention was the discovery that young students in a military high school were participating in "homosexual orgies." It was in the late '40s and early '50s that the legal sanctions against homosexuals were introduced.



For decades, Argentines have lived with a series of short-lived governments—both civil and military. Always, there has been some form of institutionalized repression of homosexuality. One civil government (in the late 50's and early 60's) perpetrated sweeping campaigns against "immorality" which included the detention of heterosexual couples for kissing in the parks, raids on hotels, the closing of public bathrooms and the systematic detention of lesbians and gay men. When a military government took power in '66, an identical policy was continued.

Tolerance of homosexuals increased slightly in the early '70s, when through police pay-offs, a few discreet bars were permitted to operate, although always under the threat of a raid. This easing of repression coincided with the formation of the FLH (Homosexual Liberation Front), a movement which focused on consciousness-raising among lesbians and gay men. The organization was never able to grow beyond its underground status.

Between 1973 and 1975, the atmosphere in Argentina became increasingly chaotic, as certain groups of both the left and the right took up arms. During this period, right-wing terrorist groups for the first time began to threaten homosexuals directly. In July 1973, a poster appeared throughout Buenos Aires, bearing the slogan: "Against the ERP [People's Revolutionary Army, an armed left-wing group], homosexuals and drug addicts." The left responded with the slogan: "No somos putos, no somos faloperos" (We aren't faggots; we aren't junkies). Physically attacked by the right, getting little support from the left, the FLH continued to exist, and there was some measure of solidarity among lesbians and gay men.

In March 1976, another military coup took place, bringing with it the most repressive regime that has existed in Argentina



In 1977, in the Conference on Social Pathology at the University of Buenos

ideology. In 1976, homosexuals have been a target for systematic persecution. The ideological repression is severe. Any reference to printed material as well. These controls are part of the "moral" campaign to which the regime is committed—an extreme version of what it calls "Western Christian" ideology.

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REPRESSION SINCE 1976

It was very late when they got to Mónica's house. Her family was furious, but nothing mattered after what they'd been through. They made love, forgetting Rodriguez and the rest of the nightmare. It was not until the next day that they realized how difficult it is to find a place for oneself. There was danger lying in wait, and relentless paranoia, wherever they might be.

No one spoke for a few moments. Then the cop asked where they lived, saying he'd take them home in a taxi. This change of attitude was a great relief. Sara preferred to go with Mónica, who lived further away.

At that moment, a police van pulled up and a lot of heavily armed, uniformed police got out and went into a restaurant on a nearby corner.

Sara, meanwhile, remained silent. She spoke only when the cop asked her something. She thought of the scandal at the pension when they found out she was in jail. Both she and Mónica would lose their jobs. Despite these bleak prospects, there was something that brought the two women closer together with no regrets.

Mónica answered, "Us suspect? How? We're not mixed up in politics; we don't go to the university..." [University students are automatically considered suspect, since they are frequently involved in political activity. This means that there are many suspects among the disappeared.]

Rodriguez offered a further argument. He said that because of the situation in the country at that moment, the street was dangerous; everyone is suspect.

Nervous though she was, Mónica began talking. She told the cop that her father was a retired member of the Federal Police. This news seemed to soften the cop, that heterosexuals weren't as perfect as they might appear.

They didn't realize the danger. They only waited to be left in peace. They crossed the street and entered another hotel, which faced the first. A few seconds later, the plainclothes cop came in. He identified himself and asked for their documents. "Come with me," he said, "because you're under arrest." Again, the familiar question: Why? The immediate response: "A police patrol saw you kissing on a streetcorner. They told me; I followed you."

They arrived at the neighborhood of Buenos Aires that abounds in family hotels—"decent" places that only require that patrons be of age and have their documents. Mónica and Sara anticipated no difficulties when they went into one of these hotels. Without questions, they were given a room. It seemed a perfect place to know each other completely, leaving behind taboo and prejudice. Then came a knock on the door. It was the owner of the hotel. They got dressed quickly, and found that they wouldn't be permitted to stay there. They asked why, since they had paid, but the owner gave little explanation—only that a policeman had spoken with him. The cop was now outside standing on the corner.

Without their not-

As everyone expected, the coup occurred—in the wee hours of the night of March 24. In spite of many difficulties, Sara's and Mónica's romance, and their daily lives, continued.

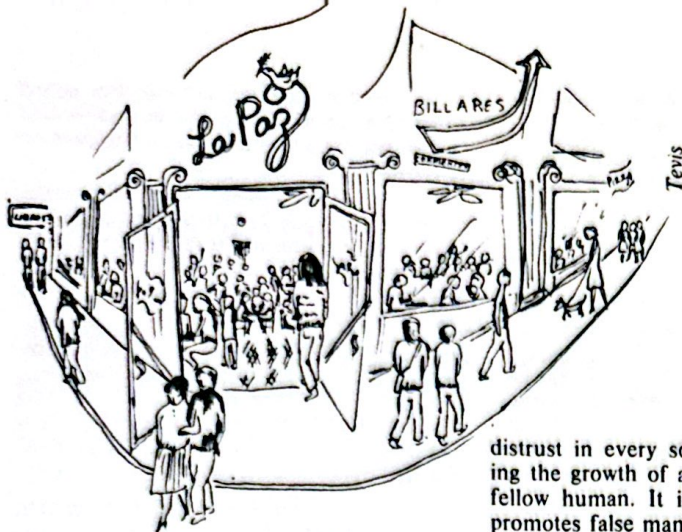
Sara had come to the capital from the interior of the country after she finished high school. Like many young people, she sought a better intellectual and economic situation, hoping both to help out her family and to make a life for herself. Sara brought with her a certain uneasiness as well. She lived in a pension for young ladies in Flores (a district of Buenos Aires). She knew she was not like the other women there—always in curlers or waiting for their boyfriend to call at eight o'clock.

It was in just such a crowd of people discussing the news of the day, that Sara and Mónica first met. Both women worked in offices downtown. They soon discovered they had more to talk about than just the news, the humidity and their jobs. A beautiful love grew between them, nourishing from one conversation to the next.

During the months that preceded the coup, there were heated discussions among the large groups of people who gathered in front of the offices of the major daily news-papers. People argued over the pros and cons of the coup, which was known to be imminent, and about what would happen afterwards.

LOOKING FOR A PLACE

below. time of the coup and after are recounted men. Some women's experiences at the extreme repression that followed extended, unlimited powers. The immediate and the police and military were given nearly "President." A state of siege was declared, history. General Videla was named



Aires, homosexuality was defined as a congenital disease. This definition sets the tone for all published texts and other material to be considered "permissible."

A clear example of how repression works against the homosexual community was the "house cleaning" that took place in 1978 when the World Cup Soccer Championship was played in Argentina. Since this was an international event, with a huge public relations budget, the police carried out an operation for the removal of all "undesirable" people from public view. With sophisticated electronic equipment, the police were able to identify numerous people they considered suspicious, including lesbians and gay men.

The existence of gay bars and discos was always more or less illegal in Argentina. In 1978 these were shut down, and they are virtually unknown today, even as clandestine gathering places. Their existence before 1978 was always dependent upon monetary "arrangements" between their owners and certain police and military factions which "protected" them mafia-style. After a short period of tolerance, a bar would usually be raided by the police or army, who took prisoner everyone they found there. In this context, all socializing becomes very risky, and even holding a private party becomes a bold action.

Uniformed police and plainclothes agents of the Department of Morality, in charge of sexual offenses, relentlessly patrol all parts of the city, looking for people who appear to be lesbian or gay. Often, when making arrests, they justify these by citing "subversion" or possession of drugs.

In the lectures given at schools (directed at the parents of high school students), the refrain is often repeated, "Subversion is not only planting a bomb or distributing a pamphlet; subversion is everything that seeks to subvert the norm; premarital sex, abortion, drugs, homosexuality, etc."

In its zeal to eradicate such "subversion," the federal police force provides special courses for its officers, teaching them to recognize gay men and women (through gestures, etc.) on the street. What is worse, policewomen and -men also learn to impersonate lesbians and gay men and then infiltrate the already tenuous community. This introduces an element of paranoia and

distrust in every social interaction, impeding the growth of a basic respect for one's fellow human. It is an atmosphere which promotes false mannerisms and attitudes in the constant effort to cover a deeper lesbian or gay identity.

Lesbians face many problems not shared by their gay brothers. It is women who find few, if any, models with which to identify. The sensational press regularly features articles about crimes of passion among gay men, arrests at parties and corruption of minors, etc. In *porteño* slang and humor, there is no problem in mentioning relations between men.

But lesbianism is shrouded in silence. Each woman faces her feelings alone, uncertain whether any other women share her needs and desires. Not knowing what may reveal one's "difference" to the rest of the world, Argentine lesbians must be cautious in the smallest details—clothing, gestures, speech and even gait. There have been cases where women recognized as lesbians have been fired from their jobs (under other pretexts). In a country with high unemployment, economic problems are the most severe for women, especially for those who choose independence from men.

It must be remembered also that psychological theorists and practitioners are far more ready to condemn lesbianism, and female sexuality in general, than any variation of male sexual behavior. This is also true of the Church and of society in general.

CONCLUSION

In spite of this gloomy climate, women do form strong bonds, work together in groups and resist the regime that seeks to crush them. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo work tirelessly on behalf of their daughters and sons who "disappeared" after being kidnapped or arrested and tortured during the waves of repression. These women work publicly, with the support of many international organizations.

Other organizations of women, such as the DIMA (Equal Rights for Argentine Women) and the Argentine Feminist Organization recently presented publicly a document that calls for the removal of the law of Patria Potestad, which gives fathers complete authority over their children, wresting from the mother all such rights.

There are also groups of lesbians, although these women must do their work underground, who collaborate on small publications and work toward achieving a true community of lesbian women in the future. Gay men also help in this struggle for human survival.

In addition to the military regime's flagrant violations of human rights, Argentina today has a staggering rate of inflation, unprecedented unemployment figures and a bankrupt national economy.

It is because of these conditions that we need the cooperation of all sisters and brothers, and of everyone who wishes to join this struggle and who, because of the political and historical circumstances in which they happen to live, are able to express their ideas more freely than we. The right to love and the right to freedom must not continue to be ignored or withheld. □

For more information:

- "Connexions," Summer 1981, article about women's resistance to disappeared people in Argentina.

Contact:

- Committee for Democracy in Argentina (COFFRA), Box 28327, San Jose, CA 95159.



Cris

Lesbians and the Inquisition Love and Languishing



(Based on extracts from *Primeira Visitação do Santo Ofício as Partes do Brasil*, (1591-92), Arquivo do Torre do Tombo, Lisboa sent to *Connexions* by Grupo Gay da Bahia; and *Gay Sunshine*, San Francisco gay newspaper, Winter 1979.)

Although the Inquisition was never officially established in Brazil, it operated there through the bishops and through three visitations, the first of which occurred between 1591 and 1592. The Inquisitor, the Licentiate Heitor Furtado do Mendonça, arrived on June 9, 1591 to gather confessions in Bahia, Salvador, Pernambuco and other cities. The first confession he heard dealt with homosexuality, and throughout his stay he continued to hear numerous confessions of male homosexuality and lesbianism. A detailed account of all the references to homosexuality may be found in a book whose title may be translated as *First Visitation of the Holy Office to the Parts of Brazil, made by the Licentiate Heitor Furtado do Mendonça, Lord Chaplain of our Lord the King and of his High Court of Justice, Deputy of the Holy Office: Confessions of Bahia, 1591-92*.

More than ten women confessed or were denounced for having practiced "carnal meeting" among themselves. From this material *Connexions* has translated the transcript of two cases and has included a synopsis of two more.

AUGUST 20, 1591

"Confession of Paula Siqueira: native of Lisbon, daughter of Manoel Pires, half-Flemish silversmith, and of his wife Mecia Roia, both deceased. She claims to be 40 years old and to be a resident of this city of Salvador on São Francisco Street. Confessing her sins, she says that three years ago, Felipa de Souza, resident of the city, married to Francisco Pires, stonemason, began to write many letters of love and languishing, so that the confessant understood that said Felipa had some wicked intention. And with these letters and similar notes and gifts, she continued for a period of more or less two years, giving her embraces and kisses without disclosing to her [Paula] what her aim was, until one Sunday a year ago, while the confessant was at home, said Felipa visited her and took her into a bedroom, locking the door behind them, and said to her in plain words that they should do what she had been intending. So they

both had carnal meeting, each with the other one from the front, joining their vessels one with the other, taking pleasure and consummating in effect the natural climax of both parties as would properly be done by a man with a woman, and this in the morning before the main meal, two or three times, said coupling being effected without any other penetrating instrument.

"And after they dined, they returned to have the same lascivious coupling several times, in the aforesaid manner, always using the confessant as if she were a man, putting herself on top. And she claims that when she committed these very lewd acts, she did not think it was such a very serious sin against nature, as appears later in her confession.

"And in the afternoon of said day, said Felipa de Souza, after having done the above-mentioned, before leaving for her home, said to her that she had sinned in said manner with Paula Antunes, wife of Antonio Cardoso, stonemason, resident of this city next to São Francisco, and with Maria do Peralta, converted Jew, wife of João Bibentão, English, resident of this city, and went on to say that she had sinned in said manner with many other women and girls, tall and short, and even inside a cloister where she had stayed."

The other confession also involves the same Felipa de Souza, and was made on August 28 by Maria Lourença, Christian, native of Visseu, Portugal, 40 years old, married to Antonio Gonçalves, tinker, resident of Bahia.


"Confessing, she claims that four years ago, while she was living in a clearing half a league from this city, sheltered against the invasion of the English who had entered Bahia, Felipa de Souza, wife of Francisco Pires, came to stay with her in said clearing, and one day after dinner, at midday rest, she [Felipa] shut herself in her

bedroom with Maria, and began to speak longingly and lovingly and lasciviously to her, and gave her many embraces and kisses, and finally threw her on the bed, and with the confessant lying on her back, said Felipa de Souza lay down on top of her with her face down, with both of their skirts pulled up, and therefore, with their front vessels adjoined, they were both taking pleasure until said Felipa, who was on top, climaxed, and thus they behaved each with the other, just as would a man with a woman, but there was no exterior penetrating instrument between them except their own natural front vessels."

Maria Lourença acknowledged that she and Felipa de Souza had sexual relations several times. Souza boasted to her of having "similar dishonest and nefarious friendships" with Paula Antunes, Maria Pinheira, Paula de Siqueira and the hump-backed smith's wife.

On February 6, Furtado heard the confession of Guiomar Piscara, native of Moura in Portugal, 38 years old, married to a farmer in Taparica. When she was 12 or 13 years old, living in Rio Vermelho, she had sexual relations with a hump-backed slave girl named Mecia, 18 years old. She was also guilty of eating meat on Friday, and Furtado asked her "if she knew that the said carnal joining between women was sodomy and that to eat meat was an heretical offense; she responded that she knew not that they were mortal sins of great offense to God."

Furtado heard the confession of Madanela Pimetel, native of Pernambuco, (Continued on page 26)



Sixty places to talk, dance and play

They called themselves "Uranians," and by the turn of the 20th century there were over 50,000 of them living in Berlin alone. They had a large and visible social structure—cafes, newspapers, clubs—as well as effective political organizations. Until the coming into power of the Third Reich in 1933, Germany was a haven for Uranian—lesbian and gay—culture.

(Based on *Courage*, West German feminist monthly, July 1980 and *Lesbians in Turn-of-the-Century Germany* The Naiad Press.)

The emergence of a homosexual subculture in Germany was related to the rise of industrial capitalism and urbanization in the 19th century. During this time, the traditional large family units began to break down, leading to a separation of so-called "public" and "private" lives. Lesbians in particular became more visible as women began to work outside the home, earning their own incomes and living beyond the control of their families.

UNNATURAL ACTS

Despite harsh laws against homosexuality, a male homosexual subculture began to develop in European capitals as early as 1750. In Germany, Prussian code dictated that both men and women committing "unnatural acts" were to be burned at the stake. Under this law, a woman named Catharina Linck was executed in 1721 because she had tried to pass as a man and marry another woman.

In 1837, a "liberalized" code was enacted, commuting the death sentence for unnatural acts to only "imprisonment followed by life-long punishment." In 1851, the unnatural acts code was further refined to restrict punishment to males only. German law preferred to ignore the possibility

Harlingue-Viollet

According to one account, the "Urbanian ladies" usually met in cafes—one in the north of town—every day between four and six in the afternoon and drank coffee, chatted, read the papers and played cards and chess.

A more visible part of lesbian social life of the time were women's dances. These sometimes-elegant affairs were held regularly and openly in Berlin, as documented by Hirschfeld: "In one of the big halls, the Uranian ladies have a dance one evening every week. Many of the lesbians wear male costumes...The largest number found at the yearly costume party arranged by a Berlin lady. The party is not open to the public, only to those who know one of the ladies of the organizing committee. One participant gave the following vivid description: 'On a beautiful winter night after eight in the evening, car after car arrives at the first hotel in Berlin, and ladies and "gentlemen" in costumes of all countries get out.'"

The number of dances and clubs for lesbians increased in Germany through the 1920s. In Berlin alone there were about 60 places where women could go to meet other women, talk, dance and play.

INTIMATE EXCHANGES

Lesbian culture was not, however, limited to the circles of the "educated daughters" of the upper classes. There were many middle and working class lesbians, with their own groups and social activities. This side of German lesbian subculture

TRATION CAMP

LESBIANS IN THE BUTZOW CONCENTRATION CAMP

During the war it was a punishable offense for German women to have any kind of relationship with foreign men. The SS guards "let loose" the Russian and French prisoners on the women, so that they would be "properly impaled once and for all." The lesbians were systematically separated from the other women and were marched to and from work under SS guard. They were given the usual camp food of watery soup without meat or fat with rotten cabbage leaves. Two women died of starvation. My friend survived and died of TB the first year after the war. □

Munich papers of the time.

Hirschfeld, however, mentions lesbian subculture only in passing, perhaps because, like today, lesbians are generally less visible than gay men. Testimony given by lesbians indicate that lesbian couples were often isolated, wanting to prove to society that they were well-adjusted and "normal." One had to have special information to recognize and find these women.

(Translation of an extract of an original text reprinted in the French edition of *Bent by Persona Press*, Paris, 1981. Extracted from *Der Kampf gegen Lesbtinnenbewegung*, by Ina Kuckuck, Verlag Frauenoffensive, München, 1975.)

They were arrested and separated. Helene G. was charged before a martial court with "diverting the war force," expelled from the army and sent to the Bützow Concentration Camp in Mecklenburg. There she was put in a special block



Harlingue-Viollet

that women were capable of sexual expression. This view was reiterated in the German penal code of 1871; Paragraph 175 of the code stated that homosexual acts between males were against the law.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Throughout the 19th century, German "lesbian-feminists" were submerged within the women's movement as a whole, working in women's groups without openly identifying themselves as lesbians. At the end of the century, however, German homosexuals began to organize politically. At first, the movement was comprised almost entirely of men, but soon began to attract women-identified women. The strength of the Uranian movement raised many lesbians' consciousness about their rights in society in general and in the women's movement in particular.

Speaking in Berlin in 1904, Anna Ruegeling said, "From the beginning of the women's movement until the present day, a significant number of homosexual women assumed the leadership in the numerous struggles and, through their energy, awakened the naturally indifferent and submissive average women to an awareness of their human dignity and rights... Considering the contributions made to the women's movement by homosexual women for decades, it is amazing that the large and influential organizations of the movement have never lifted a finger to improve the civil rights and social standing of their numerous Uranian members."

The commitment of the German women's movement to lesbian rights was soon put to a test. At the end of the 19th century, there was some attempt to extend Paragraph 175 to again cover unnatural acts between women (as it did in Austria), and in 1910, such a law was drafted. The proposed extension of Paragraph 175 sparked women's organizations into action—perhaps the first time in history that feminist groups on a large scale came to the rescue of lesbians. Meetings of women's organizations were held throughout Germany to discuss strategies for fighting the proposed extension, and because of their protests, it was defeated.

THE THIRD SEX

In 1905, Magnus Hirschfeld, the first leader of homosexual emancipation in Germany, published his study of homosexual subculture, *The Third Sex*. According to Hirschfeld, over 50,000 Uranians were living in Berlin, a city of 2.5 million; there were an estimated 1.2 million homosexuals in Germany as a whole. The large size of Berlin made it possible for homosexuals to lead double lives, and gay social life pulsed in both public places and in closed-private circles. There were about 30 restaurants, beer cellars, coffee shops and music-clubs for homosexuals, as well as small hotels and four bathhouses.

was documented by F. Eberhard, a zealous misogynist who set out to prove the supposed depravity of lesbians and the women's movement in his book, *The Women's Movement and Its Erotic Basis*. Among the documents cited by Eberhard is a short item from the *Berliner Tageblatt* of February 22, 1909, involving a libel action brought by the chairwoman of a women's club called Ladies Community against one of the editors of the paper. The editor had claimed that "intimate exchanges" happened in the club, and club members acknowledged that these did in fact occur. "Several divorces were the consequences of the intimate affection between the women," reports Eberhard. He also writes about a pianist who was arrested because "she sang scandalous songs in front of a drunk female audience in a cellar bar."

LESBIAN NEWSPAPERS

As lesbian culture came increasingly out into the open in Germany, threatened philistines and marriage worshippers began to feel a need to control these women. In a letter to the editor of *Welt am Montag*, on August 29, 1910, one such philistine complains about "the public activities of these homosexual women." Describing an excursion of a women's bowling club, Golden Ball, the writer expressed anger because some of the women who were dancing to the music had short, wavy or straight hair, smoked cigars and wore turtlenecks, ties and jackets. The climax of this reported immorality was that two women who danced together held each other very tight and kissed, and one woman who smoked a

MARTE AND OLGA IN BERLIN

(Based on *Unsere Kleine Zeitung*, West German lesbian magazine, May 1980.)

Marte is now close to 80 years old. She is a trained dancer and worked at the German State Opera until 1938. She reminisces below about life as a lesbian in Berlin in the 20s and during the rise of the Nazi regime.

"During the 1920s there were lots of bars where young and old were welcome. They were for lesbians only and were always run by women. There were bars for middle class lesbians and bars for working class lesbians. I saw the magazine *The Girlfriend* in the bathroom of one of them. I met Olga through an ad in this paper. She had written in saying she wanted to have a nice girlfriend again...I answered her, 'I don't know whether I am kind and nice'. That impressed her. She came at once and took me to her family. And the father gave

an opinion on me and said, yes, now you've met a person who is good and decent.

"Later the police started raiding the bars, and *The Girlfriend* had to be sold secretly—we were scared to buy it and we always had to hide it. Then after 1933, the Nazi SA [brownshirts] came. One day there was a march down our street, and they passed by with their flags, and my Olga stood there and watched it. Then they went up to her and slapped her in the face because she did not salute the flag. She came in crying and I told her—this serves you right, you know that we have to be careful. They raided the bars, and even private apartments. We hurriedly moved to another neighborhood. The bars got closed down. L.T., M's girlfriend, was put in a concentration camp. They caught her somewhere with a woman." □

cigar offered one to her girlfriend.

With the growing freedom of the press and politicization which came after World War I, a considerable number of homosexual magazines began to be published, five specifically for lesbians. These papers were partly for political agitation and partly for entertainment. From 1923 to 1932, a lesbian paper, *The Girlfriend: Weekly for the Ideal Friendship between Women*, was published in Berlin. Available at newsstands, *The Girlfriend* was put out by the Ladies Club Violetta, a member of a larger

group called the Federation for Human Rights. The federation was the largest mass organization of homosexuals at this time, boasting a membership of 48,000.

With the '30s came the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich and an end to the active lesbian and gay political and social life in Germany. Even before the start of World War II, Hitler's intense persecution of homosexuals completely broke down the homosexual community and subculture. □

(See also *Connexions #0, Lesbian Bus Tour Through Berlin*.)



Harlingue-Violet/Body Politic

Amnesty International

At the twelfth International Congress of Amnesty International, representatives of 44 countries adopted the following resolution on the repression of homosexuals.

"On the question of the position that the organization should take in relation to people who are imprisoned for being homosexual, the Congress decided that anyone taken prisoner for advancing [supporting] the cause of homosexuality should be considered as a prisoner of conscience. In cases in which homosexuality is used as a pretext for arresting persons for their beliefs, Amnesty International may adopt them as prisoners of conscience." □



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Forthcoming in 1982:

Rocking the Cradle: Lesbian Mothers by Gillian Hanscombe and Jackie Forster.

News Flashes

Dykes in the Street

(Extracted from *Toronto Clarion*, Canadian alternative newspaper, vol.VI No. 2, November 6, 1981.)

Saturday afternoon shoppers in downtown Toronto looked incredulous as they watched the "Dykes in the Streets" march on October 17. Worried about hostility and name calling, women nevertheless bit the bullet and came out to affirm lesbian power, pride and visibility in the first lesbian pride march in Toronto.

The colorful and festive march was organized by Lesbians Against the Right (LAR), Toronto's newly-formed lesbian political organization. The purpose of the event was to show that lesbians are here to stay and are united in fighting back against groups like the Klan and Positive Parents,

who blame lesbians, along with immigrants, gay and blacks for economic problems.

"We are marching today for every lesbian who can't be here, out of the fear she might lose her job or lose custody of her children. Lesbians are everywhere. And we have the right to be everywhere," said one of the speakers. □

Brazilian Refugee

(Extracts from *The Cheap Stencil Service*, International Lesbian Information Service newsletter, September 1981.)

Maria Felix Duarte, a Brazilian lesbian, has recently obtained the right of sanctuary from the Swedish government, arguing that the status of women in her country was insupportable, which was confirmed by the Swedish ambassador in

Brazil. Duarte is reportedly the first person to have received refugee status on the grounds of homosexuality. □

Gay Monument

(Based on *Spare Rib*, British feminist monthly, June 1981.)

Next year, the world's first monument to victims of gay persecution is to be built in Amsterdam. The initiative came from the Homo Group in the Pacifist-Socialist Party.

A lesbian sculptress, Karin Dean, won the design competition. Set in pink cobblestones, three triangles will form one huge triangle—the sign gays were forced by the Nazis to wear in the concentration camps. Though primarily a monument to victims of the Nazi persecution, it is also intended to be a reminder that gay men and lesbians still face persecution. □

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Cecilia Brunazzi

(The following information was sent to *Connexions* by Anne Blasing, a seven-year resident of Japan, founding member of the International Feminists of Japan and publisher of a monthly feminist newsletter, *The Feminist Forum*.)

So much of lesbianism in Japan remains hidden and invisible. Unlike many western countries, whose legal codes have been influenced by Christian morality, Japan has no law against homosexuality, but homosexuality is effectively controlled by a firmly entrenched system of patriarchal values and by a narrowly defined and socially enforced code of acceptable behavior. Faced with the virtually insurmountable pressures of a highly conformist society, it is almost impossible for Japanese lesbians to avoid entering into traditional marriage. (Only 10% of all Japanese women remain single.) Another factor serving to keep women from pursuing a lesbian, or even an independent, lifestyle, is the economic status of women in Japan, which is low even by international standards. Were a lesbian's sexual preference to become known at her place of employment, harassment and social pressure would almost certainly force her out of her job.

While most lesbians in Japan live extremely isolated lives, a few small lesbian groups have begun to emerge in recent years. There is a fledgling feminist movement in Japan, but while lesbian time, energy and money are absorbed by the movement, the value of lesbianism to the movement and its political implications go unrecognized. In 1975, twelve women, who were the first group in Japan to publicly identify themselves as lesbians, published a magazine called *Subarashi Onna* (Wonderful Women). This magazine took a theme of gay liberation and was not strongly feminist or theoretical in its content. Published one time only, it sold a total of approximately 1000 copies. Following the publication of *Subarashi Onna*, another group known as *Mainichi Daiku* (Dyke Daily, Daiku because it sounds like "dyke," but also because, in Japanese, it means the carpenter, someone who is involved in building) published two

newsletters which sold 400 copies each. At about the same time, a group calling itself *Hikari Guruma* (Lightning Wheel) also formed and published two newsletters. Having taken some of its ideology from the U.S. lesbian movement, *Hikari Guruma* was too theoretical for most Japanese lesbians to identify with and it too ceased publication. Then in 1979, the women from *Mainichi Daiku* and *Hikari Guruma* joined to establish a consciousness-raising group which became the core of the Tokyo lesbian-feminist movement.

Currently, the only Japanese lesbian-feminist group operating in Tokyo is the Lesbian-Feminist (L-F) Center. Although less than five women are active in running the group, their energy has generated a ray of hope for other lesbians in Japan who do not yet feel able to take the risks associated with lesbian activities. Among the activities sponsored by the L-F Center are women's dances, which are held once a month, consciousness-raising groups, and

correspondence with lesbians who write to their post office box number.

The ideal to which the L-F aspires is to give a positive image to lesbianism in Japan and to encourage all lesbian women to come out. When asked about the group's relation to gay men, its founder stated that gay men in Japan have no political consciousness and are "not worth working with."

Within the last three years, the international lesbian community in Japan has also begun to identify itself and to create opportunities for social interaction. Early in 1979, a group known as the International Feminists of Japan (IFJ) was formed. Since that time, the group's membership has grown to include 300 women of 20 different nationalities. IFJ has enabled lesbians to meet with one another in a positive feminist environment and to organize their own activities around the larger mixed feminist group. Currently, the lesbians in IFJ hold women's parties at least once a month and work with their straight sisters in the group on a number of projects.

Beginning in 1981, several members of the international mixed gay community organized to form the Men's and Women's Alternative Lifestyle Group. This group meets for a discussion once a month and also holds a monthly social event. Although very new and still quite small, this group holds promise for real growth in the future.

Japan is a country remote culturally and geographically from the West; a country where a woman's pride is relegated to her role as wife and mother; a country where the pride of a woman who loves and works for women remains unknown. With the work of lesbians such as those associated with the L-F Center and IFJ, a small start is being made to change this, and the future is not without hope. □

Contact:

- L-F Center, P.O. Box 84, Nakano-ku, Tokyo, Japan.
- Men's and Women's Alternative Lifestyle Group, International Feminists of Japan, C.P.O. Box 1780, Tokyo 100, Japan.



South Africa and Lesotho — Three Lesbian Conversations

We have had tremendous difficulty getting information on lesbians in Africa. Most sources we contacted could provide no information on the existence of lesbianism either in the Arab north or in Black Africa. The only contacts we had on the continent itself were in South Africa—and there we finally managed to find proof that African lesbians do in fact exist, although it was not possible to reach the lesbians themselves.

The following interviews were conducted in Cape Town. Two of the women were black—of mixed race, so-called "coloreds"—and three were white. The South African government has hierarchically divided the population of that country into four racial groups: white, colored, Asian and African, the last comprising some 12 different ethnic groups. Each group has a different legal status in the country and only the whites have the vote.

The "Groups Areas Act" strictly regulates the areas in which each group may live, often "re-zoning" blacks out of their traditional homes in favor of whites; other laws regulate the jobs they may have. While the widest gap—in standard

of living, freedom of movement and employment—separates the white minority population from the three black groups, a significant economic, legal and cultural gap separates the so-called "colored" and Asian populations from the Africans. The latter constitute more than 70% of the population and form the most discriminated against and impoverished class. There is as little communication and social mixing between the Africans and the so-called "coloreds" and Asians as there is between the whites and the entire black population. Heterosexual intercourse between the races is prohibited by law, but there is no legislation prohibiting interracial homosexual acts between consenting adults of either sex. Lesbians do not exist in the eyes of the law.

The following interview is conducted with Margie and Carol, two black, so-called "colored" lesbians.

"THERE'S SOMETHING IMMENSELY IMMORAL IN THIS COUNTRY."

Carol: I knew I was a lesbian when I was about five. I used to dress in boys' clothes and had crushes on my teachers and classmates. I felt strange about it in high school,

but when I fell in love for the first time, I wanted to jump on every roof top and shout it out to the world—and she said, "Don't be bloody stupid." [Laughs]

Q: How did your family react to your lesbianism?

Carol: Generally, I'd say there's a hard-line attitude among "colored" families toward homosexuality, except in cases of extremely queenish men or the stereotype butch woman. They're seen as freaks of nature, and have to be accepted: "God also allows a place for them" kind of thing. But the ordinary looking person is not quite kosher.

Margie: I think my sisters know, but we've never spoken about it. My mom, strangely enough—being a country woman—seemed to know. I left home to live with a woman when I was about 24 or so, and although I didn't say a word to my parents, when this woman left me to get married, my mother was very upset and never could forgive her.

Q: Do you feel that racism is something that lesbians confront in relationships?

Carol: I was in a relationship with a white woman who I lived with for four years. It did a lot for me in terms of black/white

relationships. I'd known a lot of white people, but the fact that you know a lot of white people doesn't make any difference; once you go home you do your own thing. But living with them...Well, we had our fights.

I can only speak for myself, but I think my lover and I certainly did confront racism and did try, to a large extent, to work through it, but there are certain things that can't be changed in a relationship with one person. I mean, there's something immensely immoral in this country.

Q: What is the major problem for you as a black?

Carol: Being seen as a person, I suppose, not seen but recognized.

Margie: I also think our white lesbian friends have the same attitude toward us as we have toward the other blacks. I mean they might see us as "our colored friends" in the beginning. It's very patronizing. Then they find out we don't have to be treated special. We do that to the Africans. And also, probably if we make friends with them, we sort of go overboard. It's easy to break it down if you haven't got any guilt feelings about it.

Q: And what about at work?

Margie: I work for a bank, and they're not allowed to be really racist there. I was one of the first six blacks they hired. They didn't know how to handle the situation. They wanted to hire blacks, this was in 1971, but they didn't know what to do, and it was ridiculous—we were six women in a staff of over 120 whites. We were really like lost sheep in the corner. Then I realized there was a union, hell, the same union for blacks and whites, and I decided to get myself elected on the committee. Then things started moving from there. We used to have a toilet only on the top floor, and we were stationed on the ground floor—and there were toilets on every level for the whites, and I thought, hell, man, this can't be. We also had different colored uniforms. I wrote all the major branches in the country to get their support; we were doing the same jobs, getting the same pay, why can't we get the same uniforms or no uniforms at all? Eventually we got all the same uniforms, and so nobody wore them any more. Now it's completely different. When coloreds were first hired at the white branches, there was no recreation because of the liquor laws prohibiting blacks and whites from drinking together. Now they've opened up bars at all the branches. □

LESBIAN LINE: CAPE TOWN

In 1979, eight Cape Town lesbians set up South Africa's switchboard, Lesbian Line. The project folded within a year. In the following interview two of the original founders discuss their experiences and explain why the project failed.

Carol: We raised the money to get an answering service and install a telephone and started out with a lot of excitement and enthusiasm. Then people lost interest because we didn't get the response that I suppose some of us had always really hoped

for, even though we were aware that it wouldn't blossom overnight into Lesbian Line, London. It was just very disappointing for all of us going down there to do our shifts, and maybe getting only one call all afternoon—and that one a wrong number.

Anne: The problem was we had no way of advertising. We had little stickers printed which we put up in women's toilets, in gay bars, on campus, and places like that, but they got ripped off immediately. Not one newspaper would take our classified ad. One journalist from the Cape Town evening paper wrote a very sympathetic article, but the editor refused it week after week and it never got printed. So the whole time we existed only one article was run about us, in a national weekend magazine from Natal [North East province]. The response from that kept us going for more than two months. We got calls and letters from all over South Africa, from desperately iso-



lated Indian women in small towns in Natal, also from whites in remote villages in Zimbabwe.

Carol: But we had to keep desperately anonymous. We couldn't afford to let *anyone* know where that telephone was. I remember us being reasonably scared that if it were found out, it would be fire-bombed or something. But another problem, of course, was burn-out. It was obvious that our phone line needs to exist, but the people who started it were all pretty committed elsewhere, and only had limited time. And because it didn't get off the ground as quickly as we had hoped, a lot of us lost interest, which meant that the few who stayed had more to do. I think that if we had been able to get a lot more publicity, it would have worked.

Anne: Also, I reckon that we jumped the gun. We don't even have a mass-based feminist movement here, and there's hardly

even the slightest twitch of a gay liberation movement. So there isn't really the context here in which this kind of project could survive. Another thing was that the kind of support we could provide was very disappointing for the women who came to us. We tried to have monthly social events—and the women would come, avidly looking for other people to meet, and would be very disappointed.

Carol: One of the problems with these parties was that they became, unfortunately, an "us and them" situation. It was our fault in a way, but we were all burned out and didn't really know how to handle the situation. So it became something where we were all "liberated" lesbians and feeling fine about being gay and thought we could run this line and weren't we clever, and they were all closeted and desperately looking for something and there was this big gap—we felt awkward and they felt awkward.

Anne: The monied lesbians here were not at all interested in helping struggling gay women. They were often just extremely predatory and exploitative.

Carol: Even in Cape Town, we have a very divided lesbian population: the rich lesbians that we just mentioned; the working class lesbians, where there's more explicit role playing and women passing as men; and then the lesbian-feminists.

Anne: I don't know any African lesbians. All the black women we heard from or saw through the line were so-called "coloreds" or Indians.

Carol: Africans have a different attitude toward touching and being affectionate. It is very acceptable to be affectionate physically.

Anne: In fact, sleeping together is terribly common. Very few people sleep in beds alone. Apart from the fact that, for the working class, there just aren't enough beds, it's also for comfort and for warmth when you don't have enough blankets. So there is a lot of physical touching, and possibly they do make love, but don't take it as anything special.

Carol: I have asked Nora if she knows any lesbians. She is a black [African] woman who lives in Guguletu, one of Cape Town's urban ghettos [mandatory residential township for Africans]. She is divorced and has two children. She was reluctant to talk, because she felt it was none of her business. However, this is what she actually said: there are black lesbians living in Guguletu. Nora personally knows two couples who have been living together for a number of years.

The attitudes of people vary considerably. Nora says the subject is never discussed. Some people in Guguletu think that lesbianism is bad, others think it is sick or against God, still others think it is okay, and a viable alternative. Nora says that after her marriage broke up, knowing what marriage was like, if she could find herself a girlfriend and settle down, she would be more than happy. □



Lesotho

Situated entirely within the borders of South Africa, this barren, mountainous country covers a total area of less than 12,000 square miles. Ninety-nine percent of the population of just over one million is rural; the vast majority live in villages of less than 250 people. Lesotho is almost entirely dependent upon South Africa for its economic survival.

Only 5% of the workforce is employed in Lesotho itself. Half the male population works in the mines and industries of South Africa; their wages are Lesotho's major source of revenue. The women who remain behind form the backbone of the rural communities. They work the land, tend livestock, raise and educate the children.

Elana taught in a small rural school in Lesotho for two years and was the only white person in the village. The following is a transcript of a taped conversation about the possibilities of lesbianism among the Lesotho women.

I imagine that some sort of sexual partnership or exploration or whatever exists quite a lot between women there. I think it does happen often, but I don't think the women see it in terms of a love relationship or something that could lead to a partnership. It's very important to get married and have children and to live with a man. In the village where I lived, it was very common to find women living on their

own and accepting the responsibilities of living on their own, although that did not include actually making decisions.

In Lesotho, women are not allowed to make decisions and don't believe they can. They're in a double bind really when there are major decisions to be made, like building a new house or sending the children to school or disciplining them, and they haven't heard from their husbands, sometimes for years. There are very few men around, and those who are there mostly do little but drink. So the women don't take them seriously even if they are the decision makers. The women are also more educated than the men, because the men go off to the mines at a very early age, and the women stay at home longer. I think that the wives left behind do get incredible support from each other, but they still don't believe they should be taking responsibility.

When I was there, I specifically wanted to find out about what brought women together, and I found out that they aren't really accustomed to talking to each other on a personal level. The Basothos don't open up easily. Sexuality is a taboo subject until you've had your first child, so you're allowed to explore but not to talk about it. It was obvious that there is a lot of sexual exploration among women and men and across the sexes.

I had some very interesting conversations with one of the teachers at the school who was married, although I never saw her husband at all. I don't remember how it came up, but I told her I was a lesbian and

what that meant. She didn't want to accept it in the beginning, but slowly she came to ask me more questions about it, and it turned out that she had had an experience during her year at teacher training college, where she had obviously slept with another woman.

They had quite a serious relationship, in fact. It seemed to have come up originally for comfort; they used to share a bed. She said that the first move was made by the other woman, who came to her bed and they'd sleep together, and then there was some sort of exploration and eventually it became sexual. She knew of other women who had done that; it sounded as if it were quite common. And she wasn't ashamed of it in any way, but didn't see it as anything that could become a lifestyle. Only when I talked about it, and when she was talking about the fact that she didn't like her husband and actually they had nothing in common, did she start coming around to the fact that she would have preferred to be living with this woman. But it was a very alien idea to her. After I left, I got a letter from her in which she said she was thinking of divorcing her husband and that she would really like to talk about "my predicament" as she called it.

There was another woman who I had a much more open relationship with, not a physical relationship, but we shared a house for awhile. She was extremely tactile, and she knew that I was a lesbian and knew the woman I was with. But she just couldn't imagine it at all; it was not a possibility for her at all. I don't know to what extent she had explored her sexuality with women, but it certainly wasn't something she saw for herself. I think that's probably the more common attitude, because of the attitudes of the whole culture.

The thing is, in Lesotho, and I don't know how common this is among other cultures, the Basotho are incredibly physical and are very open about touching. They were quite sexual, although there are taboos on sexual exploration, in fact, very strict ones. But there is also an open sort of acceptance that they have to explore these things themselves. Of course, there's also the whole initiation period where they discover their sexuality. I don't know very much about what happens in it, but I know that a large part of it is sexual education, for both the women and the men. □

For general information on African women:

- "Connexions," Summer 1981, women against apartheid.
- "From women," South African women's quarterly, Box 11486, Vlaeberg, Cape Town, South Africa.
- "Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation," by Jacklyn Cock, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1981.

Contact

- Africa Resource Center, 464 19th St., Oakland, CA 94612 (415)763-8011.

New Zealand An Island of Many Cultures

(Based on *Gay Left*, British gay socialist journal, No. 9, 1979; and *Body Politic*, Canadian gay bi-weekly publication, October 1980.)

I am often amused and sometimes fairly irritated by people's concepts of gay life in New Zealand. Most people know something about the country in general: that it's down there in the South Pacific, just a bit to the right of Australia. But when I mention a gay bar in Auckland or a lesbian group in Wellington, I tend to get astonished reactions: "Oh, really?" "I didn't know they had things like that there." Astonishment is indeed great when I inform people that New Zealand not only has a commercial gay scene, but a National Gay Rights Coalition with 35 chapters.

Although the mainstream culture is similar to that of Britain and the United States, there are many differences that make New Zealand unique. The population of New Zealand is relatively sparse, about three million, and is composed largely of British immigrants and the descendants of immigrants, with a substantial (10%) Maori population.

Living in a small country presents special problems for lesbians and gay men. Real anonymity of the kind possible in a city the size of London is virtually impossible to achieve here. There exist the small town pressures against eccentricity, and a strong emphasis on traditional gender roles. Even if you are willing to move to a larger town at the other end of the country, you

are still likely to run into an old school friend of your Uncle Bert's at an embarrassing moment. Likewise, the small size of the average town means that commercial gay scenes have little chance to develop. The situation is further exacerbated by continual depletion of the homosexual population, since lesbians and gay men leave the country in large numbers for Sydney, the United States or Europe.

There is still little available information about homosexuality in traditional Maori culture, though the evidence is that it was tolerated if not accepted. (The closely related Samoans still sometimes practice an institutional form of transvestism by bringing up a son as a daughter if there are no female children in a family; and homosexuality among adolescents is regarded as quite normal.) But more and more Maoris live in nuclear, rather than extended families and, as is common in working-class communities, observance of traditional gender roles is strong. Consequently there are in Auckland and Wellington large numbers of Polynesian (Maori) transvestites of both sexes who live in a subculture that in many ways is separate from that of white lesbians and gay men. Although Polynesian participation in the gay movement has been minimal, the presence of these transvestites has forced the movement to deal with racial and class questions.

Maori lesbians have been in no way invisible. It was a Maori feminist who was largely responsible for the start of the first

gay liberation group in New Zealand in March of 1972. Although lesbians had talked about the idea for some time before this, it took a major violation of gay rights to get things going. This violation was provided by that perennial source of harassment—the U.S. Immigration Service. Nghula Volkering, who was vice-president of the Auckland University Students' Association, had applied for a United States Student Leadership Grant, which was refused when she stated that the reason for her application was her wish to study the Native American and gay liberation movements firsthand. She asked for the support of other lesbians and gay men in Auckland in her protest against the U.S. Embassy's action. Within three months gay liberation groups had been formed, not only in Auckland, but in two other cities as well.

Since its beginning, the gay movement in New Zealand has had to resist repressive government actions, such as anti-gay initiatives and the banning of gay literature which included the removal of 14 lesbian books from circulation. Much of the energy of New Zealand's gay movement has gone into preserving basic legal rights for gays. □

For more information:

- "off our backs," February 1981 and October 1981.
- "Bitches, Witches and Dykes," New Zealand lesbian publication, Box 68-570, Newton, Auckland, New Zealand.

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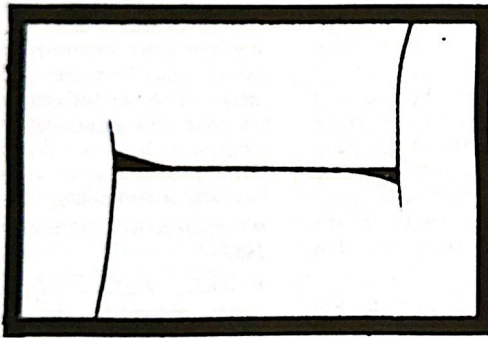
The Plastic Eroticism of Hilda Marón



(Excerpted from *Circulo Once*, an out-of-print Mexican lesbian journal, September 1979.)

This is the work of Hilda Marón, a Mexican artist based in San Luis Potosí—a city about 250 miles north of Mexico City. The following is taken from an interview with her by editors of *Circulo Once*.

"I began to paint eroticism because it is something that attracts me; it fulfills me completely. As a woman I realize myself in painting. I am conscious of expressing aggressiveness because the fact that a woman paints other women is aggressive for the "macho" world... My paintings don't include men because a man would break the straight line and mass of the paintings, so I offer the image of women.



Paintings by Hilda Marón

"I had the great fortune of having as my teacher Raúl Gamboa, who became aware of my tendency toward eroticism, and encouraged and distilled it.

"My work has been shown in several shows. Among them a show in the Center for Cultural Diffusion in San Luis Potosí where a painting of mine is on permanent exhibition. Another, and certainly very interesting, was a show with the painter Fantina de la Vega, who is a mystic artist. You can imagine the commotion that the exhibition caused, with painting after painting of Christ, The Virgin, etc, being juxtaposed with my erotic paintings! At another show in Querétaro a revolution broke out and we were thrown out, all of us from the critics to the audience. □

Brazil *continued from page 15*

46 years old, a widow. When she was between nine and eleven years of age, she had sexual relations many times with Micia de Lemos and Iris Barbosa, both her own age, and with Ana Fernandez, 13 years old. She never let the other two girls know about it when she had relations with one of them.

There was an elaborate circumlocution in describing sexual acts, a presumably standard practice among Catholic writers of the time. Sexual relations between members of the same sex were sometimes openly referred to as sodomy, but more often were called "the nefarious sin." The word "friendship" is used in the lesbian confessions to refer to lesbian affairs, as in the phrases "nefarious friendship" and "dishonest friendship." Euphemisms for erotic behavior predominate in all of the confessions, and no woman confessed to using an "instrument" or dildo. The words "nature" and "vessel" or "natural vessel" describe the clitoris and vagina.

All of the confessants "asked for pardon and mercy," promising to avoid such occasions of sin against nature. To be other than repentant was to invite execution, for the Inquisition in Portuguese Goa (India) burnt many gay people at the stake during this period. Indeed, the most striking thing about these confessions is the fact that everyone confessed to mortal sins, and yet Furtado gave all of the defendants "probation," a considerably easier sentence in comparison with Goa. □

Contact:

• Grupo Gay da Bahia, Caixa Postal 2552, 40.000, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

Circulo Once

International Lesbian Conference Focus on Autonomy

(Translated from *CLIT 007 (Concours Lesbien irrésistiblement toxique)*, lesbian quarterly, Geneva. The article was written by a Swiss lesbian who had attended the conference.)

At the first International Lesbian Information Service (ILIS) Conference in Amsterdam in January, 1981, it was decided to hold a second conference in Turin at Easter. Why a second conference so soon after the first? Because the annual mixed International Gay Association (IGA) conference had been scheduled for that date, and the lesbians wanted to meet separately before the mixed conference—first, to develop a common position before meeting together with the men, and second, and most importantly, because many lesbian feminists and/or separatists did not want to attend the mixed conference. Also, there was a strong need to see each other again, and to renew the contacts made in Amsterdam. (ILIS started out as the International Lesbian Information Secretariat of the IGA, and remained a division of the IGA until the end of the Turin Conference.) In Turin, the women of *Fuori* (an Italian gay organization) had accepted the responsibility for organizing the conference. They managed to get a grant partially subsidizing the conference from the Turin City Council, who also provided interpreters.

On Wednesday, April 15, some 200 women (ILIS reports 400 attended) showed up for the first general meeting at the Women's Center. The Italian lesbians, who formed the large majority, set the tone immediately: they explained that they had walked out of the Turin branch of *Fuori* a few weeks before. They no longer wanted to work with gay men, and they want ILIS to separate from the mixed IGA. They felt that collaboration with men always ends up to our disadvantage. For instance, we received no funding from the IGA for the ILIS conference, which, moreover, had to be held during the week, since the IGA had monopolized all of the long Easter weekend. This meant that working women could not attend.

This was to be the central discussion of the second conference. The desire for greater autonomy for ILIS had already been expressed at Amsterdam. There, a flexible formula had been adopted: "ILIS will continue to be part of the IGA, but will maintain its autonomy of decision on all issues affecting lesbians and women."

But, by the time we got to Turin, it had become clear that this wasn't enough. The majority of the women present wanted to have an autonomous lesbian organization. The final Friday evening plenary session was the scene of a long and sometimes very violent discussion. The women from Amsterdam, currently responsible for the ILIS secretariat, were reticent about leaving the IGA. They felt we did not yet have the resources to take up such organization on our own. But, given the separatist determination of the majority of women present, a compromise was reached: the ILIS secretariat would remain in Amsterdam for another year (no other country was either willing or able to take over); the principle of an autonomous organization was accepted, but only on condition that the groups from each country support ILIS financially and send information in regularly. If enough support did not come through, the Amsterdam secretariat would review its position in six months.

The conference itself was rather chaotic. The organizers were somewhat overwhelmed: the premises were too small; schedules were not respected; and discussions were poorly led. Several workshops were offered: *Racism and Classism in Lesbianism*, led by U.S. women, white and of color; *ILIS Structure*, mainly attended by women from mixed organizations, and a little cut off from the rest of the conference—the decisions made here were completely changed at the final plenary session; *Pedophilia*, led by Dutch women on the problems of relationships with minors and repressive laws in different countries; *Lesbianism and Sado-Masochism*, led by a Dutch group; and *Lesbian Mothers*, on child custody, artificial insemination networks for lesbians in California, Sweden and England. The workshop proposed by the Italian hosts, *What Does It Mean to Love a Woman: What is the Lesbian Lifestyle?*, was the most popular, gravitating around a consciousness-raising group of some 50 to 100 women with the eternal, "When I was little I looked like a boy..." and some political interventions from the Parisians of the Radical Lesbian Front.

On the whole, the three days allowed a multitude of exchanges, with the issue of lesbian identity being the central discussion. But while it seems that these discussions enabled many lesbians to better define and strengthen their own identities, we were

still unable this time around to clarify the identity and especially the political goals of the lesbian movement. Few dared to deal with theoretical areas and few ideas for confronting the heterocratic society were presented. There was a general reticence, through fear or lack of desire, to enter into political discussions.

It was a pity that no workshops were scheduled in which the different groups could introduce themselves, exchange specific information on work done, on the problems faced and the social and legal situations of lesbians in each country. Nevertheless, an international conference with representatives from each country in the western world is an extraordinary event. It was indeed a pity that, under the slogan of "No Leadership," better use was not made of this occasion. □

UPDATE The ILIS secretariat has been moved from Amsterdam to Helsinki, Finland. The Amsterdam women remain in charge of the IGA women's secretariat. ILIS publishes a newsletter, *The Cheap Stencil Service*, and they are anxious to receive news, information and donations. (Several articles in this issue of *Connexions* are the result of leads received from the ILIS newsletter.) The third ILIS conference took place December 30 to January 3 (1981-82) in Antwerp, Belgium. ■



Contact:

• ILIS, PL 45 SF-00251, Helsinki 25, Finland.

For more information:

• "Connexions," issue 0, report on the first ILIS conference, May 1981.

France

Political Lesbianism - The Battle Rages

The tensions between lesbians and heterosexual feminists that have been smoldering in Europe since the beginning of the feminist movement have recently come to a head in several countries. At the heart of the battle is the conflict between those lesbians who demand recognition for the political significance of lesbianism and those heterofeminists (and a portion of the lesbians within the feminist movement) who refuse to view lesbianism as anything more than personal sexual preference. The conflict is exacerbated by the longstanding invisibility of lesbians in their feminist movements—lack of support and especially lack of recognition for the essential role they played in the creation and the keeping alive of those movements. The controversy over political lesbianism has become a major issue for lesbians in Europe and has resulted in the formation of several radical lesbian movements.

Below are extracts from an article written by members of the French "Radical Lesbian Front." While it specifically deals with certain historical developments in France, the analysis presented in it reflects much of that existing in many European countries.

(Translated from an article by members of the Radical Lesbian Front, published in *Masques*, a mixed gay quarterly theoretical journal, Fall 1981. The introduction below summarizes the first part of the article, remaining as faithful as possible to the authors' analysis. The rest is a direct translation.)

SUMMARY

The nature of the feminist movement in France has made it extremely difficult for lesbian-feminists to integrate their political struggles as women and as lesbians into one movement. Early activism against the heterosexual norm, while initiated by lesbians, took place within the context of a mixed gay movement.

The feminist movement, marked by the leftist emphasis on the "liberation of the masses," relegated critiques of the institution of heterosexuality to second place, while promoting heterosexual demands for contraception and abortion. Early attempts at forming a lesbian movement met with strong opposition and were effectively stifled.

Some of the lesbians active in the mixed gay movement left when they began to feel the contradictions of working with

men through the "realization that social relations between men and women are ones of economic, political, judicial, ideological power—separating humanity into two sex classes with antagonistic interests; no woman—whether married or not—can live outside of her sex class."

These women joined others to form specifically lesbian-feminist groups (for example, *Gouines Rouges*, Red Dykes, in 1972). In 1974, the International Lesbian Front was created at an International Feminist Conference in Frankfurt, West Germany. The following year, several hundred lesbians gathered for the first meeting of the Front in Amsterdam. But they were unable to continue the movement in France, where opposition from other lesbians in the feminist movement, who claimed that they did not want to "cut ourselves off from the masses," was too strong. Within the feminist movement, homosexuality came to be seen as a "right to be different," and lesbianism was defined as a "lifestyle," with feminism as the political commitment.

"Radical lesbianism is not a 'sexual preference' nor simply 'to like living with women'. It is a decisive political choice that implies an analysis of the relations of exploitation and oppression that exist between two sex classes with antagonistic interests...The lesbian choice is a *mobilization in a visible collective movement*."

(Radical Lesbians of *Questions Féministes*)

— Lesbianism is the refusal of the power relationship imposed on women by men and a concrete acting out in daily life of this refusal of both the private and the collective appropriation of women by men.

— This refusal concerns an institution that is oppressive for all women, and not an "attraction," an "impulse," or a "sexuality," nor is it against biological men. Heterosexuality, like all things, is historical and social; it is the means that the class of men have used to force the class of women to submit to material relations of oppression and to see these as inevitable.

Collective for a Lesbian Front, March 7-8, 1981)

TRANSLATION

The reemergence of radical lesbian groups in 1979 was led by those lesbians who perceived the contradictions between radical feminist analysis and strategies—the gap between, on the one hand, the collec-

tive realization that the relationship between men and women is indeed a class relationship (one of exploitation and appropriation) and, on the other, the legalistic, reformist aspects of current feminist demands and the concomitant giving up of all offensive action.

They saw feminism as de-radicalizing itself, returning to the question of the defense of the political rights of oppressed peoples "in general," as if women in their struggle for liberation did not encompass all the generalities of humanity as a whole, as if they were not able to define their own politics other than by stepping into line with the political as defined by men in the interests, however contradictory these may be, of the male half of humanity.

Early in 1980, an article by Monique Wittig criticizing the heterosexual norm and giving lesbianism its political meaning appeared in the radical feminist journal *Questions Féministes*. [*Questions Féministes* has ceased publication due largely to a split within the collective over radical lesbian politics.] Then came the counterattack, claiming heterosexuality as a "private" terrain of struggle. The opposition of the radical lesbians crystallized under this counterattack...They [radical lesbians] modified the terminology of "classical" feminist analysis: in the definition of the word "woman," they included the notions of "collaboration" and "resistance" in the face of oppression; from the definition of the word "man," they excluded the idea that certain individuals were not really oppressors, or could have the peculiarity of not altogether belonging to the class of men. "A man is a man; all men are rapists," is a slogan used by the radical lesbians to make it clear that every man, whoever he may be, benefits from the relationship of physical and mental violence that maintains the servitude of women. Women do not share any "common" or "general" interest with men.

The lesbians from within the movement are reasserting the existence of a war between the sexes that has, up to now, been camouflaged under the so-called "specific problems" of women (contraception, rape, abortion). The heterosexuality which created these "problems" for women—constraints against which they are fighting—is not only a "form of sexuality" prescribed by men, it constitutes the most effective strategy used by men to maintain their power over women...But, by politicizing homosexuality, the radical lesbians

assert that it is not a matter of "sexual specificity" or a "particular lifestyle," because their choice of living objectively endangers the appropriation of women's energy by men and the benefits men reap from this. Those terms belong to the dominant discourse that "explains" homosexuality, specifying, particularizing, discriminating against, and oppressing lesbians and rejecting them in the name of some bodily abnormality.

On the contrary, their homosexuality is, they say, a logical choice of a way of life made by women who refuse private appropriation by men and who refuse, inasmuch as is possible, to contribute to the benefits which the class of men reap from the collective appropriation of women (exploitation of women in the extended family, in the workplace, in activism, in public places). This choice of freedom will only be effective for all women if those forces which are currently being drained in individual struggles are concentrated, together with the collective forces united by

the feminist movement, in an offensive movement of resistance, without concessions to the principal enemy: not "biological man" but the class of men, the oppressor class.

In these struggles, the split woman/lesbian disappears for lesbians: from now on, their lesbianism can be asserted as a subversive tactic of resistance in a visible collective movement designed to destroy the relationships of the material and psychological oppression of all women. Lesbianism, a radical refusal of all collaboration with the class of men, is the form of resistance to which all feminists, all women, are called.

[The new radical lesbian movement made its first public appearance in 1980, at the International Women's Day parade, then at a lesbian demonstration held in Paris in that June. In 1981, they refused to join in the March 8 parade, enjoining feminists to combat heterosexual power, the patriarchy, rather than "Giscard's government" that was the major target of

the feminist parade. An appeal for the creation of a Radical Lesbian Front was circulated at a feminist event the following day. The Front—an umbrella organization of various lesbian groups and individuals—held a planning meeting in April, and has since held two national meetings (June and November 1981.)] □

For more information:

- "Feminist Issues," journal of feminist social and political theory, often includes translated articles from "Questions Féministes" including 'The Straight Mind' and 'One is Not Born a Woman' by Monique Wittig.

- "Love your enemy?" British pamphlet on political lesbianism, Onlywomen Press, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1F 0AP, England.

Contact:

- Front Lesbien, c/o Les mots à la bouche, 35 Rue Simart, 75018 Paris, France.

Behind Bars

(Sources: *Clit 007*, Swiss lesbian quarterly and *Gai Pied*, French gay male monthly.)

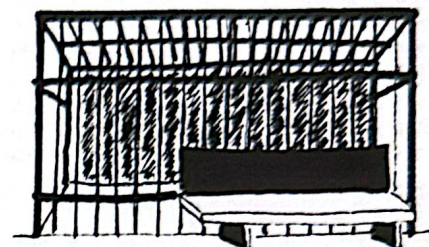
Huguette Verbruggen, a 37-year-old Flemish-Belgian lesbian, has lived behind bars in France since 1978. Officially sentenced for using false documents, she has been harassed by the prison administration for political agitation and open lesbianism.

According to Huguette, there is little homosexuality inside, since it is repressed in all the prisons to differing degrees. There are rare exceptions—gay women who remain faithful to their sexuality, despite the risks. Those couples that form do so in strictest secrecy, always in danger of separation. When a lesbian couple is incarcerated, they are systematically separated. Visitors' permits are often denied to a prisoner's lover. In one prison, lesbians are grouped in the 'S' block—S for special—where they have no contact with other women. In other prisons, conditions vary, but sexual intimacy is forbidden everywhere.

A Paris poetry journal has devoted an entire issue to Huguette Verbruggen's poetry. The following is an extract of one of her poems.

shaken in the van
that is transferring me
handcuffed
to another stone horizon
my thoughts fly
to my companions in misfortune

to those women who will see
the outside of these walls
in 10 years
in 20 years
or never again
to those women
with whom I have shared
absurdity, misery, insubordination,
hatred and revolt
my thoughts fly
to the woman
I love



and who I am leaving behind
in that inhuman universe
built on the destruction
of the individual
of the woman

my body is going elsewhere
but my bleeding heart
and my tortured spirit
attached by bonds
far stronger
than these chains
at my wrist
stay with you
my friends
and with you
my love.

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A Monthly Feminist News Journal

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1724 GAYLORD ST
DENVER, CO. 80204

Holland

Old Dykes Home

(Translated from *Serpentine*, Dutch feminist monthly, November 1980.)

In the beginning of 1980, Roze Rimpel (Pink Wrinkle) polled 120 members of the COC (Dutch gay organization) on whether they thought gay people were discriminated against in old age homes. Ninety of the responses revealed that integration into existing homes was not possible. A study conducted in conjunction with the poll, found there is little room for a gay person who is "out" in old age homes, and in fact, many gays who have been together for years are not allowed to live together when they enter a home.

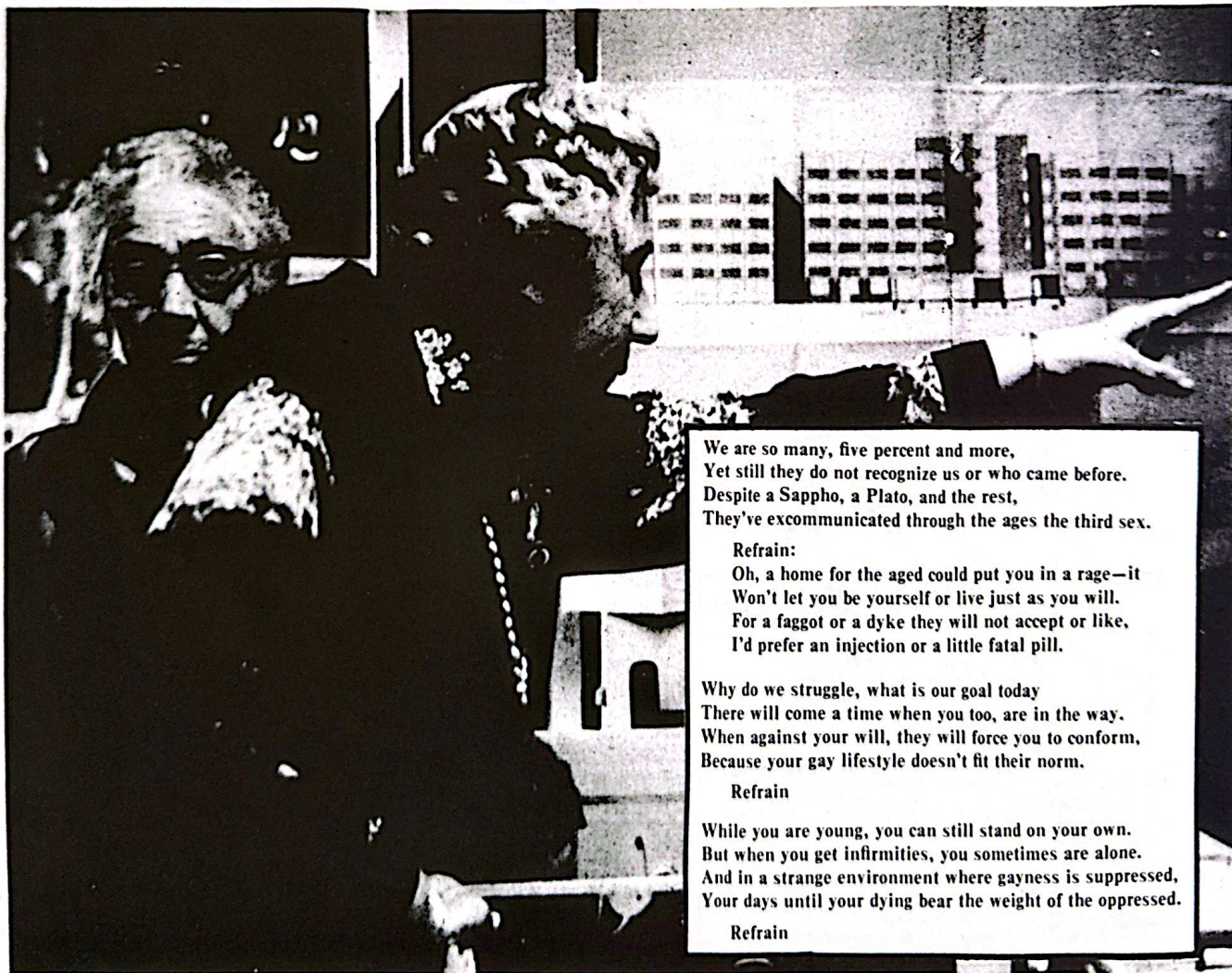
The result of this study struck Stephanie Becude, a 60 year old lesbian musician, reminding her of her own experi-

ence. "Three years ago, a very dear friend of mine was dying. She lay in one of those rooms in an old age home. I couldn't even sit and talk with her there since there was always some woman nearby eavesdropping. What do you do when a good friend is on the brink of death? You hold her hand, don't you, and say, 'Dearest, do you need anything?' That's perfectly normal, isn't it? And then you hear them whispering at the other end of the room, 'That's her fiancé. Better late than never.' Well, after that experience I realized that I don't want to be spied on in my old age.

"I have no desire to crawl back into the closet when I'm old. That's why we must have old age homes for gay men and lesbians, together or separate. As far as I'm

concerned, I would prefer to have separate homes because a gay guy is still a different thing than a gay gal. I suspect that if you are with older women in your old age, we would find it more peaceful, cosier, than if men were around."

Stephanie Becude's experience, and the result of the study, inspired her to write a song to convince people of the need for a lesbian old age home. "I think young people should also start thinking about homes for the aged and start doing something about it. That's why I wrote this song—to motivate people. I made the song sound sociable, so everyone could sing along. I wrote the lyrics, gave it a nice melody, and now everyone in my house sings it all day long." □



We are so many, five percent and more,
Yet still they do not recognize us or who came before.
Despite a Sappho, a Plato, and the rest,
They've excommunicated through the ages the third sex.

Refrain:

Oh, a home for the aged could put you in a rage—it
Won't let you be yourself or live just as you will.
For a faggot or a dyke they will not accept or like,
I'd prefer an injection or a little fatal pill.

Why do we struggle, what is our goal today
There will come a time when you too, are in the way.
When against your will, they will force you to conform,
Because your gay lifestyle doesn't fit their norm.

Refrain

While you are young, you can still stand on your own.
But when you get infirmities, you sometimes are alone.
And in a strange environment where gayness is suppressed,
Your days until your dying bear the weight of the oppressed.

Refrain

Serpentine

By airmail
Par avion

Connexions

4228 Telegraph Avenue
Oakland, CA 94609
USA

Dear friends,

We are a group of women in Germany and other countries who like to travel and are interested in making it easier for women to travel alone (i.e. without men). For too long women have had to travel in a restricted capacity, simply because they are women. We want to change this situation to make it possible for women to travel without men, and with confidence.

Each woman-member is given a directory of names and addresses of other women who are prepared to offer information and accommodation (max. 2-3 days) to herself, female travelling companion and for children travelling with them.

Women who want to join must make a reciprocal offer. It is up to you to decide how many people you can accommodate comfortably in your house, whether or not you are prepared to accept children. It is usual to write or phone at least 2-3 weeks in advance of a visit. The option to say "no" to accommodation is open, but we hope you can try to offer an alternative. Membership costs one pound.

Our long-term aim is to have a directory for each country with one main contact address in each country. As long as there is no similar group in the U.S., we offer individual membership in our group (please send a "coupon-response international" for an application form). More importantly we would like to find one woman (or a group of women) who is willing to spread the idea and put together a list for the U.S. If such a person exists please contact us. If a similar group is already functioning, we would like to be in contact with you.

Our modest aim is to spread the idea all over the world! Hoping to hear from you.

Yours in sisterhood,
Angelika
International Feminist Accommodation
Network
Schlehdorn 4
6300 Giessen, West Germany

Puebla, Mexico

10 August 1981

Dear *Connexions*,

Here in Puebla, lesbians and homosexuals marched for the first time last May Day. (In Mexico City, every year on June 27, there is a Gay Pride March.)...I am 21 years old and in the first semester of junior college. Before I was at the teachers' college, but I had problems due to politics. (I am a leftist and am active in the Mexican Communist Party.) Presently, I am also working because my parents no longer send me money. My work is also somewhat unusual for a woman. I work in a wrought-iron shop where I make all kinds of things, doors, tables, showcases, plant stands, anything that relates to soldering and ironwork. The shop belongs to a friend, and they pay me well, but I am going to change to a kind of work that fascinates me and about which I have some knowledge, which is working in a motorcycle mechanics garage. Then I will also have time to go to school. I would like to finish so that I can study physics, but here in Mexico it is very difficult to work and study. You do one or the other.

Actually, my life is rather boring. I know lesbians in Mexico City, but it is almost impossible for me to see them. There are a fair number of lesbians here, but a lot of them are very closeted, and it is still difficult to see each other. Sometimes we get together on the weekends and organize parties just for homosexuals. I don't enjoy going to heterosexual parties any more. It used to be the only diversion that we had, but now I enjoy myself more.

I live with two homosexuals, Gaspar and Felipe, my great friends and comrades. I am familiar with the magazine *Fem*, and it seems to me a magazine of great relevance in Mexico. It discusses our problems in a very real and objective way, and besides, the people that write for it are leftists, most of them anyway. To me it is one of the best feminist magazines in the whole country and can be compared with others in the world.

I would like you to tell me what you think of the Mexican left, your opinion of *Fem*, what is your favorite pastime—do you like motorcycles because they fascinate me.

Fraternally,
Lupe, Gaspar and Felipe

Dear Sisters,

I have found your review very interesting. I think that your international view is a good contribution to the women's movement here in the U.S., and around the world.

The women's movement in Europe has had a tendency toward demobilization since 1975. Demoralization on the one hand, and reorganization of the various groups to include working class women on the other, impeded them from being as active as before. However, a few months ago the women of Switzerland won their own ERA and in the other European countries they are still fighting to defend their interests and what they gained in the past.

I have been active in the women's movement in Switzerland. I have been in the U.S. for one year, and I am planning to stay for one more year. I am also correspondent for a few leftist and feminist newspapers in France and Switzerland (Geneva).

I am writing to ask you if you would permit me to translate the interview of the Cuban woman which you published in the last issue (Fall 1981, #2). I would like to have it published in a French feminist review called *Cahiers du féminisme*, and eventually in a leftist newspaper in Switzerland called *La Brèche*.

I would be very pleased if you were to agree to this because I find this article very relevant to the problem of Cuban emigration and to the question of homosexuality in a socialist country. I feel that it is very important for these issues to be discussed.

Feminist salutations,
Françoise
California

Dear Sisters at *Connexions*,

I am writing on behalf of the Feminist Newspaper Group to ask if you can help us in any way. We are a group of women intending to launch what will eventually be a weekly feminist newspaper containing news and information with a very strong Third World bias. We want to break the insularity of the feminist press in this country. Consequently, we will be reporting on international events, as well as national events and activities, with a strong pro-woman and pro-third world woman/black woman perspective.

We are a racially mixed collective and hope that the editorial "board" will comprise at least 50% of black women. What we would like to ask for is a list of contacts you may have with women's groups in third world countries, any news service agencies, etc., from the U.S. and elsewhere. Also, if you could further refer us to any organizations that may be of use to the newspaper, we would be very grateful.

In sisterhood,
Shaila Shah
Feminist Newspaper Group
A Woman's Place
48 William IV St.
London WC2, England

Resources

Body Politic

A magazine for gay liberation
Box 7298, Stn. F
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M4Y 2N9

Manushi

Indian feminist bi-monthly
available in English and Hindi
C-1/202 Lajpat Nagar I
New Delhi 110024, India

Chana com Chana

Brazilian lesbian-feminist publication
Caixa Postal 293
São Paulo, S.P.,
Brazil

Mulherio

Brazilian feminist monthly
Fundação Carlos Chagas
Av. Prof. Francisco Morato, 1565
CEP 05513
São Paulo, S.P., Brazil

Clit 007

Swiss lesbian quarterly
Centre Femmes
5, Bvd. Saint-Georges
1205-Geneva, Switzerland

Paz y Liberation

U.S.-based Latin American
gay newsletter
P.O. Box 2283
Los Angeles, CA 90028

Courage

West German feminist monthly
Bleibtreustrasse 48
1000 Berlin 12, West Germany
030/883 65 29/69

Quotidiano Donna

Italian feminist weekly
Via del Governo Vecchio 39
Rome, Italy

fem

Mexican feminist bi-monthly
Av. Mexico No. 76-1
Col. Progreso Tizapan
Mexico 20, D.F., Mexico
548 83 42

Serpentine

Dutch feminist monthly
Postbus 15426
1001 MK Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Gay Community News

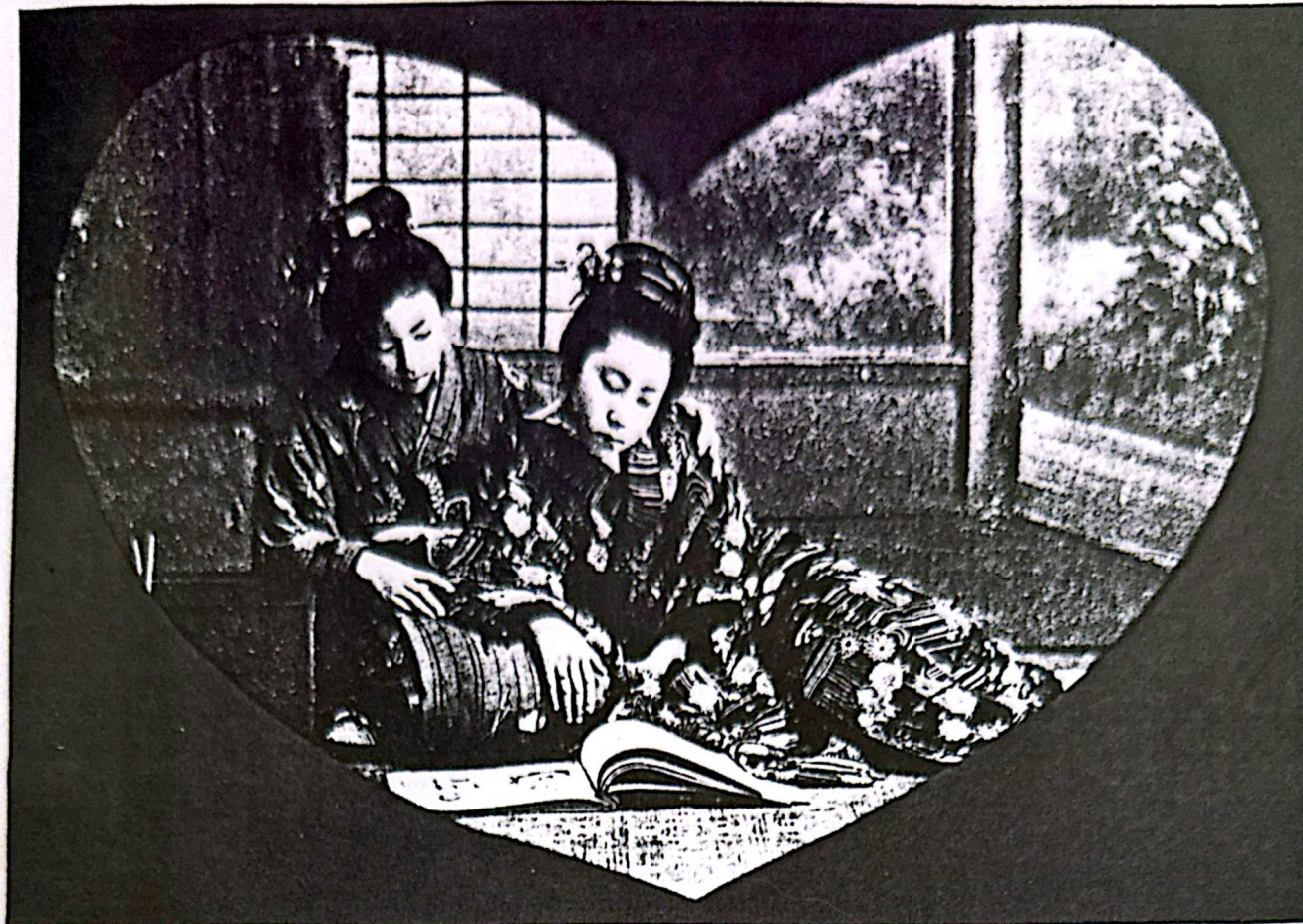
Weekly for lesbians and gay males
22 Bromfield St.
Boston, MA 02108

Spare Rib

British feminist monthly
27 Clerkenwell Close
London EC1R 0AT, England
01/253 9792/3

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Front Cover: Snapshot of Indian women from family album. Back Cover: Young German women (*Courage*)

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Front cover: Young German Women/ Courage

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