

Connections

An International Women's Quarterly
Winter 1986, No. 19

**Women's Movements:
Thoughts into Action**



Mabel Mao

At the Encontro in São Paulo, Brazil.

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Special Thanks to:

Africa Resource Center, Susan Alexander, Sheila Block, Cathie Dunsford, Sergy Floro, Ruth Frankenberg, Maude Gleis, Nina Haft, Ilana, Anne Larson, Kathy Mahoney, Mark Manzione, Lowell R. Marks, Vibhuti Patel, Philippine Resource Center, Rahai, Makeda Silvera.

Statement

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 writing 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 working 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 a quarterly and each issue focuses on a specific theme. *Connexions* is published by Peoples Translation Service, 4228 Telegraph Avenue, Oakland, CA 94609. Subscription rates are \$12 per year; Canada and Mexico US\$14; Overseas—US\$14 surface, US\$20 airmail. An annual institutional subscription is \$24.

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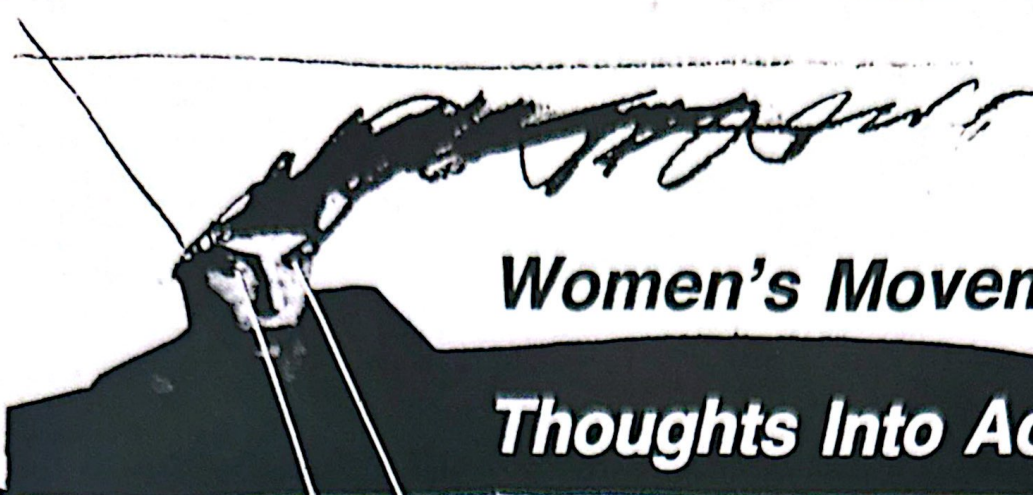
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Women's Movements: Thoughts Into Actions

To a large degree, women's political, cultural and economic situations define their priorities and strategies for organizing. Although women's priorities do differ around the world, some of the fundamental struggles that women have been and are presently engaged in have points in common. These factors are reflected in the diversity of articles included in this issue. Two common themes which emerge here are the need for autonomous organizations that have links to other social movements, and the conflicts caused by divisions of race, class, sexuality, religion and ethnicity.

The direction and visibility of women's organizations, their bases of support and the issues they focus on are determined by their current economic and political situations. In order to understand women's movements around the world, we must be aware of their overall political context, both historical and contemporary. The account of GABRIELA, the Filipino group, shows that the legacy of women organizing as well as the current surge in popular political participation have contributed to the rapid growth of this broad-based organization.

Women's organizations are constantly challenged to strike a balance between necessary autonomy and maintaining links with other social movements. Women in many countries have participated actively in the advancement of "a greater cause" only to be pushed back into their homes when the smoke clears and a particular goal has been reached. While many women have acquired political knowledge and experience from political struggles, the limits of women's power in such situations are being challenged by strong women's organizations within established movements and by the awakening of autonomous women's movements.

A major priority for many women's organizations is establishing a broad base and constructing organizations so that they can include women from diverse backgrounds. In some cases this is an immediate concern. For instance in India, one of the first issues taken up by the contemporary women's movement was women's fight against rape. This issue, which crossed over the divisions between women created by differences in class, race, language and religion was of urgent importance to all women.

A universal issue like rape can unify women from different backgrounds, but it cannot resolve their conflicts with each other. Racism, a conflict that is quite often avoided, has only recently begun to be addressed adequately in the feminist press. Such an issue challenges the notion of universal sisterhood, and women concerned with the future of the women's movement must confront it.

The structure of women's organizations is of particular importance to women who have been previously involved in strictly hierarchical parties or groups. And, again, social and cultural standards for groups and individuals affect the limits and directions of group dynamics. For instance, the premium on individuality in Western societies is a stumbling block for women whose goal it is to work collectively.

Although women's access to media and communication is still limited, a breakthrough in women's networking both regionally and internationally is occurring. *Connexions'* expanded resource list is testimony to the rapid increase of women in publishing and other media. The number of participants at the three Forums held in connection with the UN Decade for Women, from 6,000 in Mexico City in 1975 to over 13,000 from around the world who gathered in Nairobi last July, also indicates the broadening of women's organizations around the world and their ability and desire to share experiences and information. With greater understanding of how the world works and the expanded availability of information about women's lives and organizations, we can begin to build an international network of support among women.

The Limits of Sisterhood Canada

In the spring of 1983, *Fireweed*, a Canadian feminist quarterly, turned its editorial board over to a group of women of color who produced an issue which focused on the lives of immigrant and non-immigrant women of color in Canada. What follows are excerpts from the guest collective's discussion—which appeared in two parts, Spring 1983 and Summer/Fall 1983—on what it means to live in a racist, classist society. Speaking are Makeda Silvera, Dionne Brand, Himani Bannerji, Prabha Khosla, Nila Gupta and Lillian Allen.

Makeda: A couple of nights ago I was waiting for the train and this drunk guy, big redneck, came up and started shouting, "Bitch! Bitch!" There was me and two other guys waiting for a train and he's shouting out "Bitch! Bitch!" I'm really frightened because this guy is really big and I'm wondering what would happen if he came up and attacked me physically. What was I going to do? This white woman walks up on the platform and he starts up again. We kind of look at each other in solidarity and I feel less scared because at least there is another woman. But then, this drunk started calling out, "Nigger! Nigger!" and looking directly at me. And that woman, she just looked right through me and there wasn't that solidarity, any more. It was frightening. I didn't know what to do. I was angry, I was filled with rage, I wanted to attack the man, I wanted to cry, and suddenly I felt embarrassed.

Himani: So, when he was calling you "bitch," she was ready to relate to you. But as soon as your race came into focus, she too went over to the other side and didn't identify with you any more. In one sense, this shows how the women's movement in Canada is mainstream and does not seek to identify with women of colour.

Dionne: [The white women's movement] doesn't address the issues that concern women of colour.

Himani: Take, for example, the book *Still Ain't Satisfied! Canadian Feminism Today* (Women's Press, 1982). It claims to anthologize the experience of women in the movement for the last ten years in Canada, but actually leaves women of colour and immigrant women under-represented. We are invisible in the mainstream. And there is talk about "coming from the women's perspective, coming from the women's standpoint." To me, this standpoint seems empty because I don't know who this woman is that they are talking about.

Dionne: In *Immigrant Housewives in Canada: A Report* (sponsored by Immigrant Women's Centre, 1981), they link the struggle of the immigrant woman to her struggle in the house, to the husband taking away her right to speak and so on, which is bullshit. If one were to identify [the struggles of] immigrant women, black women, and women of colour in relation to domestic work in the home, it would perhaps represent 25 per cent. The other 75 per cent would be...

Prabha: ...struggles of living within this society.

Himani: They are always saying—and I think *Immigrant Housewives in Canada* is a good example of it—that immigrant women are silent. I don't think that immigrant women are silent. You appear silent to people who are deaf to what you say.

Prabha: They have their own idea of what we should be saying, and until we say those things they pretend to be deaf.

Himani: So, if you don't say that, then as far as they're concerned, you're not saying anything.

Dionne: As a matter of fact, I think they like to think that we're not "saying" anything. They like us to join with them and struggle with them—but just as a symbol. We don't even have to say anything. It's worth it to them if we are completely illiterate or at least appear that way. You don't have to say anything as long as they can get a few women of colour and immigrant women out to a demonstration. That's wonderful, because symbolically we represent some kind of radical idea.



After shopping, Saturday afternoon in 1974.

Prabha: A lot of the women in the women's movement are fairly well-educated and have a university education, so they have writing skills. Because we don't write, they cannot read our articles, and they figure that we don't have experience, or that we don't exist as coloured women who are actively organised.

Makeda: There are many of us who write, they just don't want to read it; they don't want to publish it. Reading and publishing our work would definitely force white women to look at themselves, at racism and what has been laid on us for years. Instead, the big issue is how patriarchal our culture is and how male-identified women of colour and immigrant women are. We are labelled male-identified every time we talk about struggling with Third World men to end racism and imperialism. This view of the world and the relationship of peoples in the world is certainly not compatible with mine.

Dionne: Any immigrant woman/woman of colour analysing her situation in the world has to analyse it beyond the point of being a woman, because there are other people who are in the same condition and some of them are men. We cannot analyse the world as though men of colour are not oppressed, too. That way of analysing the world gives us no way out of our situation.

I think there would be a place for serious struggle if there was a class analysis and if that analysis was based on real issues, on the real way you live. If there isn't, and you just organize as women—middle class, upper class and poor women alike—then those various interests are never going to form a coherent voice because our economic conditions will never be addressed.

If you accept the state as it is, then you go after your rights in little bits; and you leave the state intact merely by saying, "If you give me this reparation here and that reparation there, then it will be o.k." But if you do that, you don't attack the whole framework, which is a class framework.

Himani: If they are going to have a woman's perspective, divorced from a class or a socialist perspective, then we're going to have to fight them, too. It's like apartheid in South Africa—you fight against apartheid, not just the men in South Africa.

Dionne: But how does a women's movement fight in a place like South Africa?

Prabha: There isn't a women's movement. There are white women's organizations like Black Sash. They've done some good work in their capacity as white women, but there is not a Black women's organization as such. The word "feminism" is not identifiable even though there are a lot of women struggling whom we would call feminist because of how they operate in society. Political organizations do have women's caucuses—but you can't organize in that society on a separated basis. You're too worried about bread and butter issues. How can you fight for women's rights alone in a society where nobody who is Black has any rights at all?

Himani: I think we have a more complex situation than white women because we fight with one hand tied behind our backs. We feel attacked by the society at large. At times, this makes it very hard for us to turn our men over to a society which is whipping us all so that they can be whipped even further. Yet, at home we have horrible relationships. These men not only have patriarchal values, but they take the pressures of society out on us. So we are holding two social positions that are oppressive. We pay for someone else's being kicked around and we get kicked around ourselves. At the same time, we can't politically hand people over from our community to other people to be punished. When you are in your own society where there is no question of racism or imperialism between the two sexes, then you can freely fight patriarchy. But here, our fight with patriarchy is compounded with the issue of racism. The women's movement here is unable historically to state that position, because it isn't their headache—except that politically, in an intellectual sense of the word, it's a moral commitment. At home, when they fight a white man, they don't fight imperialism.

But I think that we have been part of a movement which is called the women's movement—it needs no organised membership. But to organise for them means to organise in a certain way, to speak for them means to speak in a certain language. Organisations mean a certain set of procedures, and so on. I think we are squeezed out because we don't know how to use the liberal apparatus.



Ruby Campbell and Makeda Silvera in the front lines at the African Liberation Day March, 1975.

Makeda: We are people of colour and we remain foreigners, even after being in this country for over fifteen or twenty years.

Prabha: So, what are we going to do with a women's movement that is mostly white?

Makeda: We don't want them to speak for us. What do they know about our oppression? I'm saying that they *do* have a responsibility if they claim that they are feminist and political. They have to struggle on all levels and *not* just around what is of primary concern to them. I am saying that they have to take responsibility for their white skin privilege, take responsibility for the power they wield in this society. Do we have a women's press? Can we publish our own stuff? Who controls the women's presses? Isn't it white women who claim to be feminist and "politically correct"? Well, if that is so, then they have a responsibility to work to create a new vision of the world which includes women of colour.

Prabha: But what is our role? Are we going to work in our own structure, in our communities and at some point will this women of colour/immigrant women's movement meet with the white women's movement and hash it out?

Lillian: I think that they benefit objectively from our oppression.

Dionne: You're damn right.

Lillian: And they have to be called on that, they have to struggle with that. □

Further Readings:

- *The Heart of the Race* by Beverly Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scale, Virago Press, London, 1985.
- "White Women, Listen! Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood," in *The Empire Strikes Back, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Hutchinson, London, 1982.*
- *Women, Race and Class* by Angela Davis, Random House, New York, 1981.
- *Ain't I a Woman and From Margin to Center* by Bell Hooks, South End Press, Boston, 1981.
- *Home Girls, A Black Feminist Anthology* edited by Barbara Smith, Kitchen Table—Women of Color Press, 1983.
- *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, Persephone Press, 1981.
- *Feminist Review* #17—Many Voices, One Chant—Black Feminist Perspectives, Autumn 1984, 11 Carleton Gardens, Brecknock Road, London N195AQ, England, US\$7.00.
- *Radical America: Voices of Black Feminism Vol. 18, Nos. 2-3.*
- *Silenced, interview with West Indian women working in Canada*, by Makeda Silvera, Wallace Williams publisher. Distribution in US by Kitchen Table Press.

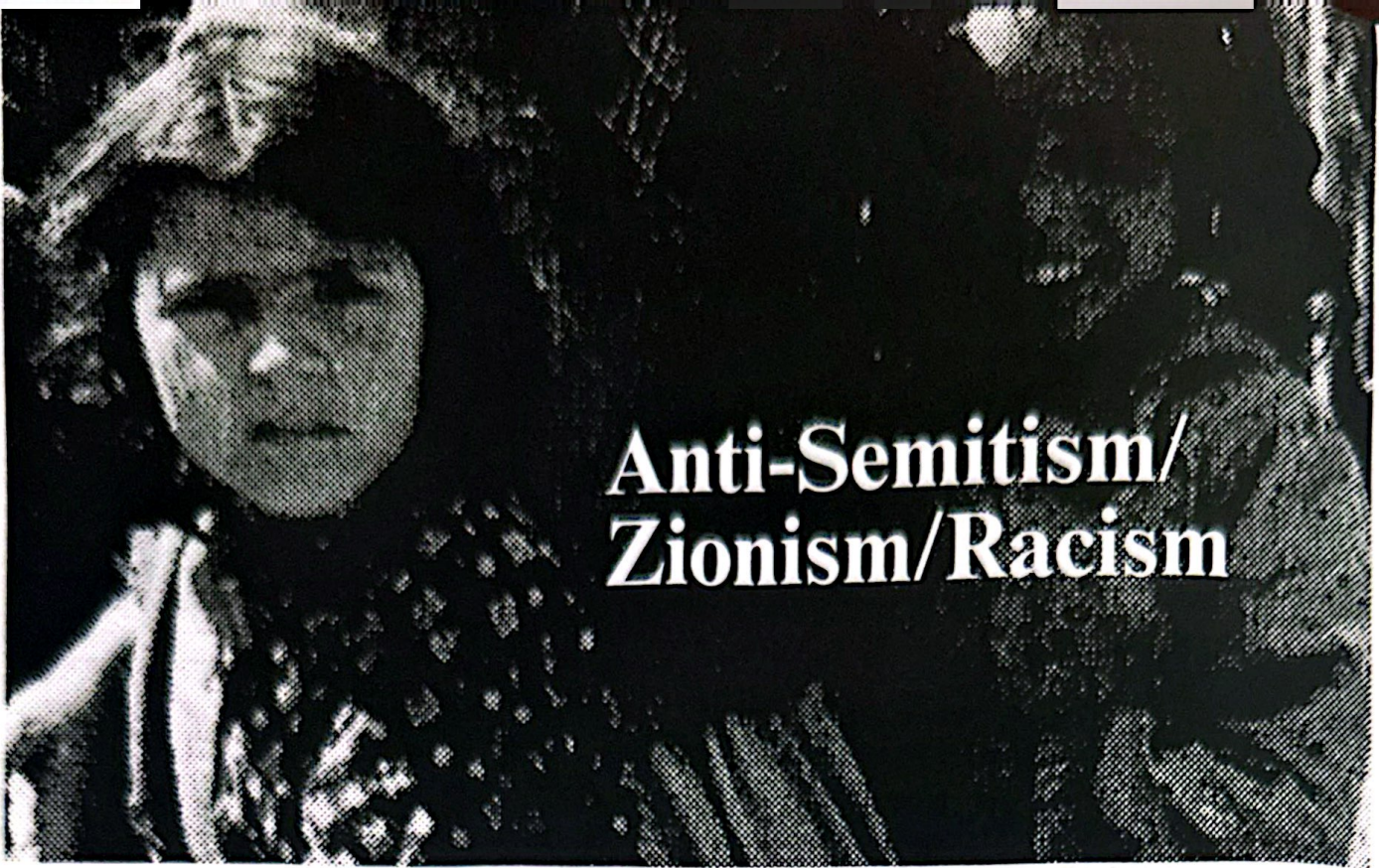
Publishing Houses:

- *Kitchen Table—Women of Color Press*, Box 2753, New York, NY 10185.
- *Black Womanstalk*, P.O. Box 222, London N1 2YL, England.
- *Sister Vision: Black Women and Women of Colour Press*, Box 217, Station E, Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E2, Canada.

Contact:

- *Third World Women's Archives*, P.O. Box 159 Bush Terminal Station, Brooklyn, New York, 11232.

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Anti-Semitism/ Zionism/Racism

(Excerpted from an article by Nira Yuval-Davis in *Spare Rib*, a British feminist monthly magazine, September 1984, No. 148.)

This article is written as a response to the debate on anti-zionism and anti-semitism and its relation to anti-racist and feminist struggles—a debate which has become very painful and divisive to wide circles of feminists in Britain. For me, an anti-zionist Israeli Jewish woman, living in England and active in anti-racist, anti-sexist struggles, to choose *not* to intervene would have been a political act, especially as I found myself more and more unable to identify with any of the major sides involved in the increasingly bitter debate.



Jewish immigrants to London's East End, 1905.

Oswite/Springboard Educational Trust

My position is that the struggles against zionism, anti-semitism and racism are complementary, rather than competing, as has been assumed all too often in this debate. I see these assumptions not as accidental, but as a direct result of certain political perspectives, mainly inspired by zionism, which have dominated parts of the debate. In order to counterpose them, I will analyse the relationship between anti-semitism and zionism, anti-semitism and racism, and their relation to solidarity with international struggles against imperialism.

This has not been an easy article to write, and I know I am going to touch various sensitive points for lots of people. This debate has by now touched most of my sensitive points. It seems to me, however, that the solution chosen by most of its participants so far, i.e., to relate only to parts of the issues which are closest to them, is not going to bring us any further.

This is written for *Spare Rib*—a feminist magazine, rather than for a general left-wing journal. This has become by now also a specific feminist debate, although it has been going on in the socialist movement in one way or another since the beginning of the century, and in its latest form since 1967. I think that the way it has been conducted within the women's movement has illuminated several problems which are endemic to the feminist perspective and which we, as feminists, should confront. My conclusion will look at the implications this debate has had for basic feminist assumptions concerning "sisterhood" and "the personal is political."

Zionism and Anti-semitism

How is it possible for the two factions to claim vehemently, with apparently the same degree of conviction, that, on the one hand, anti-zionist attacks are only a cover for anti-semitism, and on the other

hand, that anti-zionist struggles and struggles against anti-semitism complement each other? I am not neutral in this debate—I accept the second argument. But I also accept that certain arguments from the first are valid as well.

In order to clarify what seems to be a contradiction, we need to look at zionism and its relation to anti-semitism. I have no space here to go into a detailed history, but will present some generalisations that can act as a starting point.

Zionism has presented itself as a "modern, alternative" way of being Jewish to the traditional, orthodox, religious way. The Jews, according to zionist ideology, constitute a nation (in the Western European sense of the term) rather than a religious community. But zionism needed the Jewish religious tradition to justify its claim to represent the Jewish people as a whole—as well as claiming Palestine as the land of Israel. (This inseparability became much more obvious after 1967 when religion was used to legitimate settlement of the West Bank.) So, Israeli legislation had to perpetuate in various ways sexist and racist medieval Jewish laws.

All wings of the zionist movement have had as their main goal the establishment and promotion of the Jewish state in Palestine, which according to Jewish tradition is the Jewish homeland. This was done by settling in Palestine in a process which dispossessed and excluded the indigenous Palestinians from the new society.

It is important to emphasise that the zionist movement (in all its wings) did not want to establish a state for Jews who lived in Palestine, or even for those who would settle there, but *the* Jewish state which would symbolically and politically represent Jews all over the world. For this reason, Israel could never be, in principle, a democratic state because of the decision to

give rights to all Jews regardless of their citizenship, while non-Jewish citizens of Israel were not given the same rights.

There are, nevertheless, Zionists who are subjectively democrats or socialists, and in the history of Zionism there were voices protesting against some of the unavoidable implications of Zionism in the hope that they were avoidable. But all along, Zionism, both as a political movement and as an ideological one, has operated basically in the way I've described.

The Zionist movement arose as a reaction to the crisis affecting Eastern European Jewry in the 19th century. The onset of industrialisation jeopardised the economic role and way of life of those Jews that constituted a middle-caste between the landed nobility and the peasantry. Industrialisation also disrupted and dispossessed the traditional peasantry who, encouraged by the ruling class, directed their frustrations in the form of riots and pogroms against the Jews, the most vulnerable link in the hierarchy of the old feudal order. These conflicts were fueled by Christian anti-semitic tradition and gained some modern reinforcements, the most famous being the forged *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a book that supposedly proved that Jews were conspiring to take over the world.

In Western Europe, the arrival of Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe, with their different culture and appearance, reawakened the issue of anti-semitism which to a great extent had been dormant since the small number of Western European Jews had become integrated into the new bourgeoisie. Anti-semitism in Western Europe, however, was based much more on biological "theories" and paved the way for Nazi racial ideology.

Zionism, therefore, was in part a direct reaction to post-industrial European anti-semitic ideologies. Like many other reactions, it shares some of the major assumptions of that which it opposes. Zionist founder Theodore Herzl saw anti-semitism as part of human nature, beyond the realm of history, unchangeable. As a result of that first assumption, Zionists saw the solution of the "Jewish problem" as dependent on Jews changing, rather than anti-semites. The Zionist movement wanted to "normalise" the Jewish people ("And we shall be like all the other Goyim [non-Jewish peoples]"). From this point of view, Zionism is an attempt at collective assimilation.

This "normalisation" involved the exodus of the Jews from the countries where they lived to a different territory. Thus, ironically, both anti-semites and Zionists end up rejecting the membership of Jews in the societies where they live.

Because of these common assumptions, many anti-semites, especially after WWII and the Holocaust, when open anti-semitism was no longer acceptable, became ardent Zionists. One example of this is some of the Christian fundamentalist sentiment in the United States. In that view, not only are the Israelis so much "nicer" than the traditional Jews, they are also

physically removed from the West.

I want to clarify immediately that I do not mean that all, or even the majority, of non-Jews who support Zionism and Israel are anti-semites under cover. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Most supporters of Israel have seen it (mistakenly) as adequate compensation to Jews for the horrors of the Holocaust, and that Israel is the way to solve the "Jewish problem." And of course, individuals as well as nation-states (like the superpowers) also support Israel, but for very different, politically expedient, reasons.

Just as support of Zionism in itself is not a sign that a certain person or state is anti- or pro-Jewish, neither is opposition to Zionism. The Eastern European Left, for instance, objected to Zionism at the outset because it did not offer a strategy to fight anti-semitism in their societies, nor did it offer a realistic solution to the majority of Jews, only to a select group who could afford to migrate to Palestine. Zionism was also blamed for dividing the working class ideologically and politically. Later, when the Zionist state had become a reality, the main objection to Zionism from the Left and humanitarians focused on the Palestinians and the effects on the whole Middle East.

On the other hand, opposition to Zionism has been used as a hypocritical substitute for anti-semitism by those who do not like Jews in any form, those whose "Laurence of Arabia" romanticism connected them to the Arab world, and those for whom Israel is just one more state of Wogs [originally an acronym for Western Oriental Gentleman, a term coined by whites to refer to Indians who threatened their class privilege. Today, "Wog" is a derogatory reference to any non-white person]. In the '50s and '60s there were also indications that European anti-semitic literature was being used in Arab pro-

paganda as well, for example, cartoons of Eastern European orthodox Jews from the '30s were used to symbolise Israel.

What differentiates anti-semitic propaganda from other forms of racism is that it accuses Jews of a conspiracy to "take over" the world. Thus, when the influence of Zionism is exaggerated by fearful anti-semites, anti-Zionism is used in an anti-semitic way. For example, "Zionists" are seen to dominate the world press, to be responsible for virtually every reactionary victory anywhere in the world, or when contemporary Britain is described as a country where "all industrial life is in the grip of Zionist merchants, bankers and international capitalists." (*Shakti*, Aug-Sept. 1982)

The most confusing thing is that now, in the eyes of world Jewry, any opposition to Zionism is seen as anti-semitism. Since the Nazi Holocaust and establishment of Israel, the Zionist movement has transformed itself from a minority movement in the Jewish community into the dominant one. For the majority of Jews, Israel has become their "post-factum" homeland. To send money to Israel has become an easy way of being Jewish, especially for non-religious Jews. Israel's existence has become an emotional "insurance policy", a refuge in case of disaster. And because Israel's existence is a direct product of the Zionist movement, many Jews feel irrationally threatened if somebody objects to it as the Jewish state, and calls for it to become a state which represents all of its citizens—even if this call comes from those who genuinely and clearly oppose anti-semitism and all other discrimination.

A natural reaction which is directed to me often by Jews and non-Jews alike is: so you don't equate being Jewish to being Zionist nor to being religious—what does it then mean to you to be a Jew? There are



Jewish settlers in Palestine, circa 1918.

many ways to be a Jew. The way which is closest to me is the one which is related by Isaac Deutscher in his essay "What is to be a Jew?" "Religion? I am an atheist. Jewish nationalism? I am an internationalist. In neither sense am I, therefore, a Jew. I am, however, a Jew...because I feel the Jewish tragedy as my own tragedy...because I should like to do all I can to assume the real, not spurious, security and self-respect of the Jews."

Anti-semitism as Racism

For me, one of the most upsetting elements in this debate has been a statement by one of the *Spare Rib* women of colour who defined the whole debate as a "white women's issue." The implication is that Jewish women, and probably even Palestinian women cannot suffer from racism, as they are not Black. This is not an isolated response. It expresses a widely-held belief, not only among Black people but the British Left in general, that only Black people can be the victims of racism—i.e., the definition of racism can be determined, not by the ideology itself, but by the skin colour of its victims. For me this is an unacceptable position although, of course, skin colour has a most important and specific role to play in contemporary British racism.

I want to make it clear—racism in general and racism against Blacks in particular (in its legal, economic, political and interpersonal forms), is one of the most important political issues in contemporary Britain. My objection to identifying Black people as the only victims of racism is not to deny their experience as the *primary* victims of British racism today, but to expand the basis for common anti-racist struggles.

Racist language always includes some kind of biological determination. Once you are identified as a member of a certain group—and this membership is usually determined by being born into it—you are ascribed with a set of condemnable characteristics. Skin colour is used very often to "identify" such membership. But the definition of the colour is social and historical, not biological—this is why Turks are considered white in Britain and Black in Germany; why Asians are considered Black in Britain but not in Africa. Moreover, victims of racism can be targetted in ways other than skin colour—it can be an accent, a way of dress or a more subtle mannerism. But most importantly, skin colour and other "characteristics" are not really important in themselves; they are just the means of identifying the objects of racist discrimination and oppression. Fighting against racism means first of all fighting against that discrimination and oppression rather than just the ways the victims are selected.

This is, by the way, why the United Nations resolution which defined Zionism as a racist ideology is correct. Under Zionism, the "origin" of a person, whether Jewish or Palestinian, rather than any personal performance or capability, determines their position in Israeli society, in a way which cross-cuts, although is enmeshed in, class structure.

The relationship between race and

class is important in assessing anti-semitism as a racist ideology. Ethnic minorities who suffer from racism occupy certain positions within the social structure. Racism is about power relations between collective groups, and is one of the most forceful means by which one group excludes another. However, these power relations do not necessarily coincide with economic relations, although often they are partly or fully enmeshed in them. Marxism has always had difficulty in dealing with non-economic social divisions: gender, ethnic and racial divisions have often been subjected to reductionist analyses which talk about "false consciousness" covering up the "real" class relations. But this is a false approach. A middle class Black person is still put in a different social structural position to a middle class English person in Britain. To a lesser extent, but just as real, this applies to other ethnic minorities, be they Irish or Jewish.

To those with a dogmatic reductionist approach, it's difficult to accept that Jews in Britain today suffer discrimination. After all, no such discrimination can be found on the legal or economic levels (although the 1905 Alien Act was mostly directed against Eastern European Jewish refugees). Economically, the majority of British Jews are of the middle class. The social and economic positions from which they are excluded (e.g., the high echelons of the aristocracy and the Church of England) are not very different from those suffered by Catholics. However, this is by no means the full extent of exclusions that Jews suffer in Britain, as Jews well know. The history of anti-semitism has left its past victims and their children and *all* Jews hypersensitive to every hint of racism toward them.

On the interpersonal level, the traditional leftist one-dimensional view of racism (i.e. that it exists only in an economic context) has created another gap.

In this society where only one culture dominates and is perceived as natural, it is a struggle to make a truly pluralist cultural system. Most personal accounts of anti-semitism by Jewish feminists relate to the sort of "liberal anti-semitism" which negates and denies their experience. The "Black is Beautiful" struggle was also launched in this context. As the middle class is traditionally much more closely controlled by the dominant culture than the poor and working classes, such cultural struggles have less chance of overall success. But they are still valid struggles.

Anti-zionism, Anti-racism and Anti-imperialism

One more central dimension has to be added to this analysis. That is, the way the anti-zionist struggle has been linked in the current debate to anti-imperialist struggles, and the way the latter are linked to anti-racist struggles.

The Black Power Movement, and the Black feminist movement after it, have received a lot of inspiration from the anti-imperialist struggles of the Third World in general and Africa in particular. Struggles for independence and liberation have not been only economic (which was the level at which Marxists originally defined imperialism). In fact, very often the economic dimension is relatively marginal. Often the main issue is to establish political and territorial independence for the national group (mostly composed of several conflicting ethnic groups). Imperialists from the developed countries are perceived not only as exploiters, but as foreigners (White Europeans, Asians, Jews) who have come from the outside to colonise and/or exploit the people. A primary force in anti-imperialist mobilisation has been, therefore, nationalism rather than, or in addition to, socialism/universalism. Likewise, the message of the Black Power



The Sari Squad, an activist organization of Indian women in England, and their supporters protest against the racist immigration policies of the British government.

Movement has always been, to a certain degree at least, exclusive, i.e., redefining the boundaries of the ethnic group in powerful terms rather than fighting to abolish them altogether. This has been a very effective strategy for Black people in their anti-racist struggles, but it poses problems of solidarity when they see people outside the boundaries of the group also claiming to be victims (rather than only practitioners) of racism, as is the case with Jews or Asian [Indian] Africans.

Another question is that of the nature of international solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles. All too often, anyone identified as "anti-imperialist" is treated automatically as having progressive politics. A somewhat extreme example occurred at the 1983 International Women's Day Conference in London when a raging debate broke out as to whether or not Iran's Khomeini is a genuine anti-imperialist. The assumption was that if he is, then he is a "goodie." Well, I claim that Khomeini is genuinely anti-West and anti-imperialist, but in a very reactionary way.

International solidarity with liberation struggles should not stop us from being critical when, all too often, they operate class, ethnic and sexual oppression under anti-imperialist labels. Too many progressive forces in the Third World fall victim to the non-critical support of "national front" organizations by the international left.

These general points have specific importance when related to the debate concerning Zionism, because Zionism, for most of its history, succeeded in getting international support from the labour movement because it presented itself as a national liberation movement. To see Zionism as a national liberation movement for Jews all over the world is stretching the point. Only a minority of Jews live in Israel, and some argue that Zionism has only succeeded in establishing a large armed ghetto instead of smaller non-armed ones, for which the human, political and economic price to the Jews themselves, not to mention the Palestinians, is absolutely unjustifiable.

The role Israel has played in relation to the Palestinians—i.e., dispossessor, occupier, exploiter and even exterminator—does not make it *automatically* the representative or even the puppet of imperialism in the area. It has been a political movement with its own goals. Objectively, its goals do put it in a united front most of the time with the imperial power dominant in the area at the time. Establishing the exclusive Jewish state meant dispossessing and excluding the Palestinians, thus setting up a situation of inherent confrontation, for which Israel needs constant backing from external imperialists. For these imperialists, an ally like Israel is very useful, as the alliance does not depend on a specific regime or small elite but is secure as long as Israel is Zionist.

The Anti-semitism, Anti-zionism, Anti-racism and Feminism Debate

Well, at this point, readers might ask what an article like this is doing in a feminist magazine! In marked contrast to



Jewish-Arab Sisterhood demonstration, International Women's Day, Tel Aviv, 1985.

most of the contributions on this subject which have appeared in *Spare Rib*, I haven't specifically related it to women's struggles or experiences. Does this put my arguments beyond the pale of a feminist debate?

My answer, of course, is no. Racism, Zionism, anti-semitism and anti-imperialism are ideologies and movements which have deeply affected the lives of women in Britain, either directly or as part of solidarity activity which involved them emotionally. Anyone present in any of the feminist forums on these questions could not but be struck by the intensity with which they have been debated, shouted, quarreled about. One of the most striking features of these debates, however, besides the fact that they made many women very upset, has been their deadlock.

In my opinion, one of the major factors contributing to this has been the way each faction has clung to the medium of personal experience as the justification of their position, without being able to transcend their own perspective, and enter dimensions of the debate in which they have no personal stake. My writing of this article is in reaction to that.

Taking personal experience into account is an organic part of feminist philosophy for examining "the personal is political" and for consciousness-raising in groups. However, it is not without its problems. If done uncritically, it can develop extreme relativisation—there is no valid criterion from which to judge between the different perspectives developed by women who have undergone different personal experiences. This is, of course, totally opposite to the original intention of using personal experience in consciousness-raising, to induce general *truths* about the condition of women.

It can work in consciousness-raising groups, because women there usually come from similar class and ethnic backgrounds. But it cannot work when women come not only from different, but also *conflicting*

groups and classes. The fact that this is not clear to many participants in the Zionism debate is because of another, even more basic, automatic (though it should not be) assumption of the feminist movement concerning the notion of "sisterhood." This notion assumes that all women have, or would have (if they did not have false consciousness), the same political interests since their basic position in society is the same. Again, this is very problematic. There exist real divisions and relations of oppression and exploitation among women, and notions of automatic sisterhood are at best misleading.

Recognising the internal divisions among women and the complexity of the issues involved does not necessarily have to paralyse us politically. We can use analytic and ideological language as a bridge between the personal and the political, without forgetting the insights that analysis of personal experience has given us.

The most important insight the feminist movement has brought to the Left is the recognition that such complexities are inherent to most situations. (The exploited male workers go home and oppress their wives.) We should not forget this, but continue to struggle against women's oppression *and* against workers' exploitation, against Palestinian oppression *and* against anti-semitism, to express solidarity with liberation struggles in the Third World without losing a critical perspective *and* be active on a local level without losing international and historical perspectives.

I know it is easier said than done. So what? □

Further Readings:

- The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays, by Isaac Deutscher, Alyson Publications, 1982.
- Yours in Struggle: Three Feminists' Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism, Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Barbara Smith, Long Haul Press, 1984.

Alliance for the Future

Pakistan gained its independence from Britain and its recognition as a state in 1947. As a result of the conflicts between the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League, the subcontinent was partitioned into two nations—India and Pakistan. The partition fuelled the fire of already severe communal tensions and led to the resettling of about six million Muslims to Pakistan and about the same number of Hindus and Sikhs to India. Pakistan became a sovereign Islamic Republic in 1956 and two years later fell under military dictatorship. With the election of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in December 1971, the political situation in Pakistan took on a more populist tone. In 1977, in the midst of political and economic turmoil, General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq led a successful coup against the Bhutto government. Since then the constitution has been suspended, the Zia regime has moved towards the further Islamicization of the state and political opposition to the government has been methodically wiped out.

(Excerpted from an article by Shahnaz Ahmed in *Sangharsh*, a newspaper published by the Indian women's rights organization Vimochana. Originally printed in *Pakistan Progressive*.)

One might ask why write on the issue of women's rights in Pakistan at a time when the democratic rights of the entire populace have been suppressed by a highly unpopular military regime? The reasons are two-fold. First, precisely because this regime relies on the religious elements, the issue of women becomes a critical one, even more so than during other periods in the history of Pakistan. These fundamentalist groups, while ambivalent on other economic issues, are in total agreement when it comes to the question of women. Here their position is clear: women are inferior to men and their place is in the home serving their lord and master, the male. The second reason is even more critical: women, for the first time in the history of Pakistan, are organizing a mass movement to fight not just for the preservation of those rights currently under attack, but for a further deepening and extending of these rights. As such, they constitute the vanguard of the political movement in Pakistan at this time.

Women's organizations have moved into the vacuum created by the absence of traditional political formations due to the severe political restrictions which have destroyed much of the opposition. Drawing upon a membership that cuts across classes, they have challenged the regime

and its henchmen publicly through forums, mass meetings, press campaigns, petitions and demonstrations. They are not part of any political party. They address women's issues and consciously link them to broader issues of economic privilege and deprivation, inflation, exploitation and injustice. Maintaining their relative autonomy, they have insisted that they are merely striving towards what is agreed upon in the Human Rights charter of the United Nations. The women's movement in Pakistan, like its equivalent in Latin America and Africa, does not designate men as the enemy, but rather the social structure, within which women are the most oppressed, though not the only ones to suffer oppression.

The women's movement in Pakistan can be traced back to the pre-independence period when women, mostly bourgeois women, constituted a vocal element in the anti-colonial struggle, as well as in the Pakistan movement [Muslim separatist movement]. Following the creation of Pakistan, the same women who had been active previously decided to push their efforts further and concretize some of their demands through the legal code. Women were given the right to vote, and following a long struggle in 1961 under Ayub Khan's military regime, they succeeded in passing the

promise to extend education on a mass scale to all groups, including rural and urban women. Women's groups, though they increased during this period, remained in the background, since they did not perceive themselves as being under attack by Bhutto's regime. They chose, therefore, to exploit the favorable environment to push for an extension of women's rights within the framework of the state, not in opposition to it.

The women's organization existing at that time, the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) being the best known among these, were primarily social welfare and charity organizations and the nature of their work reflected this. In addition to providing relief during emergencies, they placed a strong emphasis on education, but took a limited approach to its provision, restricting it to the creation of APWA College, and setting up a few vocational training and handicraft centers. Their attitude was paternalistic, their approach basically reformist, and their reach limited.

The coming to power of Bhutto in 1972 saw the emergence in Pakistan, for the first time, of a popularly elected, populist regime that drew support from workers, the rural peasantry and women. Given this fact, the 1973 constitution granted women rights closer in accord with the United Nations stated principles, along with a

The harassment and firing of women professors, the torture of women for their political affiliations and beliefs, increased restrictions on the activities of professional women, and the imposition of dress code requirements for women public employees were becoming everyday events.

now much-defended Family Law Ordinance in which women were officially recognized as being rightfully able to inherit agricultural property (in accordance with Islamic law), the taking of a second wife was made contingent upon agreement by the first wife, divorce was made more difficult for men, and women were given the right to initiate divorce, to name some of the better-known clauses.

As stated earlier, the women's movement at Pakistan's inception was led by bourgeois elements. Having received some education relative to their counterparts in other classes, and being part of the political mainstream (often related to men in politics), these women were cognizant of the law and able to manipulate it to their own advantage. By virtue of the Family Law coming into effect, their rights as women were safeguarded. But this law did not

promise to extend education on a mass scale to all groups, including rural and urban women. Women's groups, though they increased during this period, remained in the background, since they did not perceive themselves as being under attack by Bhutto's regime. They chose, therefore, to exploit the favorable environment to push for an extension of women's rights within the framework of the state, not in opposition to it.

An exception to this was the role played by women in the 1977 campaign against Bhutto, a role quite similar to that displayed by the "Pots and Pans" demonstration by bourgeois women against Allende's regime in Chile prior to his overthrow. In Pakistan, too, bourgeois women led this movement, not protesting the abrogation of democratic rights by the Bhutto regime (a criticism which the left

groups and the national minorities levelled at him), but mounting a right wing opposition to his regime, focusing their attack on his economic policies and their inflationary impact on their now somewhat dwindling purse sizes.

The late sixties and early seventies saw a blossoming of intellectual thought and grassroots political organization. Women joined the professions in larger numbers and made a significant contribution. Television in particular broke the taboos generally connected in Pakistani society with music and the arts. College-going women with artistic talents took advantage of this opportunity and became instrumental in portraying women differently. Left-wing parties mushroomed at this time by drawing women into the political arena who were previously dissociated from it, namely working class and peasant women. Not only did this serve to politicize more women than ever before, but it also gave them badly needed organizational experience.

It was not until three and a half years after the military take-over (which occurred in 1977) that women were once again on the political scene as a mass force. The prelude came during the first few years of military rule when the reconstituted state came to rely very heavily on Islam as an ideological weapon. The three groups most under attack—workers, peasants and women—were not deceived by this ideological cover.

Particular instances of women's oppression were being taken up by the media. The harassment and firing of women professors, the torture of women for their political affiliations and beliefs, increased restrictions on the activities of professional women, and the imposition of dress code requirements for women public employees were becoming everyday events.

Given this political climate, women recognized that they must lead this fight themselves. The Women's Action Forum (WAF) was created by professional, middle class women in Karachi in September 1981. It became an umbrella organization for seven women's groups already in existence. This popular front was dedicated to a common goal: women's development through the achievement of basic human rights for all Pakistani women. These rights include: education, employment, physical security, choice of marital status, planned parenthood and non-discrimination.

The WAF organizers proceeded cautiously and devoted their attention to fighting to preserve rights currently held but under attack from the military. Given their limited numbers at this point, a lobbying approach was used. The first task undertaken was a national signature campaign based on five issues affecting women. Over seven thousand signatures were collected in three months.

Initially made up of urban-based, middle class women, WAF also began to reach out to minorities and to working class women. Panels and workshops were organized to help publicize women's issues and to draw in new supports. While deepening its base, WAF was also extending it. In 1982, WAF branches were

They are not part of any political party. They address women's issues and consciously link them to broader issues of economic privilege and deprivation, inflation, exploitation and injustice.

created in many cities in Pakistan. Anyone who wished to initiate a chapter could do so, provided they were willing to adopt the charter drawn up by the Karachi chapter. The activities of each new chapter would be subject to scrutiny by the two oldest chapters in Karachi and Lahore. The chapters were encouraged to incorporate as many of the women's local organizations as possible.

Given the mass character of the movement, the different WAF chapters are incredibly uneven in their membership composition, and this unevenness is reflected in their work. The Lahore chapter is clearly the most politically advanced, and is more willing to take actions that other chapters might back off from. Certain chapters in WAF have stressed the non-political character of the movement. This assertion, combined with the fact that the wives of many prominent bureaucrats and upper middle class males are active in its ranks, has to a certain extent influenced the regime to allow WAF's continued public existence.

The urban character of WAF indicates that the women's movement, as a whole, still has not been able to reach the rural women, who constitute one of the most oppressed segments of the Pakistani population. This is a shortcoming that will only be rectified as the membership increases, and a deliberate attempt is made to spread out. Given the linkages between the workers in the urban centers to their rural counterparts, it can be hoped that as working class women become more integrated into the movement's mainstream, this link to the rural areas will follow.

In its battle with the regime, the women's movement, on the surface, seems to have lost more often than it has gained. Two hundred women demonstrated in Lahore in February 1983 against the proposed changes in the Law of Evidence [which gives women's legal testimony one-half the value of a man's]. At least twenty of the participants were injured in the clash with the police, and another thirty were arrested. In spite of this demonstration and the support the women got from men, the proposed changes were rammed through the puppet legislative assembly less than a month later.

However, if one evaluates the less tangible results, the gains of the WAF are quite substantial. Women have for the first time adopted an organizational stance that makes them an important force with which any political group in Pakistan will now have to contend. They have broken out of the old pattern of reformism and paternalism which have characterized the handling of women's issues by the Pakistani political establishment since the state's inception.



Women's Action Forum

They have initiated a process of education, organization and information work that will leave a mark on women for times to come, whether or not WAF continues to act as a central organization for women.

The women's movement is at a crossroads: it can either go substantially further or remain confined to a losing battle with the state played out on the latter's terms, additionally running the danger of becoming co-opted by the state. The women's movement cannot go it alone very much longer and continue to challenge the regime. The progressive elements in Pakistan which are today undergoing a much-needed reevaluation and reorganization, must address this reality both in terms of organization and program. The need is to forge an alliance in reality, not merely at the level of appearances and words. It now remains for other progressive elements in society to join ranks so that a reconstituted Pakistan emerges, not merely democratic, but where domination and subordination become words one merely encounters in history books as one does the mention of military rule. □

Contact:

- Women's Action Forum-National, Box 3287, Gulburg/Lahore, Pakistan.
- Simorgh, Pakistani women's resource and publication centre, 19-B White House Lane, Sunderdas Road, Lahore, Pakistan.
- Vimochana, Box 4605, Bangalore 560046, India.

Further reading:

- "Blood Money," Connexions, #14, Fall 1984.

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A Movement in Profile

Noi Donne/ISIS

Indian women protest against marriage dowry system, 1975.

(Excerpted from "A Profile on Women's Struggles in the Recent Past," by Vibhuti Patel, December 1984.)

The last decade was marked by the spread of the Women's Liberation Movement on an international plane. In India a new rise of women's struggles blossomed. Initially it attracted mainly educated middle and upper middle class women, but later it stirred radical and left organisations as well.

This new wave of organising by women was quite untraditional because never before had women mobilized around demands specific to women. In the past, movements against issues such as female infanticide, suttee [the burning of widows on the husband's funeral pyre], purdah [the veiling of women], and progressive movements for promoting widow remarriage and women's education were initiated and pursued by liberal male crusaders such as Mahatma Gandhi. Women were the objects of "humanitarian" and "liberal" gestures

from benevolent, patronising leaders of the reform movement. Under their leadership, women participated in the national independence struggle. And after Independence was achieved in 1947, women once again withdrew from public life.

Although during the late 1960s a small number of women students were politically active in the radical and leftist movements, most women's political participation was limited to exercising the right to vote and participating in the established political parties. In India, these parties form an institutionalised left wing and include the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and the Socialist Party. The women's sections of these parties were instrumental in organising women workers on plantations and in small industries. While in some areas the women's front gained massive membership, women activists were few in number and were, in most cases, the wives and daughters of party leaders. Thus, the policies of the

women's fronts were determined by the male leaders of their respective parties and other issues specific to women like dowry, wife beating and rape were not taken up.

Women's political participation became more visible in the Naxalbari Movement during the late 60s. [The Naxalbari Movement was led by a Maoist-oriented political organisation, the CPI-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML), which rejected the institutionalization of the Indian left parties. As government repression of the CPI-ML increased, a guerrilla-type struggle was waged in several parts of India, particularly in the eastern regions.] Tribal women, under the CPI-ML leadership, fought militantly against landlords and state repression. By 1972, many of those involved in the Naxalbari Movement were imprisoned, including more than five thousand Naxalite women. Most of them were tortured and some were murdered.

About this same time, women in the western state of Maharashtra were involved in spontaneous agitations against condi-

tions which were making the lives of urban and rural women intolerable. A famine caused by the artificial scarcity of food grains and the skyrocketing prices of mass consumption goods infuriated lower middle class and poor women. This led to the spontaneous Anti-Price Rise Movement which was organised by women in response to the generally worsening Indian economy in 1972. Women with rolling pins, *thalis* [stainless steel plates] and brooms gathered for militant rallies which numbered in the thousands. Wholesale dealers, retail shop owners and government officials were *gheraoed* [a non-violent protest technique where a targetted individual is physically surrounded by demonstrators and held captive until particular demands are agreed upon]. Women raided warehouses where food grains, tins of oil and other things were hoarded. This movement in Maharashtra enthused other women to start such agitations.

The Progressive Organisation of Women

In 1974, out of the radical student movement, the Progressive Organisation of Women (POW) was formed in the city of Hyderabad. Its manifesto, proclaiming solidarity with all women and all oppressed classes, demanded legislation against prostitution, pornography depicting women as sex objects, and dowry and child marriage; reformation of inheritance laws; implementation of laws for equal pay, maternity and creche [childcare] facilities, better living accommodations for single working women and students; and prompt action against corruption and black marketing leading to the scarcity of essential commodities.

Their campaign against dowry and eve-teasing [sexual harassment] were popular and attracted a membership of thousands of women students. After the declaration of the Emergency [a martial law mandate declared by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi which gripped India from 1975 until 1977], leaders of the POW were imprisoned and the movement was temporarily smashed.

The POW marked the emergence of autonomous women's organisations in India. Here the word autonomous implies a women's political organisation which is independent from a political party. These groups now exist in most large cities in India and in some small towns and villages. They take up issues that are of concern to women, have an all-woman membership and are run by women, not by the bosses of political parties. Women members adhere to a variety of political ideologies and sometimes belong to political parties concurrently. Men participate in the campaigns and struggle launched by autonomous women's organisations; however it is women who decide the course of the movement.

At the same time, the western Women's Liberation Movement, its literature and the issues raised, influenced many educated Indian women. In particular, women revolting against being treated as sex objects rather than as human beings caught their interest.

Initially, women's liberation became a matter of jest, and individuals were labelled anti-male, individualistic and careerist. Despite this criticism, during 1975 many small groups of women's liberationists appeared. Women involved in other progressive organisations started raising their voices against discrimination within their groups, many of which were insensitive to the oppression of women. The patriarchal norms and value systems perpetuated by many of these groups angered women activists and they found it necessary to form autonomous organisations of women.

The year 1975, declared International Women's Year by the United Nations, saw the rise of a variety of autonomous women's organisations. Some focused on the problems of female students. Others sought and organised working class urban and rural women, as they strongly believed that the women's movement was inseparable from movements of the working class. Differences in the analytical framework for understanding the problems of women came to the fore. Those who merely wanted to make some minor reforms in the existing social structure were known as bourgeois feminists. Those who found the power relationships between men and women to be the only cause of women's miseries were known as radical feminists. And socialist feminists were those who admitted the role of patriarchy in subjugating women, but also recognized the oppression and exploitation of the masses and saw them as potential allies of the women's liberation movement.

Many organisations formed and disbanded during the next few years. There was little success in organising at the national level until April 1978 when the Socialist Women's Group in Bombay organised a workshop for women activists all over India. A serious debate on the perspective of the women's liberation movement took place. Three decisions were made: a women's newspaper from Delhi would be published in Hindi and English; a newsletter oriented towards women activists would be published in Bombay; and a coordination committee of women's groups would form so that they might be less isolated and learn from each other.

The first issue of *Manushi*, published in Delhi in 1979, boosted the morale of feminists all over the country. Its wide circulation indicated the militant mood of women in India. *Manushi* was seen as the mouthpiece of the autonomous women's movement and a product of collective effort.

The Forum Against the Oppression of Women

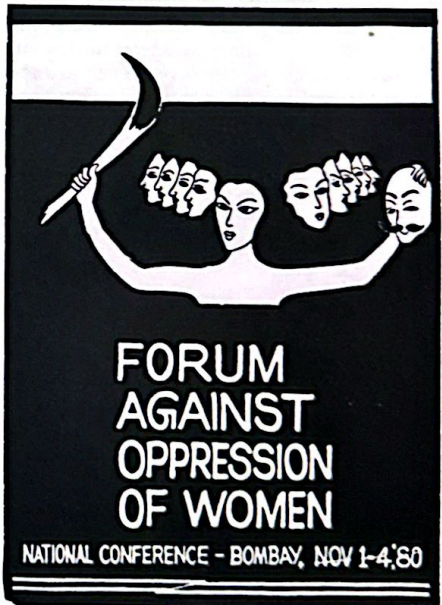
In 1979, four professors of law at Delhi University wrote an open letter to the judge of the Supreme Court in India condemning its judgement which reversed the conviction of a rapist. The rape case of Mathura, a 14-year-old girl, became a focal point for a nationwide anti-rape movement which soon involved women activists and autonomous women's organisations around

the country. Mathura had been called to the police station in a small town one night and was raped by two policemen. The local court alleged that Mathura was of loose morals and declared the policemen innocent. The High Court reversed this decision and sentenced the rapists to seven years imprisonment. In turn, this conviction was reversed by the Supreme Court which ruled that Mathura had given consent to sexual intercourse with the two policemen.

In general, awareness of the high incidence of rape was increasing. Accounts of police rape and mass-rape, used as a means of suppressing peasant uprisings, were becoming public knowledge. The blatant anti-woman judgement in the Mathura case gave birth to the nationwide anti-rape movement. From every corner of the country women's groups strongly demanded a new hearing for the Mathura case and demanded amendments to the rape law. Hot debates in the media, and poster and petition campaigns culminated in rallies organised around the country on International Women's Day in 1980.

During this period, various anti-rape organisations were formed, including the Forum Against Oppression in Bombay. Political parties that initially did not take the issue of rape seriously began proclaiming their abhorrence to this practice. Never since the Independence Movement had the masses shown such a conscious reaction against police repression. The government was forced to reopen Mathura's case and the Parliament presented a draft to an amendment to the rape law which was subsequently passed.

The Forum Against Oppression formed in 1980 and was comprised of mostly educated women, professionals, housewives and students, from the middle and upper classes. Its anti-rape activities included the submission of petitions to legislators, exhibitions on rape, educational street theatre and the distribution of pro-



Poster designed by Chandralekha, Jayaraman Litho Press, Madras, India, for the first national women's conference in Bombay, India.

paganda material about rape. Later, the Forum decided to expand its activities and fight all forms of women's oppression, and not limit itself to the anti-rape campaign.

The Forum included women from different ideological and political backgrounds and its structure was informal and non-hierarchical. These two features distinguished it from the women's fronts of established parties. The different issues tackled by the Forum included: specific rape cases involving rural and urban women workers; the boycott of the film, "Red Rose," which depicted the rape, seduction and murder of several women by the film's hero and was connected to the actual murder of two girls by their rapists; and a debate around the proposed rape bill.

The Forum organised a National Conference on Perspectives for the Women's Liberation Movement held in Bombay in 1980. Except for the Northeast region, women from all states of India participated. The politics of rape and the wording of the proposed rape bill, ideological issues, women and health, and the often untouched subjects such as wife-beating were main topics of discussion. As an outcome of this conference, resolutions on different subjects were passed, and it was agreed that activities of the groups represented would center on these issues. On the topic of personal law, it was decided that the whole country should be brought under a uniform civil code. [Each religious community in India maintains its own legal system based on religious law which particularly affects women's inheritance rights and legal status in the family.] It was also decided that women's groups should work towards setting up support structures which help women to create a new life for themselves away from male dominance and oppression. Working towards increasing and improving women's participation in the labour force was also targetted. Reservation of jobs and technical training for women, provisions for more hostels [homes] and the establishment of communal eating places and washing facilities for working women were part of the infrastructure proposed to ease women's double burden.

During 1980, the cultural sub-committee of the Forum came out with a variety of street theatre skits, songs and exhibitions as a means to educate the public about women's issues. Most popular was the dance production called "Jagruithi" based on folk songs and dances from various regions in India. It depicted the life of a woman and her oppression from her birth through her adolescence, marriage and post-marriage.

Another project of the Forum began in 1981 when, within a week, three women were murdered in different parts of Bombay. Citizens of Bombay were highly agitated over the worsening law and order situation and the general apathy of the police. One of the victims was a college professor who was murdered while riding in a women-only compartment of a commute train. Women commuters, many of whom had experienced other crimes such as petty theft while riding the train, held spontane-

ous demonstrations at the major train stations, demanding more safety measures aboard the trains.

That same week the Forum conducted a survey on the problems faced by women commuters and prioritised the needed safety measures. They responded with several concrete recommendations including wire mesh on the windows of compartments [to prevent snatching by thieves], an alarm bell in all of the women-only compartments in case of emergency, the extension of the times designated for women-only cars on the public transport railway system from limited daytime and evening hours to 24 hours a day and for stricter enforcement against male passengers' intrusions on the women-only compartments. In spite of the call from all of Bombay's women's organisations for improved safety measures, railway authorities failed to meet demands. In response, women commuters supported Forum members when they regularly patrolled the women-only cars from 8-11pm, and physically pushed out male passengers who tried to ride in the designated cars. By consistently pursuing the matter, the Forum coordinated a meeting with the railway management. As a result of these activities, the situation in trains has improved. Most of the cars now carry in bold writing the message that this compartment is for WOMEN ONLY—24 HOURS, and there is a strict police check.

The Autonomous Women's Movement—The New Awakening

The main achievements of this movement have been to highlight previously sensationalized and personal problems such as rape, wife beating and sexual harassment, and put them in their appropriate political contexts. Until recently only economic issues affecting women were taken seriously by political parties and their affiliated women's groups.

Another important development of the movement is the emergence of women's centres. Many feminists involved in anti-dowry, anti-rape and anti-sexism campaigns felt the need for a place where women who have problems could go for support. The Bombay Women's Center, Saheli in Delhi and Sakhi Kendra in Kanpur are such centres that provide services to other women. In addition, some centres publish newsletters and there are presently eight feminist publications printed either in English or one of the regional languages.

In the academic field, women's studies in India has blossomed during the last decade. The National Conference on Women's Studies held in 1981 attracted the attention of not only academicians, but also policy makers. Representatives of more than one hundred universities participated in the conference.

The women's movement has generated a great amount of sensitivity towards the problems of the most oppressed strata of society and for women activists who have to fight against sexism within their political organisations. In

rural areas, various women's committees have begun to take up issues specific to their own problems. For instance, in the city of Chatisgarh, women members of the Mines Mazdoor Union demanded that social problems such as alcoholism be a focus for their activities as well as traditional trade union issues. While women agricultural workers have always been the most militant fighters in clashes with landlords, their own demands are just now being taken more seriously by local party activists. In the state of Maharashtra alone, there are dozens of women's groups involved in organising domestic workers, women agricultural labourers, prostitutes and women working in cottage and home industries.

A profile of women's struggles in the recent past once again convinces us of women's ability to transform society. The day to day demands of women cannot be relegated to the background because they are the basis for changing social relationships. Feminists believe that revolution is a process through which a new ethos, new values, new morality and new relationships can be developed in the course of battle against hostile forces. The role of the women's movement is to ally with all of those movements that are fighting against different forms of oppression, exploitation and injustice. □

Further Reading:

- In Search of Answers, edited by Ruth Vanita and Madhu Kishwar, Zed Press, 1984.
- We Will Smash This Prison, a personal account of the Indian Women's Movement of the 1970s by Gail Omvedt, Zed Press, 1980.
- Manushi, Indian women's bimonthly, C-1/202 Lajpat Nagar I, New Delhi 110024, India.
- India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising, by Sumanta Banerjee, Zed Press, 1984.



Contact:

- Saheli, Under the Defense Colony Flyover (Southside), New Delhi 110024, India.
- Women's Centre, 307 Yasmeen Apartments, Yeshwant Nagar/Vakola, Santacruz, Bombay, India.
- Kali Press, Third World Feminist publishers, N-84, Panchshila Park, New Delhi 110017, India.

Nigeria



New Internationalist/Margaret Murray

A Proud Tradition, An Ongoing Fight

Severe economic problems face Nigeria today, despite the "development" that the oil industry once promised. As in all countries which depend on food imports, when the economy fails and foreign exchange is scarce, women bear the brunt of the government-imposed austerity measures and currency devaluation which cause the prices of even basic food items to skyrocket.

Women's reactions are vital to the stability of the government. As prices and unemployment rise, the government depends on women's willingness to lower their own social and economic expectations as well as that of their families. In Nigeria, in an attempt to silence women, the government's tactic has been to blame women for Nigeria's economic woes, accusing them of greed and materialism.

The Conditions of Women in Nigeria and Policy Recommendations, a document recently published by the organization Women in Nigeria, takes an alternative view of women's role and position in Nigeria. It examines women's relationships to urban and rural working conditions, education, the law, mass media, the family, religion, health and women's organizations. Here is an excerpt from the introduction to the WIN document.

The Organization: Women in Nigeria

Women in Nigeria (WIN) originated from the enthusiasm and interest that came out of the First Annual Women in Nigeria Conference held in 1982. At this conference, a group of dedicated women and men from all over Nigeria committed themselves to the task of establishing an organisation which would work toward improving the condition of Nigerian women. Research, policy-making, dissemination of information and action are all parts of the organisation's objectives.

The founding group believed—and the organisation still maintains—that the liberation of women cannot be fully achieved outside the context of the liberation of the oppressed and poor majority of the people of Nigeria. However, there are aspects of women's oppression that we can work to alleviate.

WIN was formally launched in April, 1983 at the Second Annual Women in Nigeria Conference. The system of using a nation-wide network of state branches and co-ordinators was adopted, and a National Executive Committee was elected. Membership has expanded and now includes representatives from most states in the federation.

Why WIN? Why in Nigeria?

"Feminism"—the fight for women's rights and women's interests—is not solely the result of "contamination" by the West, or a simple imitation of Western practices, as divisive opponents assert. One of the most recurrent charges they make to and about Third World women is that they are blind copy-cats of Western European feminists. Many Third World feminists, aware of "divide-and-rule" tactics, have replied that such accusations are consciously conceived and maintained to confuse women, to bind them to their respective men and male systems, to prevent them from comparing notes and to forestall a potentially dangerous unity. The truth is that there have always been indigenous forms of feminism which take on various issues and tactics in Nigeria: social harassment and ostracism of males as in the Igbo "sitting on a man" practice; witchcraft, occultism and magic; the exploitation of the wiles of sexuality, and plain stubbornness. Sometimes resistance takes the form of different types of anti-social behaviour, including madness. One of our tasks is to find out more about these indigenous forms of feminist resistance.

WIN follows in the long tradition of organised women's associations and movements. Previously, Nigeria has had associations of women, social and political activists, and strugglers who have tried to raise the status of women in the society and the home by various means: cult-groups, women's councils, the market-system, the church, the school, social clubs and family groupings. What is unique about WIN is that it is one of the few organisations—if not the only one—which is consciously organised around a political ideology.

We see that systems of class exploitation interact with gender hierarchy. Within these systems, a small elite minority takes over and accumulates the products of labour of a majority of workers and peasants, men and women. In addition, Nigeria's history and experience of the slave trade—slavery, colonisation and imperialism—has led to the present structures of underdevelopment and unequal access to resources which results in poverty and ignorance for most Nigerians.

WIN is engaged in research as well as policy-making, dissemination of information and action that will confront and dismantle those detrimental systems and structures. WIN feels we must know clearly and concretely how women's and

men's lives are structured by the socio-economic conditions in which we live. Despite the crucial and basic contributions of women to the economy of the nation, they are oppressed by a double workload which is unappreciated, unremunerated, and poorly taken into account in national development plans. Because of inadequate education for women and other social deprivations, the cycle of ignorance, poverty and oppression continues. The media, arts and popular opinion oppress women psychologically by promoting the ideology of patriarchy and its attendant myths of male superiority.

It is our duty as human beings to fight for a just society and for human liberation. This cannot occur unless the oppression of women ceases. □



Change

Contact:

• *Women in Nigeria*, P.O. Box 253, Samaru, Zaria, Nigeria. Include US\$15 for the full text of *Conditions of Women in Nigeria and Policy Recommendations*.

Further Reading:

• "Hard Times for Nigerian Women" in *AfricaAsia*, No. 16-1021, April 1985.
• "Women of Nigeria—Nation Builders," *Change*, *International Reports: Women and Society*, 29 Great James Street, London WC1N 3ES, England.

(The following introduction includes translated excerpts from *Boletim*, the newsletter of the Centro Informacao Mulher [Women's Information Center] in Brazil, with additional information by *Connexions*.)

With 950 women present—approximately 300 from Brazil—the Third Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter (*Encuentro*) took place from July 31 to August 4 in Bertogá, São Paulo, Brazil. Women came from Argentina, Chile, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, Uruguay, and from every state in Brazil; and Latinas came from the United States and Europe, for four days of free and convivial communion.

The Brazilian women who had attended the Second *Encuentro* in Lima, Peru in 1983 organized it with a dream and a goal: a self-financed and self-organized feminist meeting with individual participation to guarantee independence; that would be open to changes and subversions; where politics would be in the hands of the women and not the institutions.

The organizing committee had a contract with a local union to reserve a vacation colony with room for 1000. The cost of food, lodging, recreational services as well as the meetings and workshops for the weekend amounted to US\$60 per woman to be paid in advance by the committee. The committee received a loan from the Ford Foundation to cover the advance payment. The Ford Foundation also provided 100 scholarships for Brazilian women below a certain income level. At the *Encuentro*, no woman—which included the organizing committee and other women working at the *Encuentro*—was able to participate without paying the registration fee, a rule which caused some controversy. In addition, the mainstream press was not allowed to attend.

Each day of discussion was centered around a theme. Discussions and workshops took place openly and spontaneously. The afternoon of July 31 was devoted to introductory discussions: August 1 was *Our Feminisms*; August 2, *Our Body, Our Desires*; August 3, *General Themes*, including a discussion on the Fourth *Encuentro* to take place in Mexico City in 1987.

The following interview is with three Latina women—Maria Cora, from Puerto Rico; Judit Moschkovich, from Argentina; and Sonia Alvarez, from Cuba—all of whom live and work in the United States.

Sonia: The First *Encuentro* was conceived by Venezuelan women, but they were themselves unable to organize it. Colombian women took on that responsibility and the First *Encuentro* was held in Bogotá, Colombia in the summer of 1981.

A lot of the women who attended were on the international feminist circuit—professional and academic women who had been to international conferences before. It was small—250 women—but nonetheless historical. One of the big issues was what exactly was to be the Latin American feminist movement's role in social change and what its relationship to the left would

be. It was agreed that the women's movement was a political movement and should collaborate with other political movements.

Of course, one *Encuentro* was not enough and it was decided that every two years it should be held in a different country, with an organizing committee from that country. The Peruvian women took on the Second *Encuentro* which 650 women attended. The Peruvian organizing committee decided that they wanted the *Encuentro* to be very structured. They chose 18 topics, all addressing the relationship between patriarchy and women's lives and interests. Invited speakers would present their thoughts, and people would respond. Some women really liked this framework, but others felt that they as individuals weren't given the chance to analyze where the movement had gone since the last *Encuentro*.

Three-quarters of the people stopped going to the planned workshops and spontaneously organized different kinds of discussions. There was a "mini-workshop" on lesbianism to which 300 women came, not all of them lesbians. No real political advance was made in the discussion, but the fact that the issue of lesbianism was raised and so many people showed an interest was extremely significant.

Another big issue was that there were few Indian and Black women present in spite of the fact that we were in Peru [Indians, Blacks and Asians constitute 48% of the Peruvian population]. Women who had shown up, but were not able to pay were not allowed in. In the face of this, some Black women from a women's group in Brazil proposed a workshop on racism, which was a major breakthrough.

From our point of view as US Latinas, a third significant thing happened: we were acknowledged as Latinas. There had been two different registration fees, one for Latin Americans and one for Non-Latin Americans. We had been categorized as Non-Latin Americans, so we raised a stink. But at the closing, a Puerto Rican woman from the US was asked to speak for US Latinas.

The Third *Encuentro*

Judit: The organizing committee tried to have the Third *Encuentro* as unstructured as possible. They came up with themes for the day and then the people who came proposed workshops. Each night the organizing committee would make up a schedule of workshops for the following day according to what was proposed. In general, people didn't present papers or try to give the definitive word on anything. People came together to talk and exchange information.



For some of the women from Argentina, this was their first trip outside the country to attend a political conference. Because of the military dictatorship, it was hard for women who were not well-known academics or researchers to participate in the previous Encuentros. For the Chilean women, it was a relief to be out of their country and in an at least so-called democracy. At every meal, they chanted anti-Pinochet slogans and women from other countries would join in.

Sonia: Although the organizers had received a US\$40,000 loan from the Ford Foundation, funding sources were limited because funders were more interested in Nairobi [the Decade for Women conference held in Kenya in July, 1985]. There was a small number of scholarships and everyone else had to pay US\$60, which is equal to two monthly minimum wage salaries in Brazil.

Maria: About 700 women filled out a questionnaire that was distributed at the Encuentro. Most of those who responded said that they had been to college, about half of these with financial help. 573 women said they were white, 49 Black, 12 Asian, 21 Indian and 44 other. The categories were problematic as mestizo [mixed race of Indian, white and/or Black] was not mentioned as a category, nor were there categories within mestizo. People don't just lump themselves into Black, white, "Hispanic," and Asian as we do here in the US.

There were two workshops that dealt with racism, one mainly focused on the situation in Brazil. Mostly we talked about how racism affects Black people because it seems that the darkest people always catch the most hell, but we also talked about Indian women's problems. People talked about *blanqueamiento*, the process of whitening—what happens as a result of internalized racism. You try to take on as much as you can of what's white—that supposedly makes you better. You marry white to "improve" the race. Women from all different countries talked about the effects of racism within their women's movements. Also, we emerged with a statement condemning apartheid.

The Bus

Maria: There were racial aspects to the bus incident that, unfortunately, were not discussed in these workshops. What happened

was this: 23 women had come by bus to the Encuentro, but were denied entry because they didn't have the money to pay the registration charge. Most of them were Black and poor from one of the *favelas* (shanty communities) outside of Rio de Janeiro.

When I first got to Bertioga, the bus was already there. By the time I got in, I knew that it was going to be a big issue. It was discussed and argued throughout the three days. Some felt that the women should be let in, but the organizing committee maintained that they had a contractual agreement with the resort stating that everyone coming in would either have a scholarship or pay the charge.

Many women, including poor and working class women among the participants, felt that demanding entry on the opening day of the Encuentro was inappropriate. Brazilian women had had one and a half years to organize and raise funds to participate and ample time to apply to the organizing committee for scholarships. So at the Encuentro, a money collection was taken up for the women, but after a day, they only collected enough for five of the 23. The position of the women on the bus was "All of us or none," and in the end, none of them got in.

Sonia: Aside from the fact that the women did not get in, the most unfortunate aspect of the incident was the fact that people sat around and talked about the bus, but never talked about the racial or class issues that the bus raised—that *faveladas* and women like them were not able to participate in the Encuentro regardless of whether the organizing committee had the power to let them in. There were rumors that the bus had been sponsored by a political party.

Let me give some background on the history of what fed into the bus incident. When feminist groups first emerged in São Paulo, many of the participants were or had been members of one of the then-illegal progressive political parties. They were determined to make feminism a mass movement and they did a lot of work with community mothers' clubs, with union women, and in urban neighborhoods. In 1979, for International Women's Day, these groups held a huge congress for women involved in the movement.

A year later, they held a second congress, which 4000 women attended. At that one, a group of women from leftist political parties showed up and tried to impose their own sectarian political agenda on the congress. Other women argued that there were by then other political spaces in Brazil within which issues like the Constituent Assembly could be discussed, but International Women's Day should be reserved for discussing the specificity of women's oppression within class relations and general social change. After the Second Congress, many feminists began articulating a political position on gender that was distinct from that of the orthodox Left. They began to argue that the women's movement, which continued committed to general social change, had to be politically autonomous of the Left.

Womens' groups have become very polarized since then—



Mabel Maio

Judit Moschkovich



Judit Moschkovich

some are opposed to party politics and others will only work within a political party. This continuing problem was manifested in the bus incident at the Encuentro. When it was thought that the bus had been sent by a political party, the groups of women became polarized on that issue, and largely forgot the other questions at hand.

Workshops

Judit: Let me give you a sense of some of the workshops that took place. On the first day—"Our Feminisms"—the topics were violence, communication and the arts, racism, and feminism and institutional power. The second day's theme was our bodies, and the workshops included our desires, time—menstruation and menopause, culture, and interpersonal relationships. The third day was open. There were discussions about lesbianism, funding and autonomy for groups, institutional power, work, communications, prostitution and health and abortion policies.

One of the things that was clear from the variety of workshops was the growing diversity of Latin American feminism. During any one moment at the Encuentro, there were women meeting to discuss everything from feminist anti-imperialist work to domestic violence popular education to gynecological self-help. Women working in similar fields—such as battered women's groups and health collectives—met with each other, as did regional and national groups. There is no one Latin American feminism, there are many.

Maria: I attended the Nicaragua discussions, which took place in three parts. The first was really a question-and-answer session where two AMNLAE women from a legal organization spoke about the current situation in Nicaragua and women's gains. The second meeting was organized by CIM [Centro Informacao Mulher] and was a panel discussion which also included a Nicaraguan living in Paris and myself as internationalist solidarity workers. The state of Nicaraguan feminism came out much more in this one. It became clear that AMNLAE mainly responds to the needs of women who are members of neighborhood-based mass organizations.

The incidence of battered women among the mothers of martyrs is one big issue AMNLAE deals with. They say that men blame women for their children's deaths, saying that the women influence the children to fight in defense of the government, and then the children get killed. The women feel guilty, so it is hard to bring these cases to court.

At a third forum, people agreed to draft a statement of support for Nicaragua. A lot of time was spent in careful wording of that statement, because the women wanted to present it from a distinctly feminist perspective. When talking about the war in Nicaragua, people pointed out that the Contras are very much a part of the patriarchal set-up. Although the present government is still patriarchal, it has opened itself up to change, to the struggle for women's rights. If the Contras prevail, this struggle will be forgotten.

The solidarity work being carried out by women's groups in the US, Europe, and—to a lesser degree—Latin America, was commended and encouraged.

Sonia: In the workshop on Our Feminisms, our diversity truly manifested itself. The discussion shifted to what should be the proper relationship between the feminist movement and the state. Women from the countries that used to be military dictatorships and are now so-called democratic regimes—Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay—expressed reservations about their government's "progressive" platforms on women's issues. They were afraid the movement would be institutionalized and co-opted. Other women didn't see this as an issue. Feminists here in the US don't think about the state in any kind of structured way at all, whereas most women at the Encuentro were really aware of the government and what the government might do to the movement, and what the movement can or cannot do with the government.

There were women who were really into autonomy and creating an alternative culture—what in this country would sound like radical feminism. Some were really disgusted because the feminist movement used to be militant and here we were worried about government women's councils and how to lobby legislators. They didn't want to lose the dynamism of the movement.

Judit: There were several workshops called to talk about lesbianism and one was called by lesbians just for lesbians. Some people were upset by this, thinking it was separatist. But it was called to talk about what it's like to be lesbians in our different countries and exchange information about lesbian activist groups. Some of the lesbians I talked to defined themselves as bisexual. It was too scary for them to sit down with another lesbian and say "I'm a lesbian", partly because of a history of repression [including police harassment]. On the other hand, a lot of lesbians were saying, "Look, calling yourself a lesbian (even if you sleep with a man tomorrow) is a political statement." And a lot of the discussions centered around how to be both lesbians and feminists, on a personal as well as a political level.

After being in workshops all day, we would go dance all night—we worked hard and played hard. We danced to tangos, salsa—people would press for music from their country. Discussions would continue with people screaming over the music. There wasn't this great distinction between being political and being social, between working hard and relaxing.

Sonia: One of the most significant things was that Portuguese-speaking and Spanish-speaking women talked to one another. Most people had to devise a way to understand each other because there was no organized translation.

Judit: At the closing, women all got up and made their speeches, and made recommendations for future Encuentros—childcare, sliding scale, availability, different lodging. It ended on a positive note. The way that the location for the Fourth Encuentro was picked was especially efficient. Four countries were suggested—Argentina, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Mexico. Cuba was not a viable choice because women from the Federation of Cuban Women were not able to attend the Third Encuentro. Their visas were cleared by the Brazilian government only after the Encuentro had ended, so they met with some of the organizers and other women still in São Paulo a few days later. It was agreed by consensus that the next encuentro would be in Mexico. The whole decision took 20 minutes. It was amazing!

Maria: I got very excited when I heard that the Fourth Encuentro was going to be held in Mexico. I felt that the voice of Latinas from the US would be much stronger because of Mexico's proximity to the US. Voices from the Caribbean—which were mostly not present at this one—will also be stronger. Some of the very important concerns about women and militarism in the Caribbean didn't get explored this time.

We'll see what our role in Latin American feminist development as Latinas who live in the US is going to be. We are right now an important and visible link between the feminist movement in this country and Latin America. The long-overdue dialogue between Chicanas and Mexicanas is something to look forward to in Mexico. Also the one between Puerto Ricans living here and those living on the island.

Judit: I got urgent requests for information from both feminists and lesbians. For example, they need materials to work with to help battered women to organize. They shouldn't have to start from scratch. Women from other countries should send information to them, preferably translated into Spanish.

I think the most important thing that the recurrence of these conferences every two years can do is dispel the myth that feminism or feminists don't exist in Latin America, or that the Latin American feminist movement is the same as, or an imitation of the movement in the US. Certainly, we can exchange ideas about how to deal with class differences, ethnic differences and anti-racism work. The experiences of Latina feminists living in the US in the practice of feminism are very important. On the other hand, we can learn from Latin American feminists' experiences also. For example, how they have managed to be activists both in the left and in the feminist movements, and how they struggle to define feminist issues in terms of what affects women specifically as women and in general as people living in capitalist and dependent countries. □

Further reading:

• "Gracias a la Vida: Recounting the Third Latin American Feminist Meeting," by Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach, off our backs, January, 1986.

A Revolution Deferred

Grenada

(Reprinted from *Fireweed*, a Canadian feminist quarterly, Issue 20, Winter/Spring 1985, written by Nan Peacocke, a West Indian journalist.)

The October 1983 invasion of Grenada by US military forces put a stop to the Grenada's four-year-old revolution. The women's movement within the revolutionary New Jewel Movement was manifested in the National Women's Organisation (NWO) and was a fundamental building block of the revolution. The 7,000 women strong organisation played a major role in state policy, deepening the definition of women's issues to encompass all those issues which affect women from work to education to food prices. The organisation sat on the boards of all state bodies and state industries. It was instrumental in legislating a minimum wage for domestic workers, a free health care system and a policy of women's training in non-traditional work. At the same time, the new Ministry of Women's Affairs, the only one of its kind in the region, began taking women's issues to a level of legitimacy through state policy.

Before 1979, women in Grenada made up 60% of the unemployed and were largely heads of households. After the revolution, the institution of economic projects, such as women's co-operatives, directly addressed the condition of women in Grenada. But, after the invasion the NWO was banned and the Ministry of Women's Affairs dismantled under claims that it was too political.

The following is an interview with two women who worked and struggled in Grenada during the years of the revolution. One of them was immediately expelled from the country. After the invasion, both emigrated to Canada, where they now live. Their names have been omitted in order to protect their lives.

Nan: How did the National Women's Organisation come into being?

C: At a time when Gairy, then Prime Minister, had reached his highest stage of brutality and exploitation, a number of women, mainly from the New Jewel Movement [NJM], who were concerned with the lot of women in the country came together. We met in a small village, in December 1977, to discuss the issues facing us. We were a group of about 40 women, made up of young unemployed intellectuals and working class women. There were basically two major issues to be dealt with. First, how would this small group of women reach out to the mass of women in the country, and second, what exactly could be done to ease the difficult situation of women in Grenada at that time.

Nan: Were there any other kinds of women's organisations in Grenada at that time?

C: Yes. There was the YWCA, which represented a small group of elite women, and a small church organisation, but you had to be married to join these organisations. Of course, the Grenada United Labour Party [GULP] had a women's organisation, but one had to be a member of Gairy's party, or strongly in support of it to be in the membership. They dealt mainly with the promotion of Gairy's policies, not at all with the raising of women's consciousness, or their development. So the mass of women in Grenada were not represented in any way.

Nan: What were some of the issues that the NJM Women's Organisation addressed, and what were some of the results of their efforts?

P: I think it is important to remember that a large number of the women in our organisation were not NJM members at the time, but supported the NJM and worked with us towards the betterment of women in our country.

C: The price of food in the rural areas had become an important issue. The cost of Caribbean sugar was at its highest, and the price of milk and salt fish (a staple in Grenada) were so high that the average mother could not buy them. Pamphlets were printed



Mural in Grenada.

and women from three groups went out into the community to talk to the women at the estates, in the workplace, and on the streets. They dealt only with the price of goods, not the current political issues. In the meantime, we were forming a group which would fight for the lowering of prices.

P: As well, there were many fundraising activities. We helped poor women, and unemployed women with many children, to find places to live.

C: What was really interesting was that the NJM Party paper was underground during the Gairy reign. Women in the organisation were involved in smuggling the newspaper into the workplace and to the masses at large. Now this was real organised work because, even though it was an underground paper, it reached more Grenadians than any other national paper in the country. This was mainly because of the work of women who found all kinds of ways to get the newspapers to the people.

Nan: Did women openly identify themselves as members of the NJM?

P: Many women were afraid to identify themselves openly with the organisation, but they would come to individual members with contributions, or to seek advice. When public activities were organised, they would come to support them, but in terms of actually joining the group, some of them were afraid. When we met with women, we often went not as NJM women but as concerned women wanting to talk with other women. We had to use that kind of method and it was successful.

Immediately after the revolution which triumphed on March 13, 1979, groups sprang up spontaneously all over the country. NJM women still existed as a women's organisation and had a steering committee of nine or ten people. We received calls from women all over the country who wanted to organise, who wanted someone to come to talk to them and tell them how to form a group, and get involved in the revolutionary process. The small nucleus of NJM women was able to meet most of these groups and draw them into one big organisation. More pamphlets were printed, radio announcements made, house to house contact established and individual members were grouped together.

In late 1979, the organisation took on a serious campaign to get all the women who were organising in small groups into a

national organisation. The steering committee was enlarged to include a representative from each parish.

Nan: Who decided on the representatives? What was the process?

C: Each parish group was asked to choose two reps and send them to the general meeting, which was discussed and then set for the end of 1980. The need to form an umbrella organisation with realistic goals was the major concern. We also talked about changing the name of the organisation from NJM Women to NWO which would include everybody, not only women supporting the party, but also women who were interested in developing themselves and the revolutionary government.

Nan: What policies did the NWO influence?

C: Even before the revolution, NJM women were raising questions about the exploitation of women doing the same work as men while being paid a lower wage. For example, the people who cut cocoa, one of Grenada's national products, were paid differently. The men simply picked the cocoa and put it on the ground; the women would cut it, remove the seeds from the body, basket it and carry it away. But, they were paid two dollars less than the men for doing more work. Consciousness around these issues was being raised before the revolution, so after its triumph, (less than two months afterward), the first law that was passed guaranteed equal pay for equal work.

After the revolution, the first major issue that the NWO took on was the maternity leave law. A parish-level questionnaire was sent out to all groups asking what they thought about it. Married women who worked often had some kind of maternity leave with pay, but women who were not married would be fired, so the question was a real burning one which affected many women. The national figure for children born out of wedlock was 77%. This gives an idea of how many women we were dealing with. Some became NWO members and voiced their opinions. Members of other organisations, like the YWCA and the church organisations, were also sent questionnaires. We had all kinds of views coming from these women. However, since most of the women are not married the overwhelming majority was in favour of the maternity leave law, which stated that a woman, married or not, has the right to have a child, to three months leave after birth with two months full pay, and up to six months leave if her baby is not well. She can apply for further leave, without pay, and her job will remain open to her.

P: The law was passed without difficulty, which was a real victory for the NWO. It was made easier by the fact that there were members from the NWO on the staff of the Women's Desk, which the government had established. So the NWO had a direct channel through the Women's Desk to the government.

C: In 1982, the Women's Desk grew into the first Women's Ministry in the English-speaking Caribbean countries. The ministry was actually too small for many of the problems that came up on a daily basis. Although there were sections for community development, for childbirth and childcare, for education, and so on, this was just not enough to deal with all the problems.

P: Another key area that we dealt with was women in produc-

tion. During the early stages, women were quite interested in going into non-traditional occupations. For example, we were thinking of starting a driving school for women, as the airport was going to be opened and women could be trained to take on jobs as taxi drivers, bus drivers and other driving jobs. Women were accustomed to handling heavy equipment already, and in fact, one woman was already working at the airport as a tractor driver. We also worked on involving women in agricultural co-operatives and bakeries. Women were encouraged to form co-operatives that would bring in money to the unemployed and the rural areas. The NWO also had a national exhibition which proved quite successful and showed the talents of our women in craft culture and public speaking. During the period of the four years when the NWO blossomed, we saw the talents of women coming out through the organisation and encouragement of both the government and the NWO.

Nan: I'd like to ask about the relationship between the NWO and other mass organisations. How did the NWO relate to them?

C: The NWO had relations with all the mass organisations as well as mixed organisations. For two years from 1981 to 1983, the NWO used money that the government made available to make sure that children whose parents couldn't afford to send them to school got the necessary books and uniforms. Some were able to go to school with shoes for the first time.

P: We made sure that we were not duplicating or competing with any of the programs of other organisations. We supported and assisted them in any way we could and they did the same for us. We had women who were members of both the National Youth Organisation and the NWO. During the trade union struggle, the NWO made a radio statement supporting the struggles. We had that kind of relationship with other mass organisations.

C: I think you could also say that the NWO encouraged women to join the trade unions, and farming women to join the farmer's union.

P: Yes. This was very strong especially on the plantations because the women had made up their minds that they were working too hard. They demanded half an hour off with pay to meet and talk, and this was eventually added onto the half hour that they got for lunch. So they met for an hour each day, and this caught on very well. About ten estate groups started doing this; most of the men were quite curious. They came around and listened. Most of them were illiterate but they really wanted to participate and they were listening.

Nan: And they didn't try to take over?

C: This is a question that was always being discussed among members of the NWO, within the party and within the government. I think it was in 1982 that the congress decided to have a detailed investigation into the problems that women face from their men, at home and in society. We wanted to establish a "family code." We needed to look at all the laws that had been adopted from the past, and we required research into these laws to determine which were discriminatory, and which had to be changed. We looked at the question of men battering women, men leaving women and children and not contributing financially to the raising of those children.

P: There were times when men would question the problems of women, and our definition of them. Were they distinct from men's problems? We had to deal with this on both a personal level as well as the party level, but we did write a paper which we had passed on to the central committee of the party. The burden of housework was one issue we addressed and we raised the consciousness of party men on this. I think that their response was positive.□

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For Our Own Rights Now

Iran

(Excerpted from unpublished articles by Mariam Poya, an Iranian independent socialist feminist, with additional information from Rahai, an Iranian feminist writer and translator.)

Iranian women have never been passive in their pursuit of freedom. From the tobacco strikes at the turn of the century to the student movements and mass uprisings in the 1960s and '70s, Iranian women have been active in social and political protest. However, they have not formed independent women's organizations, although they have demonstrated on several occasions for women's rights. After Khomeini came to power, women constructed several groups, but these were subsets of liberal, leftist and other groups in which the "women's issue" was always the *last* to be considered.

In the nineteenth century, two patriarchal orders confronted each other. One was the secular patriarchy presenting a new but contradictory policy towards women, and the other, a clerical patriarchy committed to upholding the Islamic law. The history of women's oppression and women's struggle in Iran is embedded in the modernisation movement on the one hand, and the power of Islam on the other.

The modernisation movement in Iran first began in the early 19th century when students and merchants, travelling in Europe, were impressed by the achievements of the European Industrial Revolution. During the second half of the 19th century, modernisation took on a distorted form. Iran was a buffer zone between the empires of Tsarist Russia and Britain, both of which forced their own banks upon Iran, thus imposing a less direct form of exploitation.

In 1890, a British company obtained the monopoly over production, sale and export of Iranian tobacco. This concession produced a massive wave of popular discontent as Iranian merchants and growers would be ruined. The clergy, who were opposed to all foreign influence, joined the opposition and called for the boycott of tobacco use. Strikes and street demonstrations made the anti-concession campaign highly successful. In a mass movement like this, women could take part in demonstrations, and they did, despite apparent general religious sanctions against women smoking.

The anti-concession uprising was the first modern struggle of the Iranian masses, and the lessons of that campaign led to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. The Constitutional Revolution was the result of

the combined efforts of opposing forces—the liberal intellectuals and merchants who desired a fair chance against foreign capital and the religious leaders who desired the return of religious power and tradition, as well as the closure of western-style schools that educated girls.

The girls' schools, originally established by French and American missionaries, were opened in 1875 to Muslim girls. A small number of young middle class women learned about French women's involvement in the Paris Commune, British women's fight for the vote and Russian women's struggle against the Tsar. These stories were repeated from woman to woman, in family circles, in mosques and even in public baths. Many graduates of these schools themselves established girls' schools despite opposition from the Islamic clergy.

During the Constitutional Movement of the 1900s, women, still wearing the *chador* (which means tent, the outward sign of women's repression for 2500 years), participated in sit-ins and demonstrations and fought for their rights within the constitutional movements and against the clergy.

At the beginning of the first World War, British, Russian and Turkish troops occupied most of Iran. A radical opposition formed in response to this occupation. During this period, new political organisations, women's groups, trade union organisations and radical newspapers appeared throughout the country.

In the northern region of Iran many people were in some way involved with the anti-Tsarist struggle in Russia. As a result, nationalists and merchants led a movement

in 1915, calling themselves the Jongalis (the forestmen).

Women who were involved in the Jongali and communist movements organised women's groups and produced several women's publications and newspapers. Other women's organisations also appeared. Four women set up the Anjoman Payke Saadat (Society of the Message of Happiness). They published a magazine and opened a girls' school both called *Payke Saadat* (Message of Happiness). In 1919, these women celebrated International Women's Day.

In Isfahan, in southern Iran, Seddighe Dowlatabadi set up the Sazemane Sherkate Khavatin (Women's Participation Organisation) and published a newspaper called *Zabane Zanan* (Women's Voice). This organisation and its newspaper were banned by the government after three years of activity, and Seddighe was arrested. At least seven other women's organisations and women's publications were actively involved in fighting for women's rights and equality within home and society, against the *chador* and Islamic laws, as well as participating in the fight against imperialist domination.

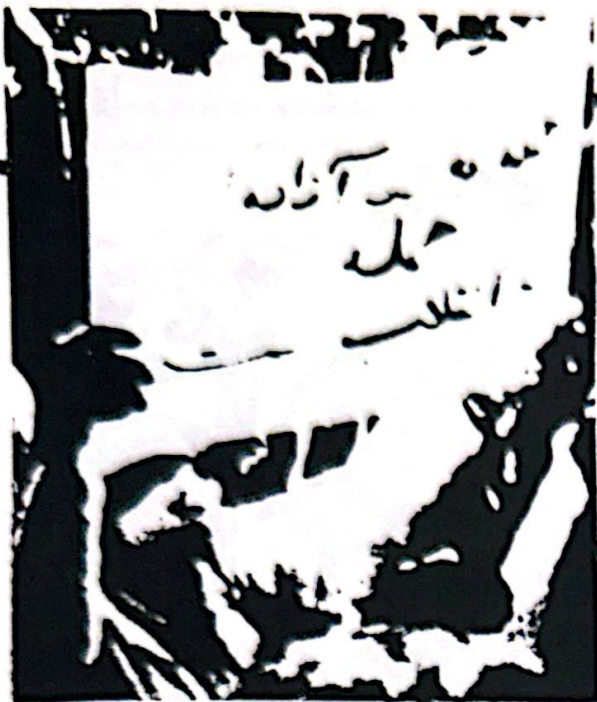
Reza Khan, as minister of war, crushed the Jongali Movement in 1919-20, engineered a coup against the old Qajar dynasty, and in 1926, declared himself the Shah of Iran and founded the Pahlavi dynasty. He committed himself to the modernisation of Iran and its industrial development.

In 1936, Reza Shah outlawed the veil and women were forced to parade in the main streets unveiled. At the same time,



Poster from March 8, 1979: "Women's freedom is society's freedom."

Iranian Women's Independent Group



"Opposing women's freedom is opposing revolution."



"Abolish all laws which control women's lives."



March 8, 1979.
Women demon-
strate in Tehran.

however, the leaders of women's groups called Payke Saadat who were fighting against the veil were jailed by the Shah for their activities. Thus, many considered that the Shah's law was not written with the intent of giving women greater freedom.

The Tudeh Party was formed in 1941 by a group of 53 intellectuals who were under Russian protection and encouragement. This party was a new body built on popular front tactics and committed to a Stalinist strategy. The women members, some of whom had been involved in earlier women's organisations, formed the Tudeh Party's women's wing. But the fight for women's rights did not go further than adopting slogans for equality. Because of their sanctioning of Russian imperial intentions, the Tudeh Party lost much of its support.

In 1952 mass demonstrations and strikes led to the rise of the National Front government headed by Dr. Mossadegh. The nationalisation of Iran's oil and various social reforms were priorities of the new government.

However, two years later the Mossadegh government was overthrown in a CIA-engineered coup. In exchange for "saving" Iran from Mossadegh and the communists, the US demanded half of Iran's oil from the newly installed government of Reza Shah, the son of the former leader. With the return of the Pahlavi dynasty and with the help of the US, harsh political restrictions were imposed and the notorious Iranian secret police force, the SAVAK, was created.

Despite vast US aid to the Shah, the

regime tottered towards a deep economic crisis by the early '60s. The demand for radical reforms was growing. By 1962, there were mass student demonstrations and university occupations. Hundreds of men and women were injured and some were killed when Tehran University was stormed by troops. In June 1963, after two to three days of street fighting in Tehran, the Shah ordered that his government immediately launch a programme of reform, known as the White Revolution of the Shah and the People.

The twelve initiatives of the White Revolution were land reform, nationalisation of forests and pastures, the public sale of state owned factories to finance the land reform, profit sharing for workers in industry, votes for women, the formation of a literacy campaign, of a health corps for the rural areas, a reconstruction and development corps, rural courts of justice, nationalisation of waterways, national reconstruction and an administrative revolution for the education service.

As a result of land reform and industrialisation, the need for female and child labor on land increased. In the rural areas women and children constituted the majority of the seasonal work force, for which they were paid only half as much as male laborers. The carpet and cloth weaving industries are also concentrated in rural areas and the majority of workers were and are women and six- to ten-year-old girls. According to government statistics, female employment in towns was running at around 11 percent in the mid-1970s, with the majority of women in the service sectors.

In the mid-1970s, although much was made of "liberating" women from the veil, and of granting women the right to vote, they were still inferior beings under the reformed version of Islamic law. Young women of the modernised middle class, however, began to fight the traditional way of life within the family. They fought for divorce and refused dowry (which is an essential condition in Islamic marriage). They began temporary or permanent relationships with men, including sexual relationships outside marriage. The family considered this not only an unforgivable disgrace, but also an act of prostitution. The modernised middle class bought virginity with their money. Sewing up the woman's hymen became a profitable business for Iranian doctors.

Many women during this period realised that as long as poverty and repression exist in Iran, women would continue to be regarded as inferior beings. They played an important role in the fight against the system. Out of an estimated 45,000 to 100,000 political prisoners under the Shah, the official statistics estimated that 4000 were women. While torture was a common fate for all political prisoners in the Shah's jails, the women were subjected to particularly cruel and degrading forms of torture, including rape and other sexual abuses. Despite these severe conditions many women during this period developed as speakers, guerrilla fighters and some even fought their way to the political leadership of some organisations. The majority of the women political prisoners were members and sympathisers of the guerrilla organisations.

The Revolution

In September 1978, following an oil workers' strike, a wave of blue and white collar workers' strikes shut down the oil refineries, the oil fields and the petrochemical complex in the south, the banks, the copper mines and many large industries. The workers demanded political rights as well as economic concessions. A rapid succession of strikes organised by strike committees (which by now were functioning in all factories, plants, all other work places, schools and universities) crippled almost all the bazaars, universities, railways, newspapers, customs and port facilities, airlines, radio and T.V. stations, paper and tobacco plants, textile mills and other large factories.

Violent demonstrations broke out in all cities and even large numbers of peasants from neighboring villages joined the urban rallies. Millions of women participated in demonstrations every day without wearing a veil. They were given scarves by the march organisers, who pleaded with them to wear them as a sign of unity for the overthrow of the Shah. A woman activist showed me a whole wardrobe full of scarves which she collected every day at the demonstrations.

What was important for all these women, veiled or unveiled, workers, peasants or from the middle class, was the fact that they all felt that this was the time to fight not only against the Shah's repression but against all the repression they face as women imposed on them for so long by their fathers, brothers, husbands and even by male comrades. They were women who spent all day everyday fighting. For many women, to wear the scarf or not seemed irrelevant at that point in time.

In early February 1979, after 18 months of violent clashes, demonstrations, sit-ins and strikes, the Shah was forced to leave the country and one of the regime's best-known opposition leaders, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran after his long exile in France. On February 26 1979, Khomeini's regime began re-instituting Islamic patriarchy.

Khomeini's attack on women began with a decree on February 26, 1979, that suspended the Family Protection Act—the Shah's minimal reform of women's rights. Khomeini returned the exclusive right of divorce to men, and permitted them to take four permanent and an unlimited number of temporary wives (*sighe*) without the first wife's permission. A few days later on March 3, another decree forbade women judges to work since, according to Islam, women are not fit to judge. On March 6, the Ministry of Defence barred women from military service (which some women had used as an opportunity to get military training). And finally, on March 7, Khomeini proclaimed that women, while not prohibited from taking jobs, must wear the Islamic veil (*hejab*, the head scarf).

The following day, March 8, hundreds of thousands of women who had been preparing to celebrate International Women's Day after so many years of repression, understood that they had to turn the day into a day of action against

the regime. Mass meetings were organised in girls' schools, colleges and at Tehran University against Khomeini's Islamic laws. The demonstrators marched in the streets of Tehran to the Ministry of Justice and the Prime Minister's office and shouted the slogans: "In the dawn of freedom, our freedom has been taken away;" "Down with dictatorship;" "We gave our lives for freedom, and we will fight again."

The *Hezbollahis* (members of the Party of God), the Islamic thugs, attacked the demonstrators with stones, shouting: "Our belief is not your belief, get lost;" "Either you put scarves on your heads or we will hit you on the head;" "Either *hejab* or *tisab* [acid]." These slogans were and are the essence of Islamic ideology towards women.

This was the first mass demonstration of women since the revolution where women marched without the veil against Khomeini and not the Shah. For a whole week there were further protest meetings and demonstrations against Khomeini's anti-woman legislation. Meanwhile the regime instituted further attacks on women's rights such as prohibiting women's participation in sports with the argument that the atmosphere of sports events was dirty and implementing restrictions on women's education which in many cases excluded girls and women from schools altogether.

On July 12, 1979, for the first time, three prostitutes were executed. This followed Khomeini's speech in which he said, "If you flog four prostitutes, prostitution will end." Later in the year, Chale Shahre Noe, the Tehran prostitution quarter, was officially closed down by the Bureau for Fighting Corruption. In 1980, it was turned into a center for Islamic temporary marriage—Islamic prostitution (*sighe*).

Today, Iranian feminists in exile are organising independent women's groups all over Europe and in most of the US. They write articles, translate books, and try to keep in contact with women living in Iran in order to build an Iranian feminist movement. The image of the thousands of Iranian women marching and shouting in the streets on March 8, 1979 under Khomeini's regime has not been forgotten.

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Edited by Dale Spender

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Subscription Information

Volume 8, 1985 ISSN 0277-5395

Published Bimonthly

Professional subscription rate US \$ 40.00

Institutional subscription rate US \$ 95.00

Two-year Institutional rate US \$180.50

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A member of the New People's Army.

In recent years the Philippines, under the US-backed Marcos regime, has experienced a dramatic escalation of militarization and a worsening economic situation, the gravity of which is unparalleled since World War II. At the same time, the long-standing popular resistance has moved to a significantly advanced level at all fronts. Repressed at the declaration of martial law and later forged by the underground resistance from the mid-seventies to the early eighties, the nationalist mass movement has surfaced once again. In the aftermath of the assassination of Benigno Aquino [a former senator in the Philippines, shot at the airport upon his return from self-imposed exile in the US], this mass movement has expanded well beyond its pre-martial law level. Multitudes of people's organizations representing a variety of sectors have emerged and coalesced, forming networks and alliances. Together they have launched massive, sustained nationwide demonstrations, pickets, marches and direct confrontation with the Marcos regime.

Not only have mass actions in urban and rural areas intensified, but the armed struggle launched by the New People's Army (NPA)—the military unit of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)—has rendered huge portions of the rural areas off limits to the Philippine army. The armed struggle in the countryside and the daily mass struggles of people's organizations compose the broad, well-grounded opposition movement that is seriously undermining the stability of the Marcos regime. Women's participation in opposition activities has brought specific women's demands into the context of the broader struggle and together with each other for women's equality. Their participation has become a vital element in this dynamic people's movement.

Powerful women's liberation movements with intimate ties to the national liberation struggle emerged in 1970 and re-

emerged in 1984, after having been outlawed in 1972 under martial law and forced to disband. In two parts, what follows is a reflection on MAKIBAKA, the first women's organization to introduce women's liberation into the national liberation movement, and background on GABRIELA, a coalition of women's groups formed in 1984.

(An article by Salome Ronquillo from *Diliman Review*, May-August, 1984, Quezon City, Philippines.)

MAKIBAKA Remembered

The emergence of several women's organizations after the Aquino assassination brings up proud, yet sad reminiscences over MAKIBAKA (Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan), said to be the pioneer in the women's liberation or feminist movement in the Philippines. MAKIBAKA was indeed the first Philippine organization to raise the issue of women's liberation, creating a stir in the media and among the male population. The organization earned a good deal of publicity because of its novelty, though not all of the attention was good. MAKIBAKA was derided and chided not only by the Establishment but also sometimes by male comrades in the national democratic movement where it chose to place itself.

MAKIBAKA proclaimed that the semi-feudal character of Philippine society subjugated women to men, molded women into shy and conservative beings and defined their function primarily as child-bearers and housekeepers. The semi-colonial nature of the society gave rise to the commercialization of sex and made women the play things of men. Therefore, women could only liberate themselves by joining the struggle for nationalism and democracy. This analysis was credible, though simple, and answered the question of how to involve women in the people's struggle.

A Woman's Task



As the women's movement became accepted, more studies and discussions were conducted on the Woman Question. Research, mostly informal [MAKIBAKA placed more emphasis on organizing than on research; political analysis was not one of its strengths], tried to dig deeper into the problem. From this, MAKIBAKA became aware of the need to work among women from various sectors of society in order to understand their oppression. The discussions that this triggered were invigorating and forced the MAKIBAKA members to fortify their stand with concrete examples drawn from their experiences working with women from different classes. Articles by MAKIBAKA members appeared in their own magazine and elsewhere dealing with these debates.

MAKIBAKA involved its members in militant mass actions; they mobilized and politicized women students, workers and professionals. They believed that they had realized their full potential in a purely women's organization. They learned to handle mechanical and organizational jobs that were traditionally reserved for men, and they were very proud of their contribution.

Despite the pride they had in their political work, the charge of "feminist" was a jab which the members feared. Their leaders walked on a tightrope, forever balancing women's issues and national issues, fearful of falling to the ground. This fear made MAKIBAKA neglect many important women's issues and caused it to operate below its organizational potential.

MAKIBAKA concentrated its mobilization efforts in schools and communities where the youth and student organizations operated, which caused some observers to think that MAKIBAKA was the women's

arm of a youth organization. MAKIBAKA attempted to organize the wives of workers and the women in urban poor communities who constitute the majority of the female population in the cities. It failed to attract them, however, because it did not explain what their points of unity with others in the organization might be.

MAKIBAKA was aware of the obstacles (housework and male authority) preventing many women from joining or getting involved in community and national affairs. It attempted to set up day care centers in urban poor communities to ease these constraints and managed to actually set up two. MAKIBAKA also conducted mothers' classes with a nurses' group (Makabayang Samahan ng mga Narses) to teach modern and scientific child care practices as well as promote breastfeeding, acupuncture and herbal medicine.

Among the issues MAKIBAKA raised as a women's organization were the irrelevance of beauty contests and the commercialization of sex. They also issued statements on such things as the pill, family planning, prostitution and high prices. But because of the fear of being identified with the Western concept of feminism, the organization concentrated on "more pressing" broader issues and activities. The pronouncement that women's issues should be second to national issues weakened and eventually killed MAKIBAKA.

In the early 1970s, MAKIBAKA was the women's movement and the women's movement was MAKIBAKA. When martial law was declared in 1972 and MAKIBAKA was disbanded, a vacuum was created. There were still women's groups, but there was no movement that worked for the liberation of women. Fortunately, individual women who were personally committed to the cause began to fill the vacuum.

The Underground and the New Movements

Even before the declaration of martial law, the government began to crack down on political organizations. As the situation worsened, a number of women went underground, and some joined the New People's Army. Lorena Barros, founder of MAKIBAKA, was one of these women. She had worked organizing peasants and had trained in military operations before joining the NPA. She was killed in 1976, while fighting in the mountains of Quezon.

From 1972 to 1976, popular resistance was significantly weakened, though not entirely destroyed. As the economic and political situation worsened, people joined unions and other groups to fight for survival. In 1976, women's groups began to form in different parts of the Philippines. Participation in labor groups, anti-prostitution/tourism groups, and in protests against the Bataan nuclear power plant had helped women to realize their political potential.

The assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino in August, 1983 galvanized people from all strata of society into action. A great number of women's

organizations were formed at this time. A group of students, workers and teachers from the university in Manila, who had met women from various organizations at political demonstrations, took the initiative to try to bring women's groups together under an umbrella organization. This was the beginning of GABRIELA.

(Excerpted from "Emergence of Women's Movement in the Philippines" by Sergy Floro in *Sourcebook on Philippine Women in Struggle*, September 1985.)

GABRIELA Emerges

In 1984, a multi-sectorial women's coalition was formed. Named after the first Filipino woman general (Gabriela Silang) who was able to transcend the traditional supportive role allotted to women in the 18th century, GABRIELA, an acronym for General Assembly Binding Women for Reform, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action was the first of the many steps towards gathering women as a social and political force. It is an alliance of various women's organizations and women's chapters that have been established in recent years, and signals the resurgence of the women's movement in the Philippines.

This is a significant advancement in the women's struggle because for the first time women from different social classes are able to identify themselves as a distinct and oppressed sector of society. The first general assembly of GABRIELA was held on March 10, 1984, and included women from various sectors: workers, peasants, students, tribal minority groups, the urban poor, professionals including lawyers, businesswomen, doctors, nurses and teachers, artists, nuns and lay workers, as well as housewives and mothers. They gathered together in order to articulate their problems and visions, and to come up with a program of action addressing not only the issues which confront them as women, but also the issues being faced by the Filipino masses as a whole.

Notable parliamentarian Senator Tecla San Andres-Ziga, lawyer Justice Cecilia Munoz Palma, and doctor Mita Pardo de Tavera came to speak about women's power in social and political actions, while also listening to their sisters from the slums in Manila, from the Bataan Export Processing Zone, from the heavily militarized areas in Mindanao.

Several multi-sectorial women's rallies have been held all over Manila since the first assembly. On July 2, 1984, a protest rally sponsored by GABRIELA brought students, workers, employees and society matrons—all dressed in black—to the Gabriela Silang monument in Makati, an exclusive business and commercial district, to protest the deteriorating economic situation, the IMF-World Bank's strangling of the Philippine economy and the rising militarization.

While the consciousness of the majority of women is now heightened, their role in shaping society's future still needs to be recognized. Although it is true that the opportunity exists for women to join and participate actively in the national

liberation struggle, the division of labor in the household has been such that women do about 90% of the work. These real conditions restrict women from advancing in their political development.

The practical constraints faced by women are now being addressed. Day care centers are being set up in rural areas as well as the cities to enable women to participate in political activities. In order for women from different areas and class backgrounds to understand each other's circumstances, two-way exposure programs as well as services and material support have been started.

The diversity of viewpoint and background in the women's movement contributes to its growth: no common plan of action is finalized without intensive discussions between the different sectors. Women have gained political experience by fighting together with men for national democracy, and with each other for women's equality. Their participation has become a vital element in this dynamic people's movement.

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Contacts:

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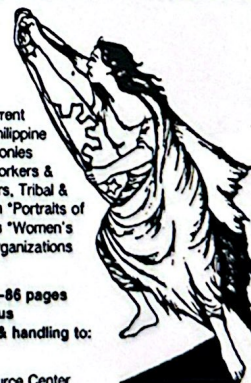
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Educating Ourselves for Revolution

Namibia

(Interview excerpted from *Outwrite*, an international monthly women's newspaper based in England, No. 35, April 1985; background introduction excerpted from *This is Namibia*, published by the International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa.)

Namibia and South Africa are the only countries in Africa where white minority rule continues. South Africa's occupation of Namibia, which began in the 1920s has been declared illegal by a series of UN resolutions demanding independence and free elections in Namibia. Disregarding this international mandate, Pretoria exercises territorial control over Namibia, instituting a system of apartheid on the Namibian people and waging a war against the South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO). Trade sanctions also encouraged by the UN are ignored by western nations. Britain, in particular, continues along with South Africa to exploit Namibia's natural resources which include large deposits of uranium.

The Namibian people have been engaged in an independence movement for over 100 years. SWAPO was formed in 1960 to lead this struggle. Today SWAPO is recognized as a legitimate representative of the Namibian people. It has permanent observer status at the UN and is recognized by the Indian government as the official diplomatic representative for Namibia.

Ellen Musialela, a SWAPO representative, spoke with the *Outwrite* collective while visiting London. She is currently in exile and at the time of the interview was working at SWAPO provisional headquarters in Angola.

The women's struggle goes back a long, long time—back to colonisation. Women were involved in the anti-colonial struggle, side by side with the men. In 1915, British troops invaded the country. Also at that time, the League of Nations gave South Africa the protectorate of Namibia. In 1948 the racist regime of Pretoria introduced apartheid to Namibia. Under apartheid there are only two professions women can take up—nursing and teaching. When women marry, they begin to work for their husbands and families.



Lynne Barber

Sewing workshop set up by Namibian Women's Council.

Q: What's SWAPO's position on this? Have you devised a programme for women?

A: In 1969 SWAPO's women's wing was created. We felt we had to join the struggle with our men. At that time very few women participated, but we are encouraging women to take part. We are educating ourselves for revolution and for the betterment of women and children. In SWAPO's constitution it is stipulated that there shall be no discrimination against women, but, as in the rest of the world, it's hard. In Africa there are a lot of individuals who think that women have to be kept, i.e., subordinate, because of that gap imposed by the colonisers. We are here to bridge that gap, by organising women in self-help projects, education and child care. These projects will give our women the education they need.

Q: Does this take place inside Namibia, or are we talking about the exiled community?

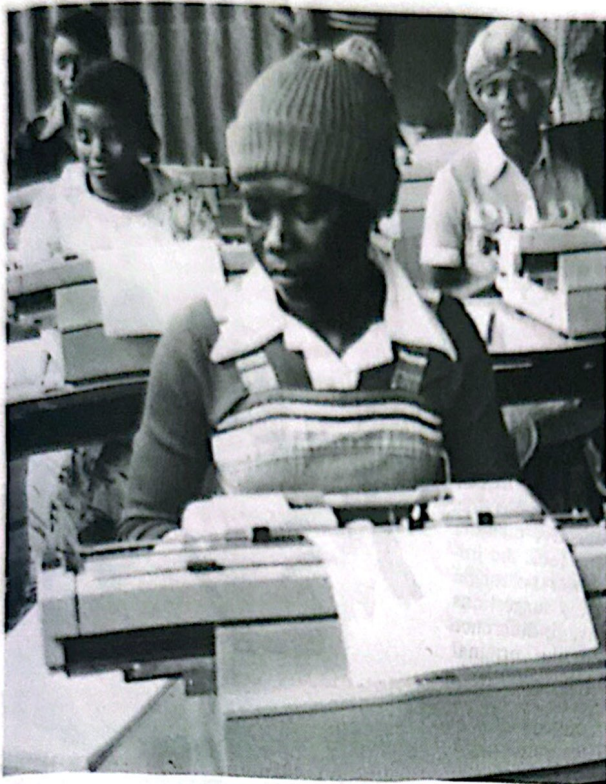
A: We are talking about the women in exile. Inside, there's no chance of organising. In exile, we try to encourage women to take up engineering jobs and other technical training, and to speak on platforms at political forums to tell the world what's happening. But there are still lots of gaps. Of the 50 members in the Central Committee of SWAPO, only six of us are women, and that's something we continue to work on—but, of course, without coming into confrontation with our men. Because the apartheid system denied us the right to education, we are still working hard to get our men to accept us as equals. The majority of the men still regard women as inferior. But the constitution is clear, and some men have started to accept it, especially those within the leadership. The president of SWAPO believes women are the backbone of any nation.

In our camps we have created lots of literacy programmes since our congress in 1980. We have been helped by other women's organisations, like the Soviet women, women of the GDR [German Democratic Republic], and the Cuban Women's Federation. Women from the age of 5 to 50 were 95% illiterate. Figures have come down to 7%. [As there are many different standards by which literacy is measured, these statistics are relative, not absolute.] Nowadays the men respect the women.

Q: In the Women's Council you have a programme to agitate inside SWAPO. Is it all based on achieving equal rights? In my view, equality is not a good enough cause—women have centuries of disadvantage. Do you think positive discrimination should be a demand? What are the political arguments you use to push your demands inside SWAPO?

A: [Sigh] I thought I explained that. Our struggle, as I told you, at this moment is very much geared towards liberating ourselves from the apartheid system under which we live and, of course, the unjust gap between men and women has to be bridged somehow. One of the things we recognise that makes women lag behind is that, under apartheid, education is denied to women. If you don't have enough education, it really is very hard to express yourself. You always feel inferior or small. That's why we have classes to educate women to take up non-traditional female jobs. We have set up self-help projects, such as weaving and sewing. They say that those are also women's jobs—but when they go back home, they won't be regarded as sitting at home, waiting for their men to bring in the money. They will be able to open up cooperatives for themselves.

Of course it was difficult to get the literacy project off the ground; it was difficult to make the men understand that we could work together. But they have started to accept it. In our camps, the women take mechanical courses and are able to drive heavy trucks for long distances, taking food to different settlements. When these trucks break down, the women repair them. The men now realise that a woman's place is not just in the kitchen. But truly though, at the moment it is very hard for us.



Lynne Barber

Typing class given by Namibian Women's Council.

We can't divorce ourselves too much from the main struggle. Our efforts are directed toward the enemy—the racist regime of South Africa. We want them out, out of our country, so that we can start to work on our own affairs.

I know that in other countries women have problems and they also organise inside the main struggle. Some traditional laws are also in our way. When it comes to family planning, for example, the women won't use it because it's against the culture and they fear they won't be able to have any more children. This is another weapon the men are using against the women. The men cheat by saying if you don't get pregnant that means you are sterile, therefore I won't marry you. In Africa it is ridiculous—if you don't want to have children you are regarded as a social outcast. So this is the kind of cheating we are trying to counteract by educating women to understand that family planning is important. It is important that you don't have children you won't be able to look after. They may die before they grow up.

Q: Is SWAPO's struggle a class struggle or a race struggle?

A: The struggle of the Namibian people is the struggle against apartheid under which we are denied the right to compromise or unionise. It is the struggle for our survival. It is class struggle. In

Namibia the majority are blacks, and the whites are in power, but we also recognise some whites work with us against the regime. We don't want to wipe out white racism and replace it with black racism. We are a peace loving people. We are internationalists, and believe that different people can live together.

Women who are active inside Namibia are involved in so many activities. Inside it is very difficult to organise; you are not allowed to participate or call a meeting without being harassed. The pass laws stop women from mobilising, so that everything is done underground. [Mandatory pass cards are used by the Pretoria regime to restrict the movements of the Black population in Namibia and in South Africa.] They organise support for SWAPO. They can understand that when the freedom fighters go back into the country they should give them shelter and food. Women are victimised for it; women like Ida Jimmy are incarcerated. [Ida Jimmy was arrested in July 1980 under the South African Terrorism Act because she spoke out in support of SWAPO at a rally in Namibia.]

Q: The situation in Angola is extremely violent at present; refugee camps have been bombed by the invading South African forces. Also, South Africa is gaining control over the whole of southern Africa through trade agreements with neighbouring countries. How do you see the struggle continuing, and what is the women's situation like in the refugee camps?

A: Because in Namibia our people are constantly harassed and repressed, and because the Pretoria regime has passed a law to conscript all our males from the age of 17 to 55, the exodus continues. At present we have 75,000 refugees in Angola and over 35,000 in Zambia. Such a big population is difficult to keep; there have been outbreaks of malaria and typhoid. These diseases are very hard to control if you don't have medicine and good sanitary conditions. The refugee camp is situated in a very dry zone where water is scarce and there are always lots of mosquitoes. Many of our children have died from malaria because we haven't got enough medicine, and the number of refugees continues to increase.

Of course, some of our friends—socialist countries like the GDR, Cuba, Sweden—do send medicines and doctors, but still the situation here requires more medicines and contributions to get trucks to distribute water. There are a lot of problems but we continue living to fight, fighting to live, and struggling to return to our country. □

Further Reading:

- Various pamphlets and books about Namibia and South Africa, International Defense and Aid Fund for South Africa, Box 17, Cambridge, MA 02238.
- This is the Time—Interview with Two Namibian Women, Chicago Committee for African Liberation, 1476 West Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL, 60613.
- To Be Born a Nation: The Liberation Struggle for Namibia, A. Temu and B. Swai, Zed Books, 57 Caledonian Road, London N1 9BU, U.K.

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The Netherlands

Collective Chaos

(The following article written by Bernadette de Wit of *DIVA*, a Dutch lesbian quarterly, comes by way of personal correspondence with *Connexions*.)

The collective structure of groups, although central to feminist organizing, is seldom critiqued. The following article describing the ideological and structural changes of the Dutch lesbian magazine *DIVA* reflects one particular trend in the Western women's movement away from collectivity and towards a more mainstream, "professional," clear-cut hierarchy. We at *Connexions* have been working collectively since 1980, and remain enthusiastic about this approach to organizing.

The desire to publish a lesbian magazine and overcome women's minority position in the gay movement and gay press prompted three friends to get together and become the founders of *DIVA* (March 1982). In time, 12 to 16 women joined us and we formed a collective—a decision made for no other reason than that collective structures were unquestionably the most common way to run feminist projects at that time. However, it didn't take long for differences to arise—differences that seemed unsolvable within the confines of our collective. Inequality of ambition, know-how and diligence had no outlet for discussion within a structure which disqualifies and is threatened by differences.

As time went on, the founders felt compelled to retreat to secret meetings to discuss policy and strategy. This split led to tension in the collective, and the problem remained. The three founders worked together until two of them, who had been lovers for eight years, broke up. When one of them did not want to stay in the collective, an enormous fuss broke out, and the group chose to side with the woman who they saw as "victim," and unanimously stigmatized the other founder. Eventually, two of the founders left the collective and the remaining founder, in an attempt to repair the atmosphere in the collective, began to play the role of caring, stimulating mother; that was I.

But I missed the support of my two co-founders. I felt more responsible for the future of the magazine and saw a desperate need for fundamental, thorough discussion of three issues: individual motivations for participating in *DIVA*; goals people had in mind with the magazine; and the structure of the decision-making process and the organization of tasks, responsibilities and power.

After the above-mentioned fuss had settled, there was a notable avoidance of principled discussion. The climate in the collective was bleak, devoid of ideas. (Suddenly it was clear to me that the three

founders had always taken the intellectual initiatives.) Fear of conflict dominated the scene and prevented the necessary discussions on where to go with the magazine. Although more than one collective member was conscious of this, no one took the initiative to start things up. I was no longer recognized as a leader, and my suggestions were not accepted. Apathy, indifference and mistrust had replaced the original feminist ideal of inspired, equal sisterhood.

The only thing I could do to escape from the vicious cycle of collective passivity was to step aside and separate myself from collectivism. I stopped playing the mother role and began to raise incessantly the issues *DIVA* needed to discuss: motives for participation, goals and structure, and decision making.

Through informal conversations it was clear that the majority of the collective members pictured *DIVA* as an inwardly-directed, small, non-professional sort of magazine. Nobody was inclined to discuss their motives openly, although many saw the collective as a circle of friends rather than as a company that publishes and produces a magazine. The minority of women, consisting of two new members of the collective and myself, wanted *DIVA* to be a professional, outwardly-directed quality magazine.

As the emotional, procedural, and ideological conflicts grew, the pitfalls of a horizontal, equally-structured collective became clear to me: women refusing to take responsibility because there is no written contract; conflicts taking over and leading a life of their own because there is no statute with a paragraph on conflicts; and the participants' lack of clear motives resulting in incompatible goals. Then the conflicts intensified and sank to a purely personal level. I was made a scapegoat by the group and, as an editor, was confronted with sabotage in the production of the magazine. I didn't want the magazine itself to suffer, so I "saved" and "mended." The other women were angry and felt that I had abandoned them. But I prefer a visible, democratic sort of interaction to the mud pool/convent/girl's school kind.

The collective eventually brought in a professional chairwoman/group psychologist to help resolve the conflicts. After interviewing all collective members, she proposed that either I leave the collective or I stay; that the collective vote on which it would be. Not surprisingly, the majority chose to fire me from the collective. To my

amazement, however, the whole thing passed without any discussion about the magazine, never considering that we were dealing with a publishing company.

When I was fired from the collective, three other women left with me. With our lawyer, we wrote the "new" collective a letter in which we questioned their right to possess the name of *DIVA*. Three weeks after the "new" collective had won the



fight, they answered our lawyer by saying that they would not join a lawsuit over the name *DIVA*. Conflicts within their group continued, and they decided to quit the magazine altogether because it was too much work to run it.

The four of us decided to continue the magazine. After a reorganization (including a statute on a non-collective basis similar to any regular, small-scale magazine which is autonomously published), we regrouped and defined all functions in the company. The next step was designing the future concept of *DIVA*; targeting the readers we would like to address, outlining a marketing strategy and deciding how much money we would need to grow from 3,500 to 5,000 copies, our short-term goal. Recently, we have been lobbying the government and private sponsors about helping to finance our goals.

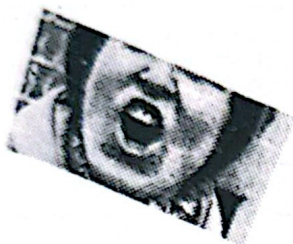
We need money to be able to run the magazine professionally. We think *DIVA* is a quality magazine that would sell to a greater number of readers. We want our lesbian magazine to deal with issues of sex and gender, sexuality, and political, social and cultural changes. We are convinced that our approach, both journalistically and graphically, makes *DIVA* interesting not only to lesbians, but to anyone who doesn't fit into common sex roles, or sexual stereotypes and categories.

DIVA is not a separatist pamphlet, complaining about oppression or retreating to a safe and small subcultural lesbian island, far away from the big patriarchal world. On the contrary, *DIVA* faces what is going on in the world; from our point of view as visible lesbians, we communicate with all people who explore another way of dealing with sex and sexuality now.

DIVA does not favour the search for a universal theory of feminism, nor for a conceptual and political separation between women and men. This goes for any issue

we cover, be it sexual fantasies, power, career, violence, or whatever. We do not believe women are better human beings than men just because there is a structural oppression on the basis of gender. Without arguing for a sex-neutral integration of women in the general culture, as "human beings" who can become equal to men after having overcome their second class position, we want women to be part of the real world. We cherish the idea of sex-specific political and cultural institutions, but not on the basis of a common victim position. On the contrary, same-sex bonding for women is a way to explore the world and to learn to deal with women from a positive perspective.

This position meets a lot of opposition in the women's movement, where men and women are seen as each other's enemies—an inadequate reaction to the traditional, complementary view of the



Kvinder/Kirstine Theilgaard

sexes. *DIVA* does not join the war between the sexes which is propagated by radical feminism. For us, sex differences are there to be fused, explored, accepted, made less strict, or whatever productive way one finds to deal with them. For this reason, *DIVA* is attacked as being apolitical and male-identified.

For many feminists, male lust equals violence and all power is necessarily patriarchal; for us there is no gender-bound definition of lust or power. Female sexuality can range from vanilla passivity to SM aggression, even in one individual. Sexuality is still a big problem in our society as a whole, and feminists are no less frustrated than anybody else. We suspect that many lesbian couples pretend that there exists no power dynamics between them, and that a lot of feminists reinforce their own fear of lust and call this politically correct sexuality.

Our point of view is to deconstruct the myth of male-violent-horny-powerful. We show all kinds of lust, power relations and eroticism between women nonjudgmentally, hoping to demystify the male-female dualism in feminist discourse, feminist emotion and feminist action. Our position must not be confused with a pro-SM stand—it is not as simple as that, although there is a lot of SM covered in *DIVA*. We do not join the silly fight between pro-SM and anti-SM which is going on in many feminist circles. Both sides accuse the other of being politically incorrect and each calls itself the real liberated feminist. In fact, we want *DIVA* to be a magazine about the *how* of things, instead of a judgement about the *why*. The most interesting thing about any

phenomenon is to investigate how it came about, how it has come to mean what it means today, what kinds of meanings different groups in society give to it and how, in the process of naming and renaming, the phenomenon changes.

This is our goal and we attain it by means of good, witty, stylish journalism and attractive layout and graphics. This is also the reason why we do not want to function as a big, equal collective. Producing a quality magazine demands talent and ambition and those two do not work in a collective where average is the norm. Unfortunately the sisterhood is powerful principle in the feminist movement has boiled down to an arrogant, moralistic, judgemental view on anything said and done by fellow feminists which does not fit with one specific type of radical feminist norm-system. *DIVA* is 100% against this. We love women to try different solutions to different questions and problems.

As Jo Freeman and many others have pointed out, structurelessness leads to

tyranny. Power exists in all social relations; it operates on every level and between members of an oppressed group. Feminists had better recognize this as fact, instead of idly trying to prove that power is an issue for all human beings except women. Nonsense. Instead of *avoiding* power problems, we propose that feminists tackle them. By doing so, one becomes familiar with power and how it works.

To conclude, the tendency of feminists to "mother" each other needs to be done away with because mothering does not help women to become independent persons. *DIVA* suggests that professional role models, mentors, comrades, intellectual examples, artistic and creative examples should replace the "mother" in the women's movement. Instrumental, intellectual, sexual leadership and inspiration is what women need instead of all this therapeutic, sentimental, emotional, symbiotic goings-on between women. In this stage of feminism women must learn to become individuals; they must learn to conceptualize solidarity on the basis of political ideas instead of belly-identification. Differences are not threatening, and acknowledging them does not have to mean loss of political power if you see making alliances as something other than hungrily looking for identification, for safely cuddling in the big group of sameness. Women must grow up; feminism should step out of her adolescent phase. □

Further Reading:

- Untying the Knot—Feminism, Anarchism and Organization, (includes "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," by Jo Freeman, and "The Tyranny of Tyranny," by Cathy Levine), published jointly by Dark Star Press and Rebel Press; printed by Algate Press, 84b Whitechapel High St., London E1, England.

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Louder Than Words!

Kvinder/Kirstine Theilgaard, Fanny Knight masks

For more than a decade, Rote Zora (Red Zora), a West German underground women's group, has launched violent attacks against the many institutions that perpetuate women's oppression. Rote Zora is an autonomous group within the Revolutionäre Zellen (Revolutionary Cells), a militant group that formed in 1973. The Revolutionäre Zellen has carried out numerous actions against multinationals and the military.

The following interview originally appeared in *Emma*, a West German feminist magazine. According to *Emma*, the article was left anonymously in their mailbox. The interview was translated and printed by the Canadian anarchist periodical *Resistance: Documents and Analyses of the Illegal Front*. The interview, as it appears below, was excerpted from the English feminist newspaper *Outwrite*, February 1985.

Q: Let's begin with who you are.

Zora 1: If this is a personal question, then we are women between the ages of 20 and 51. Some of us sell our labour, some of us take what we need, and others are "parasites" of the welfare state. Some of us are lesbians, others love men. We shop at disgusting supermarkets. We live in ugly houses. We like going for walks or to the cinema, the theater, or the disco. We have parties and cultivate idleness. And, of course, we face the reality that many things we want to do can't be done spontaneously. But after successful actions, we have lots of fun.

Q: How did you get your name?

Zora 2: We are named after [the children's book] *Red Zora and Her Gang*, which is about a wild street girl who steals from the rich to give to the poor. Until recently, it was a male privilege to be part of a gang or to act outside of the law. However, girls and women are strangled by thousands of personal and political chains, and this should turn us into masses of "bandits" fighting for our freedom, our dignity, and our humanity. Law and order are fundamentally against us. Even though we have achieved a few rights, each day we have to renew our fight. Radical women's struggles and loyalty to the law just don't go together!

Q: It is no coincidence that your name has the same initials as the Revolutionäre Zellen.

Zora 1: No, of course not. The name Rote Zora signifies that we have the same principles as the Revolutionäre Zellen, the same concept of building illegal structures and a network which is not controlled by the state apparatus. This is the only way we can carry out subversive direct actions in conjunction with the open legal struggles of various movements. The slogan "We strike back," voiced by women in 1968 as a response to individual violence against women, is today no longer as controversial. But it is still taboo to use this same reaction to the greater power conditions that steadily produce violence.

Q: What actions have you carried out and why?

Zora 2: Rote Zora started in 1974 with the bombing of the Supreme Court in Karlsruhe because we wanted the total abolition of the law restricting abortions and not some manipulative halfway measure. After that we bombed Schering [a major pharmaceutical company] and made constant attacks against sex shops. Actually, a porn shop should be burned or devastated every day! Women are still represented only as sexual objects and producers of children. We think it is absolutely necessary to

pull this oppression out of the "private domain" and to show our anger and hatred with fire and flames.

Zora 1: We don't limit ourselves to the direct or obvious oppression of women. We are also concerned with social conditions, such as urban and environmental destruction and the capitalist mode of production, which are the same problems that men confront. We don't like the left's "division of labour": women's issues are for women and the general political themes are for men. Therefore, we have set fire to the fancy cars belonging to the lawyers who were responsible for a series of brutal evictions, who worked for a slumlord named Kaussen. [Kaussen speculated on property in several countries. Due to financial difficulties, he committed suicide in 1985.] Together with the Revolutionäre Zellen, we printed and distributed fake subway tickets so people could have a free ride.

Zora 2: Our latest bombings were directed against Siemens [a major electronics firm active during the world wars] and the computer company Nixdorf because they promote technology that allows for more sophisticated weaponry. The labor practices in their factories located in the so-called Third World isolate women in part-time jobs with no health protection and no social security.

Q: How do you see your connection to the Third World and the exploitation of women there?

Zora 1: In all our attacks we've stressed this connection such as when we attacked the prostitution tourism industry and the Philippine Embassy last year. We don't struggle for women in the Third World; we struggle with them. For example, we struggle against the exploitation of women as a commodity. The modern slave trade has its equivalent here in the conditions of conjugal possession. [For example, the trade in Third World women sold as mail-order brides to European and North American men.] The forms of oppression are different, but they all have the same roots. We won't let anyone play us against each other anymore. The separation between men and women has its equivalent internationally in the separation between people of the First and Third World. We ourselves profit from the international division of labour. We want to end our involvement with this system and emphasize our common interests with women from other countries.

Q: Do you define yourselves as feminists?

Zora 1: Yes, of course. We operate on the basis that the personal is political. We believe that all social, economic and political conditions which structure and reinforce the so-called personal are an invitation for struggle, especially for us women. These are the chains we want to tear apart. But it is incomplete to make the oppression of women here in West Germany the only reference point and not to see other oppressive conditions such as class exploitation, racism, or the annihilation of whole cultures through imperialism. This attitude never takes into account the basis of misery: that the oppression of women and the sexual division of labour are presuppositions which are fundamental for exploitation and oppression of any kind—against other races, minorities, the old and the sick, and especially against the rebellious and disobedient.

Zora 2: We find it problematic when feminist demands are used for "equal rights" and recognition within this society. We don't want women in men's positions, and we reject women who have



careers inside the patriarchal structure under the guise of women's struggles. Such careers are special cases from which only some privileged women can profit. Women are only allowed to design and manage power in this society if they advocate the interests of men.

Q: The women's movement was quite strong in the '70s and achieved some things through legal channels. For example, the struggle against the anti-abortion law, publicity about battered women, the redefinition of rape as an act of power and violence, and the building of autonomous alternative structures. Why do you then maintain the necessity of armed struggle?

Zora 1: Of course, the women's movement achieved a lot and for me the most important thing was the development of a broad consciousness about women's oppression in this society. Also, women no longer experience their oppression only on an individual basis or think that they themselves are responsible for it. Instead women come together and experience their common strength. The things that were organised by the women's movement, like bookstores, centres, newspapers and conferences, have all been part of the development of the struggle.

The legal route is not sufficient because repression and structures of violence are legally permitted. It is legal for husbands to beat and rape their wives. It is legal for the prostitution tourism industry to buy our Third World sisters and sell them to German men. It is legal for women to ruin their health and do monotonous work for subsistence wages. These are all violent conditions which we are no longer willing to accept and tolerate, and which can't be abolished solely by criticism. It was an important step to create a public consciousness about violence against women, but it didn't lead to its prevention. The sharp unfairness and abuse that women suffer is still met with an incredible amount of indifference. Such tolerance exposes male parasitism. The attitude that women's problems are less significant and can be ignored is connected to the fact that there is not much militant resistance. Oppression is first perceived through resistance. Therefore we sabotage, boycott, damage, and take revenge for violence and humiliation by attacking those who are responsible.

Q: What do you think about the contemporary women's movement?

Zora 2: We think it is wrong to talk about *the* women's movement. On the one hand, the women's movement is understood to be a result of long-standing structures, of projects, of consciousness raising groups, and of spirituality. There are many currents which do not complement each other very successfully, but instead partially exclude or fight against each other. Some new political impulses are starting as a result of the different contexts in which women are becoming aware of their oppression. These women are radically questioning patriarchal structures and developing politics in the interests of a broad base of women—for example, women in Latin American solidarity groups, in anti-imperialist groups, in the squatter movement. Therefore the saying, "The women's movement is dead; long live the women's movement" is accurate. The women's movement is not a single-issue movement like the anti-nuke or squatter movement, which will cease to exist if no more nuclear power plants are built or no more property is available for speculation. The women's movement relates to the totality of patriarchal structures, their technology, their organisation of labour, their relationship to nature.

It is a phenomenon which won't disappear with the elimination of a tumour here and there. It requires the long process of social revolution.

Zora 1: The women's movement lacks a rejection of state politics. The class question has always been left out and social differences neglected by reducing everything to sexist oppression. Women do not achieve power from within the same system that was designed expressly to exclude them and to stabilize and conserve patriarchal domination. Therefore, we consider women's committees which want to exert greater influence in parties and institutions the wrong strategy.

Q: Do you see yourselves as being part of the women's movement, or of the guerrilla movement, or both, and how do you see the connection?

Zora 1: We are part of the women's movement. We struggle for women's liberation. Beside the theoretical commonalities, we also agree that personal radicalisation can encourage other women to resist and take themselves and the struggle seriously. It is a feeling of strength when you can do things which you once were afraid of, and you see that it is effective. We would like to share this experience. We don't think it has to happen in the forms we choose. For example, take the women who disrupted a peep show by spray painting women's symbols and dropping stink bombs—these actions encourage us, strengthen us, and we hope women feel the same way about our actions. Our dream is that small bands of women will exist everywhere: that in every city a rapist, a battering husband, a misogynist publisher, a porn dealer, a pig gynecologist should know that a band of women will expose him and publicly ridicule him. For example, it will be written on his house, on his car, at his job, who he is and what he did—women's power everywhere!

Q: How can women who are not autonomous or radically organised understand what you want? Armed actions tend to frighten people off.

Zora 2: Why aren't people disturbed when a guy sells women, why do they only react when his car is burnt? Traditional social violence is accepted, whereas non-traditional reprisals "frighten people away." Maybe it is frightening if everyday reality is questioned. Women who get it pounded into their heads from the time they are little girls that they are victims get insecure if they are confronted with the fact that women are neither victims nor peaceful. This is a provocation. Those women who experience their powerlessness with rage can identify with our actions. As every act of violence against one woman creates a threat against all women, our actions—even if they are aimed only against the individual responsible—contribute to the development of an atmosphere that says "resistance is possible!" □



Dear *Connexions*,

I am a member of the Scorpio Society of Uruguay (Fundación Escorpio del Uruguay—FEDU) which is a support and help group for homosexuals, both women and men. Our group was founded in September 1984, and if this work is difficult in other countries, it is even more so in Uruguay. We are the first gay movement in the history of this small country and as such our work is arduous, as you can imagine.

In spite of all the obstacles that are placed in front of us, we have already published two bulletins. We have a renowned legal adviser, who isn't gay, but who is supportive of our cause. He is trying to get legal status for the Society so that we can operate totally legally. We have had coverage in two daily newspapers in Montevideo and in a few weeklies. Two radio stations have interviewed us and a few days ago we appeared on a 20 minute program on television. We were filmed with our backs to the cameras, a move that has been highly criticized by the gay movement, but because of social and economic repression, it couldn't be avoided. In exchange, we explained to the TV viewers why we had to appear on the air like that. Since then, another channel proposed to tape a more extensive program, which for us is very important.

It is also of vital importance for us to have contact with other gay movements around the world. At present, we have only received word from the Argentine Homosexual Community (CHA). We hope to make contact with as many as possible.

Presently, you will have to write us at my home address as the post office box we have is being raided and at the moment we don't get our mail. We anxiously await your reply.

Sincerely,
Mariel and FEDU

Dear *Connexions*:

In response to your letter asking for information on the women's movement in Fiji, I talked to a few people and came up some thoughts.

The term feminism does not mean much to the average woman in my country and in the smaller islands in the South Pacific. The term and concept of feminism is perhaps too foreign for many of us, although the idea and tradition of women's groups is certainly not new. Even for some women who are English speaking and educated in the Western way, feminism is too formidable a word. Women who are femin-

ists because they concern themselves with women's problems do not really identify themselves with the feminist movement as they see it as being "Western" and do not wish to be perceived as aggressive, dynamic and assertive. Yet these are the same women who would by most standards be considered feminists.

A woman I know wrote a poem which protested the subservient role women in her society often have to play in the choice of their husbands. She said that since the poem was published, many have asked her if she is a feminist. She told them that she had never thought of herself as a feminist and that she merely wanted to express discontent over women not being able to make important decisions affecting them.

A colleague of mine said that she cannot really call herself a feminist without it meaning different things to different people. Some see feminists as too aggressive, others see them as superfluous and there are, of course, those who do not even think that the word has a meaning.

I personally have never really identified with feminism although the concept is not a new one. It is, to me, too big and ambiguous a word so I have always used it arbitrarily to mean the actual activities and movements towards changing the predicament of oppressed women.

I have always felt a sense of hopelessness and, until recently, not thought that the "power of women" to change their lives stood much chance in a male-dominated society where some women do not even see the oppression they are subjected to. My thoughts used to run like this: What can we, a minority, do? Women would more readily identify with men of the same racial/ethnic group and economic class than with other oppressed women.

Now I realize that women who are oppressed know no class barriers. The types of problems faced by middle class women are likely to be different from those faced by the poorer women and each woman may identify more with men in her group. But the fact remains that women in all classes and racial/ethnic groups are being oppressed.

In Fiji, sex degradation is not something foreign. One example is the number of men (particularly citizens of "developed" countries) who advertise for a "lady partner" or a girl for "fun times." The assumption by the advertisers is that local girls are impressed by men who offer a secure life or migration to New Zealand, Canada, the US or Australia. The fact that women reply because they hope to escape their present situation and want a better life demonstrates women's present situation in Fiji. It also points out the tasks ahead for those concerned with working cooperatively to change the present structures and the status of women.

In Sisterhood,

Sau Chee Low

(Sau Chee Low is communications officer for Ofis Blong ol Meri, an information and training service for Pacific women operated by the World YWCA.)

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Dear Readers,

Connexions is planning to carry classified advertising in our upcoming issues. Drop us a line for further information.

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Resources

Agence femmes information (French), weekly international women's news service and research center, 21, rue de Jouheurs, 75002 Paris, France.

Agora (Japanese), twice-yearly Japanese feminist journal, c/o BOC Publishing, 1-9-6 Shinjuku, Shinjuku, Tokyo 160, Japan.

Ahfad Journal (English), scholarly semi-annual, University College for Women, PO Box 167, Omdurman, Sudan.

Asian Women's Liberation (English and Japanese editions), feminist quarterly, Shibuya Coop, Rm. 211, 14-10 Sakurataoka, Shibuya-ku Tokyo 150, Japan.

Asian Women's Research and Action Network (English), newsletter published by AWRAN which provides abstracts of research and articles on women in Asia, PO Box 208, Davao City, Philippines.

Boletín Internacional de AMES (Spanish), bimonthly bulletin of the Women's Association of El Salvador promoting national liberation and the role of women, AMES, A.P. 20134, Mexico D.F.

Broadsheet (English), feminist monthly, PO Box 5799, Wellesley St., Auckland, New Zealand.

Brujas (Spanish), feminist quarterly, Asociación Trabajo y Estudio sobre la Mujer, Calle Venezuela 1286, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Brujas (Spanish), feminist monthly, Apdo. Aéreo, 49105 Medellín, Colombia.

La Cacerola (Spanish), feminist bimonthly, GRECMU, Juan Paulier 1174, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Cahiers du Feminisme (French), feminist bimonthly, PEC, 2, rue Richard Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil, France.

Les Cahiers du GRIF (French), feminist monthly journal, 29 rue Blanche, 1050 Brussels, Belgium.

Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme (in English and French), feminist academic quarterly, 204 Founders College, York University, 4700 Keele St., Downsview, Ontario M3J 1P3, Canada.

Chana com Chana (Portuguese), lesbian newsletter, GALF, Caixa Postal 62.618, Cep 01.000, São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

Chronique (French), feminist bimonthly, Université des Femmes, Place Quetelet, 1030 Brussels, Belgium.

CIM (Portuguese), feminist bulletin of the Women's Information Center, Caixa Postal 11.399, 054099 São Paulo, Brazil.

CRIF (French), feminist quarterly, 1, rue des Fosses St. Jacques, 75005 Paris, France.

Depthnews Women's Features (English), weekly feminist news service focusing on Asian women, Box 1843, Manila, Philippines.

DIVA (Dutch), lesbian bimonthly, Postbus 10642, 1001 EP Amsterdam, Holland.

Emma (German), feminist monthly, Kolpingplatz 1a, 5000 Köln 1, West Germany.

fem (Spanish), feminist bimonthly, Av. México No. 76-1, Cal. Progreso Tizapán, Mexico, D.F. 20.

Femmes & Sociétés (French), women's networking magazine, Villa 811, Sicap Baobabs, Dakar, Senegal.

The Filipina (English), bimonthly on the social conditions of Asian women, 222-D Ibarra St., Makati, Manila, Philippines.

Fireweed (English), feminist quarterly of art and politics, PO Box 279, Station B, Toronto, Ontario M5T 2W2, Canada.

Friends of Women (Thai), feminist monthly, 2/3 Soi Wang-Lang, Arunamarin Rd., Bangkok 10700, Thailand.

ILIS (in English and French), newsletter of the International Lesbian Information Service, Centre Femmes, 5, Blvd. St. Georges, CH-1205 Geneva, Switzerland.

Immigranten (in English and Norwegian), anti-racist quarterly, Postboks 244 Sentrum, 0103 Oslo 1, Norway.

The Irish Feminist Review (English), annual, Women's Community Press, 48 Fleet St., Dublin 2, Ireland.

ISIS WICCE Women's World (English), thematic international feminist quarterly, PO Box 2471, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland.

ISIS International Women's Journal (English and Spanish editions), international feminist networking quarterly, via Santa Maria dell'Anima 30, Rome, Italy or Casilla 2067, Correo Central, Santiago, Chile.

Katjff (Dutch), feminist bimonthly, Nieuwe Herengracht 95, 1011 RX Amsterdam, Holland.

Kjerringrad (Norwegian), feminist quarterly, Radhurst 2, 0151 Oslo 1, Norway.

Kvennabladid-Vera (Icelandic), feminist quarterly, Hotel Vik, 101 Reykjavik, Iceland.

Kvinder (Danish), feminist bimonthly, Gothersgade 37, IV, 1123 Copenhagen K, Denmark.

Kvinnejournalen (Norwegian), radical feminist quarterly, Postboks 53 Buyn, Oslo 6, Norway.

Kvinnobulletinen (Swedish), feminist bimonthly, Kvinnohuset, Snickarbacken 10, 111 39 Stockholm, Sweden.

Lesbisch Archivar (Dutch), lesbian feminist quarterly of the Lesbisch Archief, Postbus 4062, Leeuwarden, Holland.

Lucciola (Italian), bimonthly on prostitutes' rights, Piazza della Libertà, 13/A, 00193 Rome, Italy.

Manushi (English and Hindi editions), feminist bimonthly, C-1/202 Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi 110024, India.

Maria, Liberación del Pueblo (Spanish), feminist monthly by and for working class and peasant women, Apdo. 158-B, Ave. Morelos 714, Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico.

Mujer, Especiales Mujer and Colección Comunicación Alternativa de la Mujer (Spanish), three feminist publications of Union of Alternative Communication of Women, part of

Latin American Institute of Transnational Studies (ILET); the first two are newsletters; services; the third is an occasional publication focusing on a specific women's alternative media group, Casilla 16-637, Correo 9, Santiago, Chile.

Mujer Cefemina (Spanish), thematic feminist monthly, Apdo. 949, San José, Costa Rica.

Mujer Feminista (Spanish), feminist monthly, Unión de Mujeres, Apdo. de Correos, 311, Madrid, Spain.

Mukti (Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi and Punjabi editions), quarterly focusing on racism, sexism and imperialism from an Asian/Black perspective, 213 Eversholt St., London NW1, England.

Mulherio (Portuguese), bimonthly feminist newspaper, Rua Amalia de Noronha 268, Pinheiros, 05410 São Paulo, Brazil.

New Internationalist (English), thematic monthly focusing on the Third World, 175 Carlton St., Toronto, Ontario M5A 2K3, Canada.

NOGA (Hebrew), feminist quarterly, PO Box 21376, Tel Aviv 61213, Israel.

Navel Fam (Creole Patois), newsletter of the Muvman Liberasyon Fam, 5 Ste. Therese St. Curepipe, Mauritius.

OFIS BLONG OL MERI Newsletter, (English), quarterly on South Pacific women, Box 1327 Lae, Papua New Guinea.

Outwrite (English), feminist anti-racist, anti-imperialist monthly newspaper focusing primarily on women of color, Oxford House, Derbyshire St., London E2, England.

Paris Feministe (French), feminist monthly, Maison des Femmes, 8, Cité Prost, 75011 Paris, France.

Quehaceres (Spanish), bimonthly feminist newspaper covering news from Latin America and the Dominican Republic, CIPAF, Benigno Filomeno de Rojas 305, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Pacific and Asian Women's Network (English), newsletter published by Pacific and Asian Women's Forum (PAWF) which collects and disseminates information about women's action and research groups, 4 Bhagwandas Rd., New Delhi 110 001, India.

Race and Class (English), quarterly theoretical journal, 2-6 Leek St., King's Cross Rd., London WC1X 8HS, England.

Resources for Feminist Research, RFR-DRF (in English and French), international quarterly of abstracts and recent research on women, 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6, Canada.

Rites for Lesbian and Gay Liberation (English), monthly newspaper, Box 65, Station F, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2L4, Canada.

Saheli Newsletter (English), quarterly of the Saheli Women's Resource Centre, Office above 105-108, Shopping Centre, Under Defense Colony Flyover (South Side), New Delhi 110024, India.

Sangharsh (English), feminist newspaper produced by the Vimochana Forum for Women's Rights, Post Box 4605, Bangalore, 560 046, India.

Somos (Spanish), bimonthly bulletin of AMNLAE (Louisa Amanda Espinoza Nicaraguan Women's Association), Rep. San Juan, 2 1/2 cuadras al S.O., Managua, Nicaragua.

Spare Rib (English), feminist monthly, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC 1, England.

Spinboden (German), occasional publication of the Berlin Lesbian Archive, Postfach 30 41 49, 1000 Berlin, West Germany.

Trouble and Strife (English), tri-annual radical feminist journal, c/o Women's Centre, 50 Bethel St., Norwich, Norfolk, England.

TW-MAE-W (English), publication of the Third World Movement Against the Exploitation of Women, PO Box 1434, Manila 2800, Philippines.

Vamos Mujer (Spanish), occasional publication of the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Women (CODEM), Casilla 5216, Correo 3, Santiago, Chile.

La Vie En Rose (French), feminist monthly, 3963 St. Denis, Montreal, Quebec H2W 9Z9, Canada.

Vi Manskor (Swedish), feminist cultural quarterly, Barnsgaatan 23, 11641 Stockholm, Sweden.

¡Viva! (Spanish), feminist publication of the Flora Tristan Investigative Center, Jirón Quilca 431, Lima 100, Peru.

Voice of Women (English), publication of the Women's Section of the African National Congress, PO Box 31791, Lusaka, Zambia or African National Congress, 801 2nd Ave., Ste. 405, New York, N.Y. 10017, USA.

Voice of Women (English, Sinhalese and Tamil editions), journal for women's emancipation, 18/9, Chitra Lane, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.

WAF (English), feminist bi-annual of the Women's Action Forum, Box 3287, Gulberg, Lahore, Pakistan.

Women and Environments (English), feminist tri-annual on housing, development, ecology, planning and design, c/o Urban and Community Studies, 455 Spadina Ave., Toronto, Ontario M5S 2G8, Canada.

Woman Speak (English), quarterly on Caribbean women, University of West Indies, Women and Development Unit, Pinelands St. Michael, Barbados

This is by no means a complete list of alternative international publications. For a more complete listing, write to Connexions.

Books Received

• **Third World Resource Book**, a guide to organizations and publications, edited by Thomas P. Fenton and Mary J. Heffron, Orbis Press, 1984.

• **Woman in the Muslim Unconsciousness**, by Fatma A. Sabbah, Pergamon Press, 1984.

• **Nicaraguan Women**, WIRE, 2700 Broadway, Rm. 7, New York, NY 10025.

• **The World of Burmese Women**, by Mi Mi Kiang, Zed Press, 1984.

• **Passbook Number F.47927**, women in the Mau Mau in Kenya, by Muthoni Likimani, Macmillan, 1985.

• **The Family in Question**, by Diana Gittins, Macmillan, 1985.

• **Women and Crime**, by Frances Heidensohn, Macmillan, 1985.

• **Women and Social Policy**, edited by Clare Ungerson, Macmillan, 1985.

• **Chain Chain Change**, for the Black woman in an abusive situation, New Leaf Series, 1985.

• **Mejor Sola Que Mal Acompañada**, for the Latina in an abusive situation, New Leaf Series, 1985.

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