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An Innocent's Look At New Zealand Women Writers

Aorewa McLeod

I'm an academic, teaching English Literature, who has spent almost 20 years in the 19th century. For the last five years I've been teaching a course on 20th century women writers. When I first set up the course it was on the understanding that I wouldn't trespass on/poach from any of the other papers the English Department offered on NZ Literature. So we had a course with no NZ women writers.

In April, 1984 the Auckland University's student paper *Craccum* asked me to review a new, unknown book *The Bone People* and in the same Year I was asked to be one of the fiction judges for the National Book Award. It was my first formal approach to NZ literature. Because I'd written that 'first' review, and because I'd been lucky enough to be judge in the year *The Bone People* was nominated, the *Spiral* collective asked me to write a survey of contemporary NZ Women's writing for *Wahine Kaituhi: Women Writers of Aotearoa* in 2000-2800 words. I agreed, and read and reread.

But because as an academic I'm used to academic deadlines and had forgotten how close to the bone feminists must work, I got my

survey in too late. I'm glad now I did, because I feel it is very much an innocent's approach. An innocent feminist literary critic, looking backwards from *The Bone People* to see what NZ women writers are saying to her. I'm very aware that my approach is precisely what Patrick Evans was objecting to when he wrote in his book on Janet Frame:

> . . . we tend still to demand a reflection of ourselves in the fiction our writers produce; we have a narcissistic thirst for identity which has sociological rather than purely artistic implications.

But I think the survey is worth printing because it is objectionable — open to objection. And because it records the problems of being both a feminist and a professional critic.

E Nga Iwi O Ngai Tahu

Where are your bones?
My bones lie in the sea

Where are your bones?
They lie in forgotten lands
stolen, ploughed and sealed

Where are your bones?
on south islands, sawed by discovering wind

Where are your bones?
Whisper
Moeraki, Purakanui, Arahura
Okarito, Murihiku, Rakiura.
Lying heavy on my heart

Where are your bones?
Dancing as songs and old words in my head
Deep in the timelessness of mind

Where are your bones?
Here in my gut
Strong in my legs walking
Knotting my fists, but

Where are your bones?
Aue! My bones are flour
ground to make an alien bread. . . (Hulme, 1982)

Hulme's question is one that many New Zealanders, both Maori and Pakeha are asking. In her novel *The Bone People* the Maori hero tries to find a name for the new unity the central trio have become. Perhaps, he says, it could be 'e nga o nga iwi'. Hulme translates this as a pun:

> It means O the bones of the people (where bones stand for ancestors or relations) or, O the people of bones (i.e. the beginning people, the people who make another people).

For me *The One People* is Aotearoa's first bi-cultural novel — one which draws on both Maori and Pakeha culture and suggests how we are indeed a new people. Looking back in years to come I'm sure that *The Bone People* will appear as a watershed, a beginning point in NZ writing. It represents a freedom and opening up of possibilities, both in form and subject. It rejects the limited and limiting images of women that NZ writers, women as well as men, have been trapped with. It captures the feel of the coastlines and land and the way we speak, and it suggests alternatives to the way we have lived. NZ writing will never be the same.

Before *The Bone People* I'd only read two novels that felt like being a New Zealander to me, a NZ woman. They were Joy Cowley's lucid and tragic story of adolesence, *Man of Straw* (1970) and Patricia Grace's simple and moving first novel *Mutuwhenua* (1978). Cowley's captured the pain of growing up in a constricting and repressed Pakeha family and community. Grace's is the story of a country Maori girl's growing-up, marrying a Pakeha, and discovering her need for her roots in her family and land. This, and Grace's short stories, *Waiariki* (1975) and *Dream Sleepers* (1980) are the best literary portrayals yet of Maori life.

Yvonne du Fresne's stories of a young girl in the thirties and forties in a Danish community on the Manawatu plains, *Farvel* (1980) and *The Growing of Astrid Westergaard* (1985) are funny, strong and sensitive accounts of learning how to become English New Zealanders. Astrid learns how to be like the royal princesses and how to make English thatched cottage gardens. She learns a culture that is alien to both the Danes and the Manawatu — their teacher leads them to study the bush with Arthur Mee's *Guide to Nature's Wonderland.* In du Fresne's *The Book of Ester* (1982) a 50 year old NZ widow relives her Danish-Huguenot heritage, searches for her bones in the alien land she has lived in all her life. Du Fresne sees an affinity between Dane and Maori.

> . . . there we stood, the people who had ridden the

> endless seas on ships with prows like dragons, Rangi Katene, Anna Friis — and Astrid Westergaard.

Astrid/du Fresne feels no guilt over the original possessors of the bush her ancestors cleared and the swamps they drained.

Besides *The Bone People* the recent work that's had the greatest impact on me was Donna Awatere's indictment of Pakeha culture: *Maori Sovereignty* published by *Broadsheet* NZ's feminist magazine, in 1984[1]. It's a series of articles written to 'reconceptualise colonial experience from a Maori point of view', to examine the cultural basis of racism, sexism and capitalism in Aotearoa and to:

> 'show the lie of multi-culturism by pointing out how the Pakeha does not culturally exist with the tangata whenua' (people of the land)

The conclusion of the articles is that:

> . . . all immigrants to this country are guests of the tangata whenua, rude visitors who have by force and corruption imposed the visitors' rules upon the Maoris. It matters not what generation born New Zealanders they are. Every white is an intruder who remains only by dint of force. This land is Maori land.

It is true that NZ writing as a whole, both male and female, shows 'the lie of multi-culturalism'. However, bi-culturalism is in evidence now — in children's books. It's there not only in works like De Hamel's *Take the Long Path,* (1980) an account of a young boy discovering his Maori heritage, or Grace's *The Kuia and the Spider,* or Katarina Mataira's retelling of Maori legends, but in parallel texts — children's books printed in Maori. Since the pioneer work of Kidsaurus in 1978 it's of our young children's books that we might say, 'e nga iwi o nga iwi'. And I think it's significant that some of the best women writers have turned to writing for children — Joy Cowley, Patricia Grace, Sue Freeman.

Our best known contemporary writer, Janet Frame, published her first volume of stories *The Lagoon* back in 1951, and the two novels most read in NZ, *Owls Do Cry* and *Faces in the Water* in 1957 and 1961. The early stories are about a working-class Pakeha childhood. *Owls Do Cry* is a poetic re-rendition of that childhood and *Faces in the Water* about 'the surroundings and events in the several mental hospitals I experienced during the eight following years.' Recently she has published three volumes of her autobiography, volumes which have won her awards her novels did not — *To the Is-land; An Angel at my Table;* and *The Envoy from Mirror City.* In the last volume

she says of her writing:

> If I make that hazardous journey to the Mirror City where everything I have known or seen or dreamed is bathed in the light of another world what use is there in returning only with a mirroful of me? Or of others who exist very well by the ordinary light of day.

But for me it's the 'ordinary light of day', the 'mirrorful of me' of the early stories, the autobiographies and the first novels that appeal, not the 'Mirror City', the later symbolic stories and novels. Of the later novels only *State of Siege,* about a middle-aged woman alone, besieged by her memories and by the fearful unknown outside her Waiheke cottage, speaks to me as directly relevant to the condition of being a woman and a New Zealander.

There are a lot of recent NZ novels about the condition of being a fortyish woman — Margaret Sutherland's *The Fringe of Heaven* (1984); Marilyn Duckworth's *Disorderly Conduct* (1985). The classic of the type is Fiona Kidman's *A Breed of Women* (1979), where a 40 year old woman looks back on her progression from a repressive farm childhood, through two marriages, children, suburbia, a later career in the city, and a not very satisfactory love affair with a younger man. It's a novel that many women seem to have related to as being about their lives. It's interesting that *Disorderly Conduct,* Duckworth's first novel after almost 20 years of silence is very like others of the type. Duckworth's earlier novels created an almost gothic atmosphere of entrapment in sexuality and women's roles. In *A Gap in the Spectrum* (1959), a young woman finds herself in an alien world, not her home, where her only role seems to be to search for love, and where she finally finds herself trapped in a dependent relationship. *The Matchbox House* (1960) focuses on the sexually obsessive closeness and dependency of the family, and the manipulative power of parental control. *A Barbarous Tongue* is about a very messy love affair and pregnancy complicated by incest. The power games, violence and domination of marriage reach a surreal pitch in *Over the Fence is Out* (1969).

Sutherland's *The Love Contract* (1979) records 10 years of married suburban life. Described realistically, without bitterness or satire, it's a sad account of the contract women enter into and the consequences of it. The heroine has internalised the belief in true love, and is confused about its result, after the happy-ever-after. NZ women write prolifically of girlhood and puberty, and of the fortyish woman: . . 'time to start fighting free of labels. Time to be herself rather than an image,' says Kidman's heroine. *The Love Contract* tentatively questions the waste between, but it seems a 20 year gap that women writers find it difficult to find words for. Twenty years they don't want

to, or cannot write about.

Lauris Edmond's *High Country Weather* (1984) has a fiftyish narrator looking back nostalgically at her rejection of a love affair for 'real life' i.e. her marriage and children and 'ordinary things.' It's infused with a resigned acceptance that a woman's total fulfilment can come only through the intensity and meaningfulness of true passion, but that this is irreconcilable with her ordinary daily life.

The Bone People presents a central female protagonist who is very different from the typical heroine of a NZ woman's novel. Materially she has everything she needs and complete freedom to act as she pleases. She rejects the expectation of happiness through true love and coupledom and the nuclear family. And it's a novel which is not bound by the restrictive formats of the other women's novels today. It's a joyous fusion of autobiography, myth, romance and grim realism. It makes me ask how far the expectations of a particular literary format are bound up with the expectations of possibilities of living.

Sutherland's first novel, *The Fledgling* (1974), and Cowley's *Of Men and Angels* (1973) are both about older single women who foster a pregnant girl for the pleasure of vicariously mothering her child, and, in both, the need for the child supercedes anything else. Interesting that there are no novels about motherhood, being a mother, but that in these two novels the desire to have a child is seen as an obsessive need in unmarried older women. Cowley's first novel, *Nest in a Falling Tree* (1968) is the first of a group of novels, by various women novelists, which focus on an older woman/younger man relationship. Here a 43 year old spinster, whose only occupation is looking after her domineering invalid mother, boards and beds an opportunistic teenage boy. More recently Sue McCauley's *Other Halves* (1982) develops this theme in a moving and convincing account of the relationship between a 16 year old Maori street kid and a 33 year old Pakeha woman whose marriage has just broken up. Jean Watson's *The World is an Orange and the Sun* (1978) is a married woman's wistful account of her neighbour's affair with a much younger boy, and her escape from husband and family.

But the rest of Watson's works provide a welcome relief to the repetitive themes of many women novelists. *Stand in the Rain* (1965) is a young woman's 'on the road' account of an alternative life style to the suburban housewife's; and *The Balloon Watchers* (1975) is a liberating parable about a woman whose marriage has failed and who exists in a dreary office job, but who finally finds the joy of being simply herself and enjoying living. And Sue Freeman's two short novels, *Fat Chance* (1982a) and *In Wales on a Wet Friday I cried into my Do-Nut* (1982b) are free of anxieties and the tensions of domestic suburban life. The heroine of *Fat Chance* is disarmingly honest and

amoral, refreshingly unhung-up sexually, and has a young daughter whom she brings up very well indeed. She also has a peripatetic lover and a joyous ability to live in the moment. She has built her own house (although it's a somewhat less impressive structure than Kerewin Holmes's) works on a shearing gang (and other jobs), and is very much in control of her life in this very NZ picaresque novel.

Women's Work: Contemporary Short Stories by New Zealand Women (1985) chosen by Marion McLeod and Lydia Wevers is overall a depressing collection. So many of the stories are about limits and constraints. The schoolgirl in Sutherland's 'Codling-Moth' who feels 'a grey web of guilt is spinning itself about me'; or Rosie Scott's 'Diary of a Woman' which begins:

> . . . living in this muddled, gloomy, dirty, peeling house with its knowing walls which defy any form of taming — a great mass of brown, dark and dirty shapes and tainted with maybe a death and certainly a long and indecipherable life littered with all sorts of fears and last sordid and sad relics. A feeling of being placed right in the middle of the vortex, no escape, or any of the escapes prepared are only hollow and pathetic appeasements.

There are exceptions — Keri Hulme's 'One Whale, singing'; Jessie Feeney's moving 'A married woman'; Kathleen Crayford's 'Duncan' and Patricia Grace's stories. But generally the stories confirm the novels' impression of a woman's life in NZ as grim, limiting and depressing. Duckworth, in her latest novel, has returned to the Sci Fi genre of her 1959 *A Gap in the Spectrum.* And in leaving realism, she does create a powerful image of the psychic entrapment of the love ethos.

NZ has recently produced three examples of women's science fiction. Sandi Hall's *The Godmothers* (1982) is a medley with a little of everything a feminist Sci-Fi enthusiast could want, but there's nothing to it as a NZ work. Lora Mountjoy's *Deep Breathing* (1984) is, in contrast, a very NZ example of the post-holocaust genre. A survivor from an Antarctic outpost journeys through a remarkably green and pleasant NZ after the atomic war, visiting settlements and communes that feel very like the Coromandel now. There's no sign of a nuclear winter, congenital defects are minimal (or interestingly psychic), and the life of the gypsy-like 'road women' is distinctly appealing. Duckworth's latest novel, *Married Alive* (1985) reads at first as if it's going to be another post-holocaust Sci-Fi novel. But the effects of an infected serum which drive a fifth of the population insane are not realistically portrayed — rather they are a metaphor for the dangerous possible consequences of close personal relationships. The (again) 40 year old heroine is unable to break her conditioning of wanting the perfect true love, wanting a permanent relationship, despite the fact

that exposing oneself to this means exposing oneself to insanity and murderous violence. Yet the novel ends 'happily-ever-after' with her escaping from the dangers of one destructive permanent relationship into the arms of another true love.

An outstanding recent publication for me was J.C. Sturm's *The House of the Talking Cat,* short stories originally published in magazines in the fifties and forgotten until Spiral collected them together in 1984. These stories evoke the feel of NZ in the fifties, yet they deal with issues of female, Polynesian and working-class experience that are still part of our lives. They're not only superbly crafted, but wise and aware. But Sturm has written nothing since. This, and the fact that it's taken over 25 years for her talent to be recognised, is representative of the fate of many women writers in the past in NZ.

Ian Wedde, in his introduction to the new *Penguin Book of New Zealand verse* (1985), writes of a "New Zealand poetry" where male hegemony has achieved the dubious status of orthodoxy.' It's a welcome anthology in that for the first time there's a good representation of women poets, but although there's a group of recent women poets who are competent and prolific — Elizabeth Smither, Lauris Edmond, Reimke Ensing, Cilla McQueen — there's little to mark them as distinctively female, or, for that matter, as having distinctively NZ themes. Two stand out for me, as speaking about my condition — Rachel McAlpine and Heather McPherson. McAlpine, particularly in the 'Sheila and the Honourable Member' and 'A Chat with God the Mother' sections of her 1977 collection *Stay at the Dinner Party,* has found a bitter and humorous cynicism that makes her poety powerful stuff. I think the Sheila poems, 'this is me Sheila talking'; 'my ground is sour and sacred/with the bones of all my mothers' will become NZ feminist classics, along with 'bird-woman' from *Fancy Dress* (1979). McAlpine's verse drama *The Stationary Sixth-Form Poetry Trip (1980),* about an English lesson on 'Kubla Khan' is playful, moving, educational and a joy to hear. She too has turned to writing about and for children.

Heather McPherson, in her 1982 collection *A Figurehead: a face* writes strong feminist poems with a distinctive NZ flavour. Here's part of 'For her thirty sixth year, a breakout':

> This is the rage of a burning woman
> this is the year of her rising
>
> This is the rage of a woman
> who did thirty six years time
>
> in a coffin-brake

This is the rage of a woman woken out of a box
broken out of nails, bars, tight forms
breaking into new improbable image
tossing off that apologetic loiterer on the edge
crumpling that skin, a torn singlet
for hotwater cupboard rags
filling her lungs with air . . .

This woman finds a lineage of survivors
who boiled coppers in the washhouse once a week
chopped sticks, and spread their long unplaited hair to
who sometimes imagined glories more vast than could be seen
standing on country roads late at night
urging visions from the dark hills
whose bulk is more mysterious than sky
whose outline nudges a solid memory of one immoveable

Those women startling at the white shape on the fence
a morepork that flies off
one legend says to death

Those women turning back to a flaked verandah

to face the photographer unsmiling
from the folds of gathered gowns
Here for a moment the rage withers
Here for a moment the rage curls down. . .

Looking through the poetry of the last 10 years the only other poems that strike me as personal and distinctive are, oddly enough, a group of poems by women artists: Joanna Paul's 1978 poem sequence *Imogen,* poignant elegy to her dead daughter; Sylvia Mary Bowen's exuberant, eccentric Blakean interpretations of life, *The Orange China Aeroplane* and *My Name is Sylvia Mary Bowen* and *I've Come To Save the World: a painter's notebook in a schizophrenic society* (1983); and Christina Beer's *This Fig Tree has Thorns* (1974). Beer's are sensuous poems where love and loss and the body and the land blend. Perhaps not being primarily poets has given these artists a freedom their more conventional literary colleagues lack. But we're still waiting for the poet who will do for the NZ poetic landscape what I think Hulme has done for the fictional.

It's in the theatre that some of the most exciting developments in women's writing have been taking place. Before 1980 NZ theatre was almost entirely dominated by men, now the most exciting plays are by women. Renée, whose first play *Setting the Table* appeared in 1981 has gone from strength to strength with *Secrets* (about incest and

cleaning toilets); *Dancing* (about the menopause); *Groundwork* (about the 1981 Springbok tour conflict); and *Wednesday to Come* (set back in the depression). Of *Setting the Table* Renée wrote:

> I wanted to write something that showed women as witty and .ntelligent and hardworking, because all the women I know are like that, and I never saw any of them on the stage. And I debated furiously with friends the question of the use of violence as a weapon, as a strategy, as an action, and it seemed to me that no one out there in the wider community had any idea what feminists actually did, and I wanted to show something of that too.

Renée's last play *Wednesday to Come,* which is more about class and poverty than overtly feminist issues, is the only one to have had wide critical acclaim. Hilary Beaton's *Outside In* published in 1984, is a brutal, aggressive and yet tender portrayal of life in a women's prison. It's horrifyingly effective and tragic, on the page as well as the stage. Carolyn Burnes' *Objection Overruled,* published 1985, uses the courtroom as a setting to make the audience judge the past actions of a 'normal ordinary' NZ male in his family. It's a black horror account of entrapment, repeating the patterns of the parents, of incest, frigidity and power games that echoes the world of Duckworth's early novels. Norelle Scott's *Promise Not To Tell,* a mixture of realism, symbolism, chorus, is a shatteringly effective indictment of incest. NZ women's drama of the last few years has provided a vital and powerful portrayal of the Pakeha nuclear family and the pair bonding of love as a claustrophobic, incestuous and violent trap. And the plays have an energetic, experimental, innovative approach to form that most the fiction lacks.

It's significant that a central focus of Hulme's innovatory novel is the violence inherent in the parent-child relationship, and what alternatives we can find to the love contract and the conventional nuclear family unit. The striking sameness in so many NZ women novelists' portrayal of the lives of adult women suggest how we ourselves are still trapped by the conditions and limits of our lives. We need new ways of living and writing, hence the fascination of Keri Hulme's life as well as her writing, and hence perhaps why McAlpine, Cowley, Freeman, Grace et al have turned to writing for children: 'e nga iwi o nga iwi'.

Notes

1. These articles were extended and collected into a book, also published by *Broadsheet,* (Awatere, 1984).

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Anna Davin: History Research is a Political Act

When Anna Davin was in NZ in 1984 she talked about her life and work with Margot Roth and the following account is the product of two long conversations.

Anna is an English historian in her forties who sees historical research and analysis as a major part of her socialist feminist political activity. She is the eldest of three daughters of NZ parents but her brief visit here was her first. However, she said that her own interest in recording the largely undocumented working lives of women and children of the 19th century had been sparked off by listening to her mother's accounts of what NZ was really like for herself, her mother and her Irish immigrant grandmother, Ellen Silk.

She came here after a longer stay in Australia, which began with her attendance at the Women and Labour Conference in Brisbane and continued at the Australian National University in Canberra where she was the faculty visitor in women's studies. In both Australia and NZ Anna obliged with workshops and talks in women's studies and/or history, and those of us who met her found her singularly generous with her time and her knowledge.

Anna's father, Dr Dan Davin, is a well-known ex-patriate author and editor and the recipient of an honorary doctorate from his old university, the University of Otago. Anna's mother Winifred (formerly Gonley) was also an Otago University student and writer. Her 1932 MA Thesis, which Anna looked up when she was in Dunedin, was on the NZ novel and discussed not just Katherine Mansfield but other writers like Jean Devanny and Jane Mander. Winifred had, as well, been reading Australian women novelists like Katherine Susannah Prichard and Henry Handel Richardson.

The daughter pointed out that her mother's study of contemporary women writers indicated that while she might not have been ahead of her time, she was an interesting person within it. Her student friends included a women lawyer and another woman who had had to drop out to nurse her father, and after his death joined a Roman Catholic missionary congregation. The account she gave to Anna, her old friends' daughter, of her life in Tonga, Rome, Germany and finally back to NZ at the age of 77 doing domestic chores for the church hostel she lives in as well as translating church documents from the French, showed her to be a most thoughtful and competent person. But, as Anna said, her life and her thoughts, like those of the rest of Winifred's lively group, are in danger of being lost because nobody is recording them.

Was Anna, then, anxious to ensure that her mother became better known in her native country?

This was only a part of the voyage back to the family connections on the other side of the world, she said. Obviously as her mother's writing had not been widely published like her father's, there was no particular reason why she should be as well known as he was — but the intellectual relationship between them had always been tremendously important for her father's writing.

> I've already said my mother's stories made me an historian because they gave me an enormously vivid sense of what the passage of time meant for generations of women and their daily lives. I also know how important her intellectual influence, her values, her warmth were in making me a feminist as well. She never assumed that because my sisters and I were girls there would be things we couldn't or shouldn't do. It was a very empowering childhood because my sisters and I were girls there would be things we couldn't or shouldn't do. It was a very empowering childhood because of her. I want to re-establish her importance to me and my father so she becomes important to other people — as I think she should be.

The shape of Anna's career resembles that of quite a lot of women — tending to fit round children and household rather than advancing

straight upwards. She became pregnant while she was still at school then dropped out to get married, and, in the next four years, had three children who are now in their twenties. (The fourth and youngest child was born a generation later in the 1970s). The father of the three oldest children is a mathematician who was completing his first degree at Oxford University when their first child was born, and continued with research and teaching at Oxford and, later, at Princeton University in the USA.

His family, said Anna, 'were communists or fellow travellers' and had an important political and educational influence on her. His mother was a chemist:

> She's actually, and I have to say this not to swank about family connections but because it's so exciting, she got the Nobel Prize for chemistry.

Anna worked with her then father-in-law on a book about colonialism in West Africa, which she found taught her about:

> . . . the economic and political relationships of post-imperialism, as well as the internal dynamics of my own society. That, as well as what my friends and peers were discussing, were formative experiences for me.

Before they left for the US, said Anna, they often had student friends occupying the spare room in their house. Looking back on that period of his life she recalled herself listening in the background and reading to keep up with her husband and his friends. Most of them were involved with the start of the *New Left Review,* so there was a strong intellectual left-wing culture and the occasional strong woman like Juliet Mitchell. She thought of her younger self as neither reading for her own purposes nor having her own ideas:

> but when I present that version of myself Juliet laughs at me and says that's a load of rubbish and that in fact I was arguing and talking and playing my part. Somebody else was saying that their memory of that time was Luke, my husband, silent in the kitchen cooking and me talking all the time.

Life on the housing project associated with the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University was 'very much the Betty Friedan stuff' — a lot of bright young men and their wives, most of whom, Anna commented, had had more education than her and some of whom had postponed their own further education in order to give financial support to husbands who were studying. Areas of conversation were restricted to children and domesticity and were very unpolitical.

When President Kennedy was assassinated everybody was in tears, but that was as far as politics went.

However, Anna saw Princeton as important because it made clear to her how women's situation in relation to men was not an equal one. The following, very difficult year in Algeria sharpened that perception. Anna and her husband had gone to Algeria immediately after that country's liberation as an expression of solidarity with Algerian independence from France. But they were short of money, had no baby-sitting circle like the one at Princeton to rely on and, because they were Europeans in an Arab country, were automatically assumed to be French:

> I really became agoraphobic in the end. I couldn't go out on the street without being followed and commented on and harassed even when I had children with me; even though, for Algerian women that was a period really much better than anything that preceded it or, alas, followed it, because the subsequent Algerian government came down much harder on the Islamic stuff.

These months as an academic's wife stuck at home with the children made Anna realise that she had to bring this phase of her life to an end. She was accepted as a student at the University of Warwick, a new university where her husband began teaching in its first teaching year. Because he had always played 'a very equal part' in housework and child care, and his salary now enabled them to employ domestic help, Anna became a very busy history student. As this was the late sixties, many students including Anna were caught up in left-wing political discussions as Warwick in those days was one of the 'particularly active' English universities. An aspect of this involvement was:

> . . . singing in the folk club because I liked folk music and got fed up with how sexist the songs and the presentations were. I learned lots of women's folk songs — or songs which seemed to present the woman's voice — and started overcoming shyness and singing those.

However, 'burning the candle at too many ends' as Anna put it, led to a temporary halt to the combination of political activities, history studies and domestic responsibilities. Anna first thought she had pulled a muscle on one of the big anti-Vietnam war demonstrations, but this turned out to be tuberculosis. Paradoxically, she said, she thought her period of illness was good for her children (then aged about nine, seven and five) as it made them realise how much she had done with them — because other people now had to do it all instead.

They also became aware of adults as vulnerable, which turned them into loving and supporting people at an early age:

> It's obviously not something one could recommend, but as consciousness raising for children, a sick mother does wonders for making them appreciate mothers.

Despite the enforced rest Anna sat (and passed) her final examinations at the same time as everyone else. In 1970 she and her husband moved to London, and their marriage broke up.

Anna's interest in studying history had been heightened in Algeria, when she first read *The Making of the English Working Class* by E P Thompson, who was teaching at Warwick University. It was, said Anna, very well-taught history since not only Thompson, but some of the young tutors also, were excited by social history which actually included some women — not enough, Anna thought, but 'more than you could say for most history.' Because her perception of history had been shaped at home by her mother's family stories instead of at school, she saw it as a subject about daily life and about women and children. The conventional sources were unsatisfactory because they were written from above and outside mainly by 'middle-class' men in bureaucratic and administrative and institutional contexts.'

Anna also has a clear concept of historical research as a political act and explained this in the first article she wrote about women and history. When she moved to London she used to spend one day a week in the chronically understaffed office of one of the first women's liberation groups, and felt she had to respond to some criticisms about her going off to work in a library when she could have been attending meetings or organising demonstrations. The importance of feminist historical research was to enable us to understand much more about our past — and despite some advances in this area during the last 15 years, there was still a greal deal to do.

Anna also explained why she disliked the term 'herstory' as a substitute for history. Her distaste came from two directions. The first:

> is one I'm not terribly proud of — it's an extreme pedantry which was part of my upbringing in a house of dictionaries and precision in the use of language. I think it can be just a way of being elitist, and if I'm editing somebody else's text, I try to battle against it.

More important than pedantry, however, was that coining the word 'herstory' blurred the distinction between women's history and

feminist history. Through the century there had been a fair amount of women's history, which to Anna is simply history about women. Examples of history which had also tried to be feminist were: Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labour* in the 1890s; the work of Vera Britten and Winifred Holtby in the 1920s; and Marian Reynoldson's *Petticoat Rebellion* in the 1960s. Less overtly feminist were Alice Clark's Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century and Ivy Pinchbeck's *Women Workers and the Seventeenth Century* and Ivy Ivy Pinchbeck's *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution* — the emphasis in these two books was more on the history and less on the feminism.

Feminist history came from the understanding that women were oppressed as a sex because of society's gender divisions. Looking at the same kinds of divisions in the past showed that they did not neccessarily operate in the same way. But besides wanting to understand the roots of today's oppression, the feminist researcher also wanted to change the situation, according to Anna, so there was a political commitment in there as well as a politicial analysis; and one of the central features of the historian's analysis was the existence of sexual divisions:

> I'm a socialist as well so I see the past and present construction of gender in society as fundamental but I also see past and present class divisions as fundamental. What interests me enormously is the interaction of gender, class, race and age divisions in the way that society at any given point is structured and how those divisions get exploited by ruling groups at the expense of others.

Anna said she was also deeply interested in how women's and children's lives were affected by the interaction of ideology with class and material factors — such as the macro-economy, the household economy and women's shifting place between them. For instance, in the second half of the 19th century the middle class assumption was that children's place was at home or in school and certainly not making an economic contribution to the household. In contrast, working class people assumed that work was good for children — not tedious and dangerous work like that in the early textile mills but at an acceptable level related to their age and family need. Cutting across this was the middle class perception which produced the introduction of compulsory education.

You've got a fantastic conflict between working class families' need for child labour and the ruling class assumption that it's wrong for children to work — and that's the kind of conflict I like exploring.

Anna pointed out that relatively speaking, last century's working class children were perhaps more independent and, in a sense, freer than middle-class children. Her interest in the liberation of children probably came in part from the politics of the sixties and the attempt to point to ageism as well as sexism and racism as things to be struggled against. It also came from her experience of thinking about how to bring up her children and looking back to her own childhood and comparing it with others. She felt her own childhood had been free in many ways — although she had perhaps been too much protected from work. This was probably because her mother had always had to combine domestic responsiblities with book-learning and did not expect much domestic help from any of her three daughters.

Taping oral history was one of the methods Anna used for her own research into everyday lives of the past. Asking people what they remembered about their childhood, especially what they knew of their mothers' lives was an exciting way of working. However, the ethical problem it raised stemmed from the belief that those interviewed should be treated as people and not merely sources — and Anna agreed that women oral historians were more likely than men to perceive this as a problem.

Thus, she stopped recording people's recollections for some years out of concern that she had too little to give back to the elderly people (mostly women) who had entrusted her with their lives in the form of often emotionally laden memories. She felt that her dilemma lay in the fact that she could not provide any indication of how she was using the material because, as an historian, she worked very slowly.

> What they want is a continuing relationship with somebody they trust and have got close to; and I can't give that either because I have my own social life, I have my own political life, my own work, my time is always incredibly short and it's very difficult to operate at their pace. The elderly without much social contact would love me to spend two or three hours a week coming to tea and talking, and the more people you've taped, the more impossible that becomes. It wasn't a possible situation.

A less than ideal compromise arrived at by Anna was to talk to elderly regulars (some of them women) on the neutral ground of her local pub in a poor London inner-city neighbourhood. They were usually very happy to talk about their early days, and Anna took notes rather than using a tape-recorder.

Another more structured way of gathering information was through

people's history groups which were usually centred on a particular area in London and contained a mixture of ages and local working class people plus what Anna described as 'more educated outsiders like myself.' Groups has regular meetings but were flexible about whether a particular topic like shopping or married life structured the discussion or whether the evening's talking just wandered. Sometimes the whole group of 10 to 20 took part in the one session or they might break up into several smaller teams, each with a tape-recorder in order to do more directed work. The negative side of such groups was that they tended to consist mainly of the traditional white working-class; usually missing were non-English participants such as those with a West Indian background.

The positive side was that the groups were usually dominated by women, so that there was a real value placed on topics like domestic life or women's health which might be seen as less relevant by, for instance, male trade unionists. There was a combination of reasons for this female presence — one, obviously, was demographic as elderly women outnumber elderly men. Another was the greater importance for women of getting out somewhere. They had, on the whole, less access to the pubs than men, less money and greater anxiety about spending it on drink. Adult education classes, therefore, were really important social forms for some women, reducing their isolation and giving them intellectual stimulus as well.

For Anna herself, taking part in this kind of social history was rewarding because everyone else was as much in control of the discussion as she was. In some cases a group had managed also to produce publications:

> . . . a returning of the people's lives to themselves, and a real way of ensuring that they made the decisions about how to present their lives and how to interpret history.

The idea of making historical research and analysis totally accessible was part of a wider movement that perceived history as too important to be confined within academic institutions in the hands of a few formally trained specialists. This movement gained impetus in the late sixties through Ruskin College, an English trade union college in Oxford. The students, mostly men and often skilled workers, had usually left school at the age of 13 or 14 and had spend some years in the labour force before going to Ruskin with the help of trade union scholarships. The history tutor encouraged the students to turn to old newspapers or any other forms of records which enabled them to explore subjects relevant to their experience and identification. For example a cooper might look at the history of coopering, or the daughter of a tenant farmer might examine the history of women's agricultural participation in the 19th century, while some popular

culture was seen to be as suitable a subject for research as work was.

The college authorities, however, did not care for this method of learning by doing. They held the traditional view that 'proper' research was a privilege for graduate students, certainly not appropriate for undergraduates let alone the adult equivalent of sixth formers — which is how they basically saw the trade union students.

As part of the struggle over this new way of teaching/learning, the students and their supporters set up open days for the public to hear them presenting their work. Attendances grew rapidly, and as Ruskin was big enough for only about 200, other places in Oxford (like the local Playhouse) had to be used to accommodate an audience of about 1000 (with sleeping-bags) who came to the workshop on childhood. People were packed together and the discomfort level was high:

> You couldn't move without knocking somebody, and so you'd get very cramped. If you had the windows open there'd be traffic noise but if you had them closed then the smoke got to people. But there was an enormous excitement because the range of people was so different from those at regular academic conferences — you'd have local car workers chipping in with their experience, women who'd never had any formal education since they were 13 or 14 and had been adult education students all their lives. There was a terrific input from political activists of all ages as well as people working in education institutions at every level bringing in both their experience and their reading and asking how they could feed all this information back into their teaching situations.

One of the immediate results of these increasingly large conferences and workshops was a concern to record and circulate some of the papers and talks that were given. A collective organised the publication of pamphlets and books and finally, from 1976 onwards, the twice yearly journal, *History Workshop.*

The collective consisted of about half Ruskin students, with Anna among the other half of politicially committed supporters. From the beginning they made a commitment to having equal numbers of men and women and also tried to have a wide representaiton so that at no time were all members in academic jobs or even fringe academic jobs; and the group included lesbian, gay and heterosexual historians but with a gap, said Anna, since they were all white. Their object was to stress the political importance of historical understanding — for instance, in relation to class and sex divisions in society, as well as to race and age. They wanted to make historical work widely available, which meant taking care to avoid jargon and mystifying language;

encouraging people without formal training to write about work they do, or to do work and to write about it; publicising the ways history could be misused or exploited — for instance, to criticise historical presentations on television or to discuss the kinds of assumptions behind museum exhibitions.

Initially, the collective believed that sub-titling *History Workshop* 'a journal of socialist historians' made their feminist commitment clear. But after a few years the sub-title was changed to 'a journal of socialist and feminist historians' because of a clearer understanding, particularly among the women. Anna felt this was a vital step:

> If we believe we have an important contribution to make in terms of feminist politics, then the more clearly that's stated, the more likely we are to get important contributions from feminist historians. And there are ways in which contemporary feminist debates, for instance around pornography, can be given a historical dimension, and I think that our change of title makes our journal a more likely forum for that kind of discussion.

Her NZ visit was particularly heartening, said Anna, because she found women making important contributions and getting intellectual stimulus in a whole range of situations that did not inevitably include the university. Both here and in Australia she had met tremendously strong women and she thought she understood her parents better for seeing something of the society in which they grew up. She had been able to contribute directly to NZ's feminist history by passing on all she had learned from old family photographs and documents that relatives here had shown her — the main recipient of this information being her friend, NZ feminist historian Charlotte Macdonald who had immortalised Anna's great-grandmother, Ellen Silk.[1] And part of a statement made by Anna in 1975 was still applicable:

> Women's history is not just a question of filling the gaps and setting the record straight, though these are important: it's also an urgent need to find an explanation of our present situation and a way out of it. It's for use not only for interest. But it still has to be as near the truth as we can get, which means a lot of work: if some of it can be done collectively, so much the better.

Notes

The publication of this interview was delayed because of what could be called technical hitches, and we apologise to Anna for this. Thanks to Athina Tsoulis for transcribing the tape.

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1979 Convention: A Cultural Analysis

Michele D. Dominy

Anthropologist Edwin Ardener argued in 1972 that when anthropologists — female or male — go to the field the cultural reality they describe is a male reality. He warns that we should not assume that women and men share the same conceptual worlds. Many feminist theorists define anthropology as a search for the ways in which people lead meaningful lives, a search for how people classify, symbolise, and understand their lives. Sparked by these insights, feminist theorists in a variety of disciplines are exploring the ways in which female and male conceptual systems — modes of classifying, symbolising and understanding — differ.

The research of Susan Harding (1975) and Susan Rogers (1975) in anthropology, Pamela Fishman (1978), Marjorie Goodwin (1980) and Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker (1982) in sociolinguistics, and Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Carol Gilligan (1982) in social psychology highlights differences in women's and men's conceptual systems. They argue that such differences are socially and culturally based, rather than biologically based, and ask us to explain them by

examining the constraints of social arrangements and exploring strategic responses to such constraints in social interaction. Increasingly they focus on miscommunication between the sexes rooted in their conceptual apartness. But few theorists acknowledge the co-existence of separate conceptual systems among women which also may result in miscommunication.

Within society, women have varying interpretations and understandings of what it means to be female. Such variations are fundamental and hold implications for how women think about the world and their role in society. For eighteen months, from January 1979 until August 1980, working in a variety of women's voluntary associations within a culturally homogeneous population of Pakeha women in Christchurch, I saw the variety of understandings women have of themselves and explored how these gender conceptions simultaneously reflect and shape political activity and ideology.

The 1979 New Zealand United Women's Convention provides an arena for exploring differences in two of these gender conceptions as they are expressed through social behavior — activity and voiced ideology. I focus on the convention as a sociocultural drama, a concept developed by anthropologist Victor Turner (1974) to refer to public situations where a crisis or conflict emerges and is resolved. Contemporary anthropologists see the process of social life, that is social action, resulting from the tensions and interplay of sociocultural identities as people define themselves through their actions and beliefs relative to others. One way of focusing on this process is through the sociocultural drama, which typically allows people:

> to reiterate their collective and personal identities, to arouse great emotion and energy, which are then redirected towards some commonalities, some deep symbols, and stable shared norms. (Myerhoff 1978:185)

Often such crises illuminate internal contradictions and inconsistencies within ideology and between norms.

The fourth and largest United Women's Convention, in Hamilton in April 1979, was clearly feminist whereas the previous convention in Christchurch in 1977 was more broadbased.[1] Advance publicity stated the perspective:

> We, as the coordinating committee of UWC,[2] believe that all women have the right to equal choice and equal opportunity. Thus, it follows that:
> 1. Patriarchy (male dominance) as a major omnipresent system

must be ended;
2. We recognise that each woman must make her own choices over compromise and survival within the patriarchal system;
3. Believing that the personal is political we see feminists as having a responsibility to all women;
4. We believe that feminism is an active commitment and involvement towards feminist goals;
5. Certain basic premises are essential to a feminist conception. These include:
(a) Control of your own body, i.e., abortion a woman's right to choose
(b) Freely available, quality, 24-hour child care as a right
(c) Abolition of sex role stereotyping in all areas of society
(d) Fostering and developing non-hierarchical organisations and institutions
(e) Recognising that all forms of sexual preference are valid and that heterosexuality is not superior to any other lifestyle
(f) Fostering the right of women to work for equal pay and with equal opportunity, a basic tenet of feminism . . . [The] convention will be run accordingly. (Convention Committee 1979:10)

This perspective alienated two categories of women. First, it alienated nonfeminist women from groups such as the National Council of Women which, with most of its member organisations, did not attend as an organisation but allowed women to attend as individuals. Few did, with the exception of some delegates to NCW from National Organisation for Women (NOW), an explicitly feminist group, and the Abortion Law Reform Association of New Zealand (ALRANZ), a pro-choice for women group. Reasons for not attending varied, ranging from the convention's radicalness to its support for abortion.

Second, the perspective alienated separatist women; these women, however, attended the convention in order to make a political statement. In attending, they were vocal in their opposition. Activist lesbian-feminist strategies were public strategies, intended to be visible to non-separatists and to subvert normative modes of politeness. They functioned as a mode of persuasion through symbolic inversion. Symbolic inversion presents an alternative to shared culture, rules, values and norms by contradicting and inverting them, bringing them into question through deliberate, self-conscious, patterned behavior which is internally consistent. (Babcock 1978:15) Given the dominant role of separatist dissension at this convention, I focus on the range of issues it raised.

Separatist activists believe that lesbianism is more than a lifestyle, more than a matter of 'sexual preference' or 'choice'. While the

organisers intended to integrate lesbian women into the convention, the lesbian-feminist women interpreted the statement in the convention premises to imply a condensation of their differences from heterosexual women into differences merely of whom they had sex with, rather than of their belief that lesbianism is fundamentally a political issue. Furthermore, they objected to the lack of mention of the word 'lesbian'. Adrienne Rich (1980:632) reinforces such objections in her article 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence':

> Any theory or cultural/political creation that treats lesbian existence as a marginal or less 'natural' phenomenon, as mere 'sexual preference', or as the mirror image of either heterosexual or male homosexual relations, is profoundly weakened thereby, whatever its other contributions. Feminist theory can no longer afford merely to voice a toleration of 'lesbianism' as an 'alternative life style', or make token allusion to lesbians. A feminist critique of compulsory heterosexual orientation for women is long overdue.

In response, lesbian feminists shook other women into facing their attitudes about lesbianism by making themselves highly visible. Many wore purple armbands and one of the keynote speakers, American lesbian-feminist activist, Charlotte Bunch, was asked to read the following statement:

> Women wearing the purple armbands at the UWC are lesbians who are proud to be lesbian. The women's movement is still trying to make lesbianism invisible by insisting that lesbianism is just a sexual preference, but lesbians are a threat to men and their power structures because men cannot exist without women. Every woman can be a lesbian. Every woman can build a life and a future for herself without men. The armbands are being worn this weekend to remind you that lesbians are everywhere. Please do not assume that every woman is heterosexual.

In addition, the women sang to the tune of 'The Streets of Laredo': 'You can see by our armbands/That we are all lesbians/If you get your head fixed/There's an armband for you'. Their aim was to communicate with an outgroup, namely nonlesbian feminists, through confrontation.

The statement read by Bunch indicates pride in identity, as do the actions separatists took to mark themselves. Wearing purple armbands is an extension of the way lesbians use dress to differentiate themselves in the larger community. As a stigmatised group, they

adopt markers in order to elevate their own status. Similarly, separatists reclaim the words 'lesbian' and 'dyke' as positive, self-ascribed labels in an attempt to defuse the effect of outsiders using them as terms of abuse. Such symbols reinforce as well as convey identity. Such open communication of group identity forces straight women to confront lesbianism, to respect it as a political stance and not merely tolerate it. The act of announcing to nonlesbians that they can 'get their heads fixed' and be lesbians too, the activists believe, challenges the normative values of heterosexuality. Not only do they try to elevate the status of lesbians, they also try to extend the boundaries of the status.

This claim that 'every woman can be a lesbian' diffuses the specificity of meanings. These separatists want to redefine and to change the content and meaning of categories as a way of reorganising the world around different conceptions of femaleness and maleness. Clifford Geertz (1973:447) explains that such a process 'works (when it works) by disarranging semantic contexts in such a way that properties conventionally ascribed to certain things are unconventionally ascribed to others'. In the case of Christchurch activists, the purpose is to contradict male definitions and to make female definitions central.

Contrasting strategies pervade the lesbian-feminist message. One argument is for exclusivity, separatism and cohesion as a group with a distinct political world view. While the separatist ideology is rigid, the rules for behaviour constantly change and are reinterpreted to enable the group to orient itself politically to an outgroup. This contrasts with the argument for inclusivity which suggests that all women can be woman — identified and therefore lesbian. Separatists argue that women who cease to fear the lesbian label will cease to be controlled by men who use the label as a threat to keep women separated from each other and dependent on men. Charlotte Bunch in her address to the convention said:

> the lesbian is simply and profoundly the most visible symbol of a woman who steps out of her proper role.

Both strategies, exclusivity and inclusivity, while used simultaneously, have different effects. One is oriented toward solidarity, rigidity, the formulation of a strong identity and subculture in isolation; the other is oriented towards a transformation of the category into a non-marked category.

Lesbian feminism as a radical stance thus challenges the existing sex-gender system (Rubin 1975:159) and calls for a complete restructuring of society in which power structures are no longer male-defined by arguing for a redefinition of the categories of femaleness such that every woman can define herself relative to women,

independent of men. As we shall see, this message was not clear to other women.

Lesbian feminists opposed the convention's 'rigid' structure and called it 'patriarchal'. They meant that all power lay in the hands of the organising committee which provided no channel for participants to protest and was 'unapproachable' and 'inaccessible'. Several actions of the organisers also employed 'patriarchal control': selection of an institution (a university) as the convention site; choice of workshops with 'leaders', i.e., convenors; arrangement of women's mass music concerts reflecting 'consumerism'; the employment of policewomen to fend off any 'violent confrontation' in the closing session; and a refusal to allow an open forum at the closing session which would provide for feedback on workshops, discussion of ideas, passing of remits or any plans for unified political action. Separatist activists denounced this 'structure' as based on 'middle-class, professional, heterosexual feminist' values. They attacked 'heterosexism', the notion of heterosexuality as the norm. This notion of 'compulsory female heterosexuality' has been elaborated by Rich (1980:637):

> . . . heterosexuality, like motherhood, needs to be recognised and studied as a political instituion — even, or especially by those individuals who feel they are, in their personal experience, the precursors of a new social relation between the sexes.

Without formal channels for protest, activists protested disruptively. For example, during the speech of Martine Levy, the second opening speaker, a women in a pink tutu stood in the aisles where many lesbian feminists were sitting. A Christchurch woman writes:

> So, when Gaby put on a tutu and stood in the aisle, to me she was demonstrating that she had more to do with ballet than Levy's speech had to do with Women's Liberation.
>
> Many lesbians were angry because we were expected to listen politely to a woman who not only ignored our existence as lesbians, but who never mentioned single women, red-yellow-black and brown-skinned women, working class women, women who weren't mothers, etc. 'Good manners' kept most women quiet . . . [We] listened to and discussed what Levy was saying, we laughed, sang, hugged, kissed, we analysed what was going on and asked each other what could we do about it and, in effect, made an unsophisticated, 'impolite' and unco-ordinated political protest about the lack of relevancy in Levy's speech, and her crass exclusion of most women in the world. (Johnson 1979:7)

Graffiti was another disruptive strategy. Activists wrote on walls, a symbolic defacement of the institution, to directly communicate with other women. In Mariette's (1979a:15-16) words:

> . . . my anger wanted some action, some action that maybe would make other women angry . . . we went around and I wrote out my anger . . . I wanted to say something lound and clear, and I wanted to say it not only for me, but to the patriarchy which builds to entrap and train oppressors, which makes a sacred thing of buildings, but destroys peoples.

The graffiti was a verbal and symbolic confrontation 'to shock women into analysing what was happening'. To the protestors, their action destroyed the institutions to which they so objected; this defacement was not the work of 'true vandals' since the 'oppressors' who built the buildings are the real vandals 'vandalising our minds and bodies' with their institutions.

Although some lesbian women performed at the two evening concerts, the Lesbian Entertainment Trust chose not to perform at mass concerts to which they were opposed. The women were 'tired of entertaining straight women who absorbed lesbian energy but ignored lesbian politics'. In addition, the concert 'reeked of professionalism' as some women performed as 'stars' for others, and of 'consumerism' as other women were entertained. Some lesbian women exclusively created their own entertainment in their own space for each other. Threats of violence at the concert circulated through the convention grapevine but were empty.

Separatists opposed the overseas speaker. Certainly, some lesbians felt that concessions had been made to their interests in inviting Charlotte Bunch as a speaker. However, many felt that the gesture was undercut by her outsideness and her niceness. Marilynn Johnson (1979:6-7) asked:

> would lesbianism become respectable because Charlotte Bunch was so 'lovable' would there now be 'nice' lesbians like Charlotte who made non-radical and radical feminists alike feel comfortable, and 'rude' and 'rowdy' feminists like us who made them fell decidely uncomfortable.

Another queried:

> how are we to react when Charlotte Bunch talks about a Radical Feminist Revolution and speaks a language that both conservatives and radicals feel is 'their language'?

That all the women at the convention listened to Charlotte at all was

attributed not only to her 'niceness' and 'lovableness' but her clout as an overseas speaker. Activists wanted a New Zealand voice and moreover a lesbian-feminist New Zealand voice. One woman said '. . . we let an overseas "star" step into a position . . . that should have been ours'.

> I wanted speakers of our own, powerful women, who for years have been shut out and their voices silenced. Charlotte Bunch sold us out . . . she tried to be nice to everyone, she tried to water us down, she preached tolerance, niceness and togetherness. (Mariette 1979b:21)

Another added New Zealand feminists have been saying the same kinds of things for a long time. Bunch's actions contrasted with the exclusive, alienating actions of lesbian feminists.

Finally, many lesbian women saw the convention as racist and thus not genuinely feminist. Like sexism, racism is oppressive. Women responded by carrying a larger banner into the finale and asking Charlotte Bunch to yield five minutes of her closing speech time to Rebecca Evans, a radical Maori woman activist. Evans argued that the 'white women's convention' reflected racist exclusionary tactics by the organisers in its patronising poster, the lack of workshops for black women, the lack of a black speaker and the complexity of the organisational details. She said that the convention was a white, female replica of a white, racist male convention. Pakeha lesbian separatists vociferously supported her.

Pakeha separatists and radical feminist Maori activists acknowledged their alliance for the first time in their shared protest activities at this convention. Their alliance (continued in more recent protest activity) rests on their conception of New Zealand culture as white and male-defined, and reflects the oppositional nature of identity formulation. Their shared rejection of maleness (which is equated with whiteness) results in a shared affirmation and equation of female with black. Both categories of women recognise this equation, asserting that the analysis of each informs and strengthens the other. Both identities share aspects of each other in social structural and conceptual structural terms, not only in recognising a shared source of oppression but in asserting the inversion of that oppression through opposition and separation. A shared ideology rejects hierarchy, individualism, materialism, spiritual detachment and racism. Shared political strategies include the symbolic inversion of white male culture through complete separation and radical protest strategies which demand a rethinking of cultural systems of classification.[4]

The convention organisers never directly addressed these activists. In grappling with the issue of accountability, they agreed that feminists have responsibility to all women. This principle shaped their responses when the separatists challenged them to be accountable for their actions. They did not address the challenges to their recognition of all forms of sexual preference as valid. Acting in good faith, the organisers had acknowledged the significance of the lesbian-feminist stance in inviting Charlotte Bunch to be a keynote speaker although later they acknowledged the need for the New Zealand minority speakers. Nor did the organisers defend the structure of the convention. They tried to thwart separatist protests by not releasing control of the microphone at public sessions and by having policewomen present. They explained:

> 'we did not trust that whatever happened at the convention was OK and part of the process . . . we did not trust the other women present to have controlled the situation.

Meanwhile the committee remained unavailable for reasons consistent with their feminism — 'the committee intentionally avoided the "star" syndrome and kept in the background as a group'. They refused to be cast in an authority role, again for feminist reasons.

> Sometimes, we wished that some of the participants had taken more responsibility for each other and not felt that it was the committee's 'job' to 'do something' about the dissension. An example of this happened during the opening session when Martine Levy was being heckled by a group in the audience. A woman came to the side of the stage and asked two committee members to 'do something about those bloody demonstrators.' We felt unable to intervene without causing more noise and disturbance. However, the women in the audience could have quelled the noise if they had wanted to, as a group, exerting group pressure. We live in an authoritarian and patriarchal society, where we learn to 'pass the buck' to someone in authority (usually 'the man'). The committee was cast in this role at the convention. (Convention Committee 1979:111)

The committee's commitment to feminist principles in organising the convention by consensus and in refusing authority countered separatist accusations of the structure as a product of 'middle-class, professional, heterosexual feminists'.

Convenors of workshops were trusted to run them as they chose; such a structure is in keeping with feminist principles of shared and equal responsibility. The university was selected as the only possible venue for a convention of 2000; the environment was pleasant and spacious, and male faculty members were asked to avoid their offices

while male caretakers took a low profile. The convention poster was commissioned to a prominent woman activist who was 'under no instructions . . . and [told] to design something appropriate'. All minority group headquarters were contacted prior to the convention and encouraged to participate. Many responded 'not yet, we have some sorting out of our own to do'. Those who did attend were entirely responsible for running their own workshops.

The response of feminist participants towards whom separatist activist strategies were directed indicates that women were either not persuaded by the message, or did not understand it. One woman saw the disruptive tactics during Levy's speech as 'rude', disruptive', and 'childish'. Purple armbands were equated not with lesbian unity but rather with lesbian disunity. Her perception was that those heard through their noisy and disruptive tactics were a small group not only within the convention as a whole but within lesbian women as a group. She argued that if heterosexual women and the university buildings were so abhorrent then surely these women should have separated themselves off from the UWC instead of alienating other women from feminism and lesbianism. Graffiti writing was seen as violent and destructive, male-like behaviour which was a sign of lesbians being corrupted as they sought change. Women condemned it in terms of its cost and the consequence of other women having to clean up the mess.

Thus while lesbian-feminist activists and refomist feminist women shared objections to the organisers, they did not agree on acceptable protest strategies. One reformist felt that lesbian vandalism diverted attention away from the genuine oppressed minority group of the convention — the Polynesian women. She appreciated the creative energy of lesbian women who performed in concert; but she did not understand the anger:

> What was the anger all about? I had no idea. All I knew was that it was directed against other women, jeopardising other conventions. I was reminded how oppression can twist people; the lesbians in this group were arrogant rather than proud, insecure and frightened rather than confident, hurtful and intolerant towards their sisters rather than women-loving. (Seule 1979:22)

Another woman, also agreeing that the convention was racist, the channels of communciation non-existent, and the organising committee non-accountable to anyone for their actions, did not understand the violence. Many did not. Violence, on the part of the organisers employing policewomen, and in the actions of the activists usurping the microphone, was seen as male behaviour. Both groups obstructed communication through such tactics.

The visibility of the lesbian-feminists, their tactics of confrontation,

the attempts to communicate their opposition are all forms of rejection of middle-class identity. In their view, class, like sexism, is an oppressive concept. Tact, respect and tolerance are inappropriate; they are not the strategies of revolution.

> Here in the New Zealand feminist movement, we have never analysed power. Middle-class women like myself have been brought up to feel that confrontation, with its display of violent anger and long suppressed resentments is not nice and not an appropriate way to deal with conflict. Appropriate, however, is one of those words that usually means that someone doesn't want to have to deal with knowing how we feel. (Peterson 1979:22)

Separatists consider middle-class 'polite', 'nice,' 'appropriate' behaviour as distancing behaviour, which, like the threats of the lesbian label, divides women and prevents them from grasping issues. Confrontation and impolite behaviour are attempts by lessbian feminists to counter this distancing:

> Confrontation, if used for its own sake, simply to coerce or dominate, becomes aggression. As a tactic, however, confrontation is used when issues have been repressed or obscured. To identify and define issues is the first step in fighting back. But anyone who uses confrontation should be clear about the issues they want explored. (Peterson 1979:23)

Lesbian-feminist ideology asserts that to be middle-class is to be male-identified and male-defined. To be middle-class and feminist is, in this view, a contradiction and implies co-optation. Thus, to reclaim femaleness one must reject middle-class behaviour. Politeness, tolerance, tact, respect and niceness as female manifestations of the middle class are rejected for behaviour (anger, confrontation and violence) which is sex-marked as male by nonseparatists. The selective assumption of female and male attributes by women is an attempt to restructure gender categories by altering the content, the boundaries and the actors. For women to gain control of their own lives, gender for separatists must be defined by women. In the same way, lesbianism is redefined by women as a category and is broadened to include all women.

The activities of lesbian feminist women at the convention mark it as a definitional ceremony primarily for two groups: for those who see themselves as middle-class feminists, that is, subscribing to the overall belief system of the majority of New Zealanders, and for the separatists who see themselves as 'true' feminists, that is, as women-defined-women who have not been co-opted by male

definitions. Consciousness raising and political protest at the UWC lead women to define themselves not as women in a united group but in terms of their differences from other women — differences in gender conceptions, of goals and visions, and of strategies for their attainment — differences which led to misunderstanding.

Lesbian feminists who adopted armbands and symbolically inverted rules presented a clearly articulated sense of collective identity. Lesbians who removed their armbands in protesting the actions of the lesbian feminists were able to articulate their individual identities as they stood in juxtaposition to lesbian feminist ideology; they spoke of the importance of having an allegiance to women as a group (including straight women) which overrode their allegiance to lesbianism as a political stance. These women wanted to communicate their lesbianism and ideology to all women, to persuade them to bond as women to fight for feminism. The overseas speaker in calling for '[us] . . . to allow ourselves to struggle with respect for each other' urged women to seek a sense of justice, a sense of what it means to struggle for the kind of society they want, to see change for women. Women's strength will come from recognising diversity and mobilising for social change.

Two persuasive strategies are adopted. Both compel people to redefine their categories. In adopting purple armbands and saying that every woman can be a lesbian, separatists adopt a strategy of persuasion in which women set themselves apart but say that others can join too. As the term 'lesbian' loses it specificity, therefore its stigmatisation, it loses it ability to be manipulated by others as a label to make women conform. The distinction between lesbian and nonlesbian is not one of sexual preference, nor of heterosexual and lesbian identity, but one reflecting a choice to group oneself exclusively with women and define oneself relative to those women as opposed to men.

In contrast, disruptive protest strategies are also strategies which attempt to persuade through alienation by seeking to confront, shock and convert women into challenging their most basic assumptions and questioning whether these assumptions are manifestations of maleness. Thus, the intent is to alienate one's audience in order that they will reject those assumptions and in so doing discover what it is about being female that is essential. But since as social actors, women are products of a cultural environment which is male-defined, that rejection involves casting off primary conceptions of self. If women do not do this they misunderstand the lesbian message.

So for example, graffiti are interpreted as destructive and violent, not as validly communicative, by those who value property as worthy of respect and value rule-bound behaviour. Disruptive activity is interpreted as rude by those who view the disruption and anger as being directed at a female speaker rather than, as the disrupters

intend, at the female speaker as a 'tool of the patriarchy'. Those who do not think she is a 'tool' will also judge the actions rude. In contrast, those who understand the actions in the same way as the lesbian feminists themselves must share a feminist belief system with them which understands culture to be totally male-defined and must be willing to step outside of cultural definitions to interpret the protest activities.

Clearly, the intent of the separatist women's actions at the United Women's Convention was both to reinforce their identity as a group by acting collectively and voicing a shared ideology and also to persuade other women of the political correctness of their stance. They sought to do this within the framework of a more broadbased feminist ideology. The response of those women who were uncomprehending of, or who disagreed with, the lesbian-feminist stance at the convention reflects an inherent contradiction in the separatist beliefs: why as feminists, do lesbians seem to adopt male patterns of behaviour?.

It is imperative to understand that lesbians don't believe they are trying to look like men, nor trying to adopt male patterns of behaviour during acts of violence. Rather they are rejecting markers of femaleness defined by men. These women are not trying to create an androgynous image either. Androgyny is based on female and male values and is thus modelled on cultural stereotypes. Women have to work out what they are free to be and attempt to generate a female-defined culture based on the value of female experience. These attempts may include disruptive acts or vandalism when confronting the 'patriarchy.' As male culture is destroyed, female culture can be created.

An understanding of separatist and reformist gender conceptions is essential for an understanding of their miscommunication. In my interpretation of separatist gender constructions[4] separatists ascribe distinctive female moral sensibilities to a biological model based on the nature of female sexuality, and on female powers of reproduction, yet they argue for a broader notion of sexuality that is not limited to reproduction. For these women, the essence of femaleness lies not only in their powers of reproduction but, even more importantly, in their distinctly 'female' sexuality; thus they expand the concept of sexuality, redefining it as an aspect of all interpersonal relationships. Women should not control and constrain the sexual dimension of their interactions, but use their sexuality as a model to structure behaviour. They believe sensory perceptions such as instinct, intuition and telepathy, are among women's natural capacities, and they consider these natural powers as analogous to sexual powers. Separatists promote an ethos of natural purity which rejects not only male sexual energy but also the products of male technology and

culture, by generating a female-based culture modelled on aspects of female sexuality, and claiming spiritual unity with life, with nature, and with the earth. Structurally, separatists withdraw from society and create communities based around female alliances. They are creating an exclusive 'women's culture'[5].

Alternatively, the organisers want to promote a reformist feminist ideology which reinforces women's identity as a group in shared convention activity. They attempt to integrate female values and male values by fostering alternative structures which contribute to women's self definition. While denying the significance of biological determinants, they foster social mechanisms; these demand a restructuring of society which rejects an oppressive system of male dominance and accepts equal responsibility and status for all. Reformists cannot and will not accept a strategy which promotes biological differences and defines gender in light of these differences.

Unlike separatists, reformists think of gender as a social construction emerging out of experience and mirroring biological experiences. Thus not only disagreements over strategy created the impasse between reformists and separatists at the convention, but also the refusal of the reformist to permit gender, as a cultural definition of human biology, to be relevant. They do not deny that biology has something to do with gender, and that biological differences do exist, but they assert that most of the particular differences that have been attributed to biology can be explained as socially and culturally constructed. Thus reformists are rejecting biological models for gender. At the convention, reformists did not realise how biologically deterministic separatists are in seeing biology as a fundamental basis for action and thus in seeing lesbian sexuality as a political and ideological statement. The convention as an all woman group stressed the social dimension for reformists and was viewed by them as an intermediate strategy to enable women 'to get in touch with themselves', unintimidated by the presence of men.

Differences between separatists and reformists are fundamental, not merely differences in strategy or shades of feminism; they reflect the varying understandings women have of the meaning of gender as well as different conceptions of reality and how it can be changed. Such categories are ideal types, providing us with ways of thinking about difference; they are not labels which can be pasted on individual women and which might obscure complexity. The categories subsume a range of distinctions. Visionary separatists, for example, remove themselves to women's land or women's households and create a women's culture; activists, prominent at the convention, work to politicise other women, even those who interact

with men and work within 'the system'. Similarly reformists vary. Some use separatist strategies and create alternative structures such as women's shelters and health centers, whereas others (the Society for Research on Women and the National Organisation for Women for example) use more traditional strategies and work through formal structures within established paradigms. At the convention the differenes emerged in broad strokes without the gradations of such distinctions.

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Notes

1. Christine Dann writes of the convention in her history of the New Zealand Women's Liberation Movement (1985:23), 'It attracted record numbers - but for feminists of all persuasions it was a problematic and sometimes painful event. No-one offered to organise another.'

2. On route to Hamilton from the 1977 Christchurch convention, three women began a discussion which continued at the university the following year. They invited twelve other women, 'because of their known attributes and feminist commitment' to join them in organising the next United Women's Convention. Thus, they formed a committee by consensus through the 'new woman network'. They were committed to an open structure which 'fostered the development of individual strengths and also the acceptance of individual differences', (Convention Committee 1979:91)

3. This argument is developed in my forthcoming article ('To Forge a Distinctive New Zealand Identity From a Maori Point of View' Feminist Expressions of *Maoritanga'* in Jocelyn Linnekin and Lyn Poyer [eds.] *Cultural Identity in the Pacific,* an analysis of the construction of a highly politicised, self-conscious expression of cultural identity by

Maori activist women, the particular expression of *Maoritanga* called Maori sovereignty. Donna Awatere's (1984) *Maori Sovereignty* (Broadsheet) is crucial reading.

4. See Dominy ([1985] 'Lesbian-feminist Gender Conceptions: Separatism in Christchurch, New Zealand'. *Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 11:2, Winter) for an analysis of separatist gender constructions and the ways in which they reflect new ways of thinking about key cultural distinctions in New Zealand society.

5. See Marilynn Johnson's (1980) 'I Believe Men Hate Women' *(Lesbian Feminist Circle* 32:23-40) for an insightful exposition of lesbian feminism.

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Union Organiser: A Passion For Justice.

Victoria Keesing, organiser of the Northern Clerical Workers' Union talked to Margot Roth in December, 1985.

I was 15 or 16 when I first became a member of a trades union. I was working as a receptionist/telephonist/typist for a firm of chartered accountants and belonged to the Accountancy Workers' Union. People joined unions because it was compulsory but it certainly was unusual for people to get active in their unions.

There was a range of unions that covered clerical workers, whose most commonly held — or accepted — stance about unions was to loathe them and have them chase you round the country till they could forcibly take things from you, and the longer you dodged them the better.

Really I guess I got involved from having a big mouth for too long and somebody pointed me in that direction. I'd been in several different clerical positions and got into trouble because I didn't really cope well with people complaining about their working conditions and never doing anything about it. I was always the one who barrelled in and saw the boss and said: 'what are you going to do about it?'

The sort of trouble I got into is still happening to clerical workers now

— it wasn't easy to perceive. It's having your work picked on all the time and when you watch carefully what's going on round you, you see that all the good girls pick up the promotions and the wage increases while you're still waiting. It's very subtle punishment.

Was it the kind of school you went to that made you such a battler? I went to Morrinsville College and I don't think that the school or the town itself had a great deal to do with it. If anything, I would have thought that living in a place like Morrinsville would have militated against having those sorts of views because it's really rural and quite reactionary in many ways.

I think it had more to do with having an extremely stroppy mother. She didn't put up with crap herself and raised all of us not to put up with crap either. There are four in my family (three girls) and I'm the youngest and well-trained by all of them. Certainly I think the women in our house were pretty noisy and pretty forceful about what was appropriate and what wasn't appropriate and ensuring that your rights were protected and I had to shout twice as loudly to get heard because I was the youngest. It wasn't much trouble to shout at bosses after all that.

One of the key things about my family is that I'm conscious of having been raised with an absolute passion for justice — and that's really what constantly drives me — to make sure that it's not only done but is seen to be done. (I've never quite got there but . . .)

And I remember my mother saying: 'I despair for you' because from the age of 13 the one thing I wanted to do was to get married and have babies. With every single boy I brought home I was sitting there dreaming about when I could get married to him. So I managed to do it at age 16 and thought I was really quite clever — he was 20 because we waited until he didn't have to get his parents to sign to give him permission.

You know the day I left home was the day I got married. Off I went with this fellow and I had a job and for the first time in my life apart from odd bits of pocket money I had money in my hand and I didn't have to tell anyone what time I was coming home and it was lovely. For several years we did a lot of growing up together. The joker I married was a perfectly nice bloke, nothing awful about him but eventually the marriage couldn't sustain the person I became. I couldn't stand the confines of that particular narrow kind of NZ marriage and it couldn't stand me so the thing to do was to leave it behind — I don't think either of us did each other or anyone else terrible damage but maybe we grew up a lot.

My first union position (unpaid) was as a delegate for the Clerical Workers' Union. This was during my last clerical job when I was working

in Hamilton at the University of Waikato. Universities are funny old places for clerical workers. There are all sorts of jobs — essentially clerical in my view — that you're deemed incapable of doing because you haven't got a degree. Other than that it's not really different from an office anywhere else. I worked in one department typing up exam papers which must be one of the most boring jobs I've done in my life. Then I moved to the university's Centre for Continuing Education and I got a lot of encouragement there to channel my energies into the union. It seemed logical to get involved with it and have a hand in making it do what I thought it should, since I spent most of my time whinging about how it never really did anything. That's really why I became a union activist — and I've never seemed to be able to get away from it.

For a couple of years from about 1977 I was busy with a whole range of projects. I was on the local trades council as well as the branch committee of my own union, joined the Working Women's Council which must have been fairly new then, and worked with the Sisters Overseas Service[1] and the rental action group. There were a lot of women's issues that the trades council often worked on in conjunction with the Working Women's Council. At this point a whole lot of things coincided — like going to work at the university and discovering a lot of stimulating people whose company I enjoyed and who were raising issues that I'd taken only a passing interest in before; and I found a lot of neat women around the place who got me into the women's movement; and it all sort of grew and this fascinating world I never knew existed blossomed forth before me, with the union aspect really part of the tremendous growth. I always say that because I got married so young I had my adolescence late, and the marriage didn't survive.

When I was with the Centre for Continuing Education I was doing the clerical side of programmes — brochures and the costing of courses and all that — but I got really involved in looking at the educational side of worker education. Education has always fascinated me anyway, because it's probably the most debilitating thing in our society.

Does that come from your own experience at school?

I find it very difficult to sort out these days, so I don't really know. By the age of 15 I had gone through the whole NZ school system which said everybody was an individual and you succeeded or failed as an individual. I always had a view of myself as dumb and unable to succeed — and I think school does a great deal to reinforce this — but I knew a lot of people who felt the same about themselves, while others felt themselves to be successes.

In my university job I started to learn a lot about what education does in order to make places for people, and then keep them in those places. I didn't really like that. But the other side of the coin is the whole great excitement of education and the vistas it opens up for people — not in

terms of whether they are going to succeed or not but in terms of who they are as whole people. Workers have some really exciting life experiences that never get properly discussed but when these become part of our learning we find out how the world operates and that we are in fact the majority. I discovered a lot of those sorts of things not just in my job but by working and living and watching people. I found the whole education thing really fascinating and moved closer in that direction.

It was a big jolt to me finding out how NZ society functions. When I started having a look at what was going on, really the world wasn't about individuals. It was about whole groups of people whether it was groups of women or of workers or of Maori and how a lot of areas overlapped and society seemed to have different rules for dealing with different groups. That was probably the most potent lesson I learned at that time and it shocked me very badly to discover that this whole 'the world's your oyster' mush didn't really exist at all, not for most of us.

Then I moved up to Auckland to a paid position as education officer for the Clerical Workers' Union and about three years later I became a union organiser. I found that Auckland and Hamilton are very different, and I'm not sure which one I come from now. I was brought up in rural areas and after that in a very rich farming community in the Waikato and I can see that the sorts of things people do with their lives and the things they talk about are not the same as the issues in the city — maybe I just know dissimilar groups of people in the country and the city.

NZ seems to be split between a rural sector and an urban sector, with different attitudes and concerns and we've not really dealt well with the difference. We've tended to behave as if the world is a city or that the country is one city. Since that isn't true, we haven't responded much to the needs of the rural areas. Although Hamilton is obviously a city there are a lot of small town influences there and they are fairly oppressive on groups of workers. You know you have to watch what you do because you are quite likely to be living next door to the boss instead of in a different suburb, so it is possible to have friendships and contacts cutting across the whole range of social levels that I didn't see so much of in Auckland, for example.

The size of a place is an important consideration for workers because of transport to and from their jobs and their concentration into some suburbs. When I lived in Hamilton — about eight years ago now — I lived in Hamilton East which I guess is mostly a working-class area and you've got some extremes but not in the same way that you have in Auckland. There you've got big groups of housing that really filter people out into their class positions.

It depends on where you are in Auckland too whether you work with Maori people or not. Once I left Morrinsville where there is a strong

Maori community I didn't meet Maoris among the Hamilton clerical workers and it was the same when I was organising in Auckland's central city. But now I'm organising in south Auckland the proportion of Maori clerical workers is much higher. And to my surprise a few months ago I walked into a workplace in south Auckland where, for the first time ever, all the eight or nine clerical staff were Maori or Pacific Island workers.

As a union official have you found that often women are unaware of how their award affects them?

Yes I have. During the time I was an education officer, we set up a members' campaign around the award. We made visits to a lot of workplaces and explained the award and discovered as a result that the vast majority of people did not understand what an award was or where it came from. So what was happening then was what had happened to me on my first job — the boss would wander round, pat you on the head or any other available part of your anatomy and say 'Well dear, I've decided to give you a rise' when the increase had been negotiated by the Federation of Labour and the Combined State Unions. Nobody ever explained that. And at that time I found the boss's generosity was one of the most prevalent misunderstandings. We've made some headway on that problem though and over the last eight or nine years we've made some quite significant changes in their understanding as seen by our latest award campaign.

There is a difference though as workplaces get larger. It is tremendously difficult in the very small workplace to actually open your mouth and say anything when maybe the only person you are going to talk to all week is the boss. It can be very intimidating and takes an immense amount of bravery to do something about an unreasonable situation. What I've noticed is that as workplaces get bigger and more and more middle management are tucked in along the line, women are much more able to take control of the situation they're in. There's that very personal experience between the boss and the worker which can be a very difficult and stressful relationship especially if something is going wrong — it's always presented to us as 'we are all one big happy family'. Just like any big happy family the dynamics are really quite peculiar.

I think that part of it has to do with the National government's economic policy, but I don't know that the policies of the Labour government have done very much to reverse the trend. What that policy was all about was the benefits for big business and ensuring that it would continue to grow. There has been a reasonable reduction in small business over the last 10 years because it can no longer afford to compete with big business. If you've got a big job to produce something that can be done with computerised machinery and you're still employing people to do it by hand of course you are not going to get out

as big a quantity of goods, and you can't afford the equipment either to compete on those terms so you get merged in or you go under.

What kind of educational activities did you promote when you were an education officer?

There was a range really, with a lot of it seminar based. I was responsible for setting up the programme for the job delegates. So I was pulling in job delegates to have a collective look at what was happening in their jobs and also developing skills to deal with the boss and to be able to negotiate and those sorts of things.

Although I was our union's first education officer, there had previously been three or four seminars for delegates run with the assistance of the Trade Union Training Board and Waikato University and I had attended when I was a delegate myself. At that time we were looking to expand the base of our delegate structure as part of strengthening the whole structure of the union. That meant providing a service for delegates both in the more formal sense of programmes such as seminars and part of it was also keeping up contact with delegates on the job. They would frequently get in touch with me for advice on how to handle some specific situation, for example. Following on from this was setting up the campaign on the award: essentially it was taking it out and running seminars on the job that dealt with what the award is and how it works, what part the workers play in this and how they can get involved and do you have any control over your life in the workplace at all, and would you like to have.

The women were immensely receptive. I remember the first seminar I ever took was a two or three day one and we had this whole group of really wonderful women. When they arrived most of them were extremely timid and wouldn't say boo to a goose — but when they left they were ready to start the revolution. Obviously they weren't in sufficient shape to go and start the revolution right then and there, but part way through the course you could see their shoulders go back and their chins lift. They forged a lot of links with one another and found a lot of strength within the group to start them thinking about doing some battle with the rest of the world. That was really very exciting, just to watch that growth, and many of those delegates are in fact still delegates.

There's also been a dramatic change in the number of workers who are now interested in the union. I remember when a lot of people I worked with on the job weren't particularly interested, although now I find it difficult to tell whether they weren't interested, or whether they were frightened of being interested or even showing a passing interest in unions. During our award campaign we saw that a lot of our people out

there are starting to get very angry about not getting a fair go for their wages and about being low-paid workers. They want those problems rectified and they see the union as the appropriate place to begin dealing with those issues. I would say it's just been unbelievable watching that development with the sheer depth of enthusiasm and anger and concern that's out there. The response we've tapped is just sort of going boom out of the little hole in the wall that got chipped out.

You see the last government did something very clever. What they did was not only make unions voluntary but they froze wages at the same time. So to all intents and purposes the education that many workers got in that area was that there was no bloody point belonging to a union because it couldn't do anything for you anyway. That's not quite correct but I think that was the perception and it was very cleverly set up that way. Probably the major factor in the current upsurge of interest in the union was the lifting of the wage freeze. For the first time in three or four years workers have seen a specific demonstration of what their union is about and that's something they haven't been able to see for a long time.

This is the first chance they've had in all that great long period to say we're poor, we've got families, we've got roofs to keep over our heads, we've got stomachs that have to be fed, we haven't kept up — and some people have more than kept up, our companies have continued to make massive profits and where does that leave us? We want our share.

A response like this probably developed out of the Trades Council's campaigns that went on for a few years from just before the wage freeze came in. We worked very hard at taking an analysis of the economy out on to jobs, we explained things like the wage/tax trade-off and we had a lot of very good charts that compared the share of profits with the share of taxes and who owns this country and so on. When we started these campaigns, there were very few jobs I would go on (unless it was a very small firm) where people knew who actually owned and controlled their company. Now there are very few jobs I go on where the people cannot recite a whole list of who owns and controls their company and the profits they are making.

Do employers object?

A few — but they don't get much option really — and I never do job meetings at lunchtime only in work time. Interestingly though when we were doing a lot of campaign work about wage/tax trade-offs and issues like that a number of employers actually asked to sit in because they said they didn't understand the economy either.

Our campaigns were part of a whole educational development where, over a period of time, people receive information that wasn't accessible to them before, process it in terms of their own lives and reach some conclusions. I don't think people did it very consciously like that but that's my analysis of what happened. While the information was coming

to them there were a lot of things going on in the world very quickly, a lot of constraints being put on them and the information just reinforced what was happening in their lives and their understanding of it.

During that period I recall a seminar I did with my sister out at one of the Pacific Island churches of Mangere. We talked about the economy and how it works and essentially why people are poor — and at the end of the seminar those wonderful women said to us: 'we always knew we were poor, but we always thought it was our fault, we never knew why we were poor before.' I felt that same insight came through in a lot of jobs as well. For the first time workers had someone prepared to talk with them without using economic jargon, and that happened in a vast range of jobs with a vast range of unions explaining and helping workers to see that the position they were in was not their fault. And that's a pretty solid understanding to learn from and start to build on.

Up until now the amount of time that union education officers spent in schools has been minimal — I used to spend about 100 hours a year in schools and technical institutes, and used to get called in just before the end of the year as part of the vocational side of unions. But by and large the school syllabus was biased in the direction of helping pupils understand the position of employers and why we should maintain the status quo. Alongside that an hour or two at the end of the year for some trade union input was a drop in the bucket.

When I was visiting the schools I found it quite interesting. The pupils were usually the senior ones, and even before I arrived I could predict their response by the geographical location of the school. In some schools I knew I'd get: this, this and this is right and you people are disgusting, evil and wicked, why don't you go back to Russia you filthy communist — and all the rest of it. Other schools were very receptive and could tell you stories about what had happened with their own parents' involvement with unions and it was a very different life experience altogether. Occasionally there were the schools on the border where the kids came from families made up of lawyers, doctors, employers and so on and their aspirations were clearly in that direction; and other kids whose parents were clearly workers and were looking for some validation for the position of their own parents. There were all these expectations going on in the classrooms but certainly after a while I could tell in advance what reaction I was going to get.

What this shows fairly clearly is that the school and the family and the economy all link in together. I don't think it's any great insidious plot or that there is necessarily a puppeteer making it dance or anything like God sitting on a cloud. True, the economic system sits there and then things start to fold in around it — you start to see that in schools the influence of family aspirations are very strong. They are clearly reinforced by the school and the school education structure

and a whole range of things like, for instance a lot of the economic theory that's taught so as to present a very biased lot of information. History is the same and we've learned how it portrays women and workers. Our history is really not there, what's written down is the employer's history and the employer's perspective of us as workers. All of this ensures that children are shaped in such a way that they will perpetuate the system — so it's not surprising that when you walk into a school you know what reactions you're going to get.

You changed from being an education officer to become a union organiser. What's the difference?

Not a lot actually. As an education officer I covered the whole of our district which is from the top of the North Island to Gisborne and across to Taupo. As an organiser I have a geographically sizable area that runs from Mangere Bridge south to Pukekohe. I'd be hard pressed to tell you how many jobs I've got though — hundreds. Both education officers and organisers respond to problems but in different ways. As education officer I saw my role as looking at the kinds of problems that were occurring and grouping them together for collective consideration. As organiser I see one job as having one particular problem so we work to resolve this while building union consciousness.

One of the reasons I switched over to organising was that you can see an entirely different facet of education — how people actually learn about the world through their own experiences. That's all about increasing people's confidence, assisting a group who (and this is a generalisation) have been taught by the system to fail and taught by their employers to keep their place and helping them to win and that's a really exciting area of education — it's amazing.

As the years have gone by I've found that every time you go out to fix a problem you make more work for yourself. For example setting up the education programme for job delegates creates more work because what they are doing is helping to build the confidence of workers on the job, then they can start arguing about their working conditions and wages, so they immediately start asking for representation and it becomes a vicious circle. The more active and activating you are the more there is to do and it's just not possible ever to see the end of it.

I think all unions lack resources, time and money. The only income they have is from union subscriptions so the number and salary of their paid officials depend on the size of their membership[2]. Our union is not particularly well-off but we're in a better position now than we were a number of years ago. We are starting to develop some research facilities, not as broad or 'as good as' those of the employers. They have got a lot on computers and we don't have

access to those decisions and precedents that make life easier — or so I understand, but I don't spend a lot of time at the Employers' Association. We are really people intensive and that's the major resource we lack — we don't have enough money to share the jobs round more and put enough people out on the road.

When workplaces start to organise I work with them and try to maintain contact for quite a long time rather than say 'go away and organise yourselves now'. This is because it's very easy for a workplace to get bogged down and get a very myopic view of its own problems. One of the reasons they pay my wages, I think, is to enable them to have the input of the broader perspective I can have. I've had the experience of lots of different jobs and lots of different employers. What the workers on the job require of me as their servant is to advocate on their behalf. The claims come from them in the first place and they ultimately decide what they will accept or reject, but they want me to put what they want and why they want it into words and have a barny with the boss. That's what negotiations at the local level are really all about. Or I might be there when they are negotiating a legal agreement that is like an award but it's between just one employer and his employees or it could be a collection of like employers in a district and their workers.

It's entirely different at the award level. Our main national award covers some 6,000 odd employers and 30,000 workers so it's a big award. Let me explain how the employers see it: they don't think the award should reflect reality but should reflect minimum rates. And that is the award's legal position, that it sets minimum rates, and once agreement has been reached on that we start arguing with employers about above award payments. The struggle at the point we start to negotiate is whether or not we should go along with the employer view of keeping that minimum pegged as low as possible. That allows employers great flexibility about how much or how little they're going to pay people. Because that's the only legal obligation they can then pay $50 a week to someone for having blue eyes or being a good girl or shutting up about organising against the boss — there's a whole range of things here that the boss calls good work performance.

The other side of this is that the union is obviously looking for a high minimum payment to ensure that everybody gets treated equitably. What we see is this massive difference in wages between town and country. For instance if you go into Cambridge or Morrinsville or Matamata or even Invercargill for that matter, the likelihood is that clerical workers in those areas will be paid minimal award rates. When you look around the city, however, you'll find that the going rates are very much higher than the award. So we are often in the situation where people might work for a firm at head office

level in Auckland getting paid $5000-6000 a year more than their counterparts in a small town doing the same work. When that sort of inequality starts to exist, then clearly our position is that the level of the minimum rate has to be enough to live on, a fair remuneration for their skills and contribution in the workplace.

What happens at national awards is an argy-bargy between those two — but what we saw recently was the effect of different sorts of industrial action taken by the clerical workers. When the employers said 'we will give you 11½%' the workers said 'stick it we think we're worth more than that, in fact we think we're worth more than the going rate of 15½% and we're going to fight you for it in a time-honoured way' and that's what they did. They won. But we are still fighting our campaign for equal pay for work of equal value.

Of course workers are often told it's all their fault that redundancies happen because wages are too high. In fact if companies are running so near to the bone that 15½% has meant they are going to have to close their doors then they would had to anyway — it's just a matter of when.

There are some worrying things going on out there that our union has been quick to respond to. With increasing computerisation it's becoming more important for most people to learn keyboard skills of some kind, but it also means that de-skilling is going on, and we have to be aware of that. One of the things that a lot of new work does is to make the work really boring. For example, whereas before you might have had to have 12 or 15 skills operating over a period of time as a clerical worker, now you might just be sitting there key-punching all day and every day, which is bad for your health, both physically and mentally.

Some of that is changing a bit with the business of repetition strain injury. In a great many places we haven't won what we asked for when we said 'we don't want those people at those keyboards too many hours a day' — like four hours a day for example. What we are starting to say instead is that functions should be decentralised so that people have a variety of jobs to do rather than perhaps keying-in on a keyboard eight hours a day.

I think our union has demonstrated that we do respond to the needs of women. For example there is one job I work on in a combined union way, so that all union members meet together every six weeks. At the end of that meeting we send the men off somewhere else and have a women's meeting. There have been a number of concerns brought up by the women that they won't raise in the full meeting — like childcare. And because of the nature of the place they don't have access to their bags in a secure place so they want sanitary protection in the toilets, and a range of other fairly basic things like questioning how necessary it is to have to get a doctor's certificate in order to stay away from work every time they have

pre-menstrual tension or a really bad period.

On a broader scale we've seen the results of the campaign we've been doing on 'value office workers'. There are two components to that: one is that office workers are valuable workers because they do a skilled and valuable job; the second component is that the job deserves equal pay and that equal pay, if it ever did exist, exists no longer. In our union that has obviously struck a chord — it's really meant a whole blossoming of women wanting to take an active role in their own union because they clearly see it's providing some answers to the very questions they are concerned about. In the last 10 years or so we have developed ways of answering women's needs in terms of individual jobs and that takes us part way there. But we should also identify those issues that bring together a whole cross-section of women from all kinds of different jobs in a union way as our union did with the 'value office workers' question, the equal pay question. The Bank Officer's Union did it with the issue of equal opportunity in the banks. So unions are beginning to move in that direction, and it is becoming very obvious that we will attract women into the organised labour movement and maintain their interest so long as we are addressing the issue of great importance to them.

Are you suggesting that women still find it difficult to speak up about their particular concerns in a mixed meeting?

Yes, very often, but it really depends on numbers. When I deal with groups of my own workers it's different because women are in the minority. When we are in a combined union setting women are often in the majority and how vulnerable they feel will depend on whether or not the matters they want dealt with actually get raised. The only way we have found to overcome this so far is to have a women's meeting at the end of the general meeting with a woman organiser or somebody from the resource centre who can understand and respond to their problems and speak about them on their behalf.

Do you think the Working Women's Resource Centre is useful?

Absolutely. Since it was set up it has been used by a large quantity of unions. I feel that demonstrates both a willingness to start looking at and acting on issues of concern to women and is an indication that unions are unsure about what to do in a number of these cases. I know the centre has been used a great deal over sexual harassment as something that happens regularly in the workplace. Obviously the problem has to be coped with, but there is uncertainty among both paid and unpaid union officials and they need assistance to find a path that leads to a solution. The resource centre has also been incredibly valuable in providing a place for women as they start to put

one tentative toe in the water to get together with other women who might have been active for some time.

The difficulties in raising enough money to keep the resource centre going are much the same as those experienced by some unions. The centre can be supported by funds from within the trade union movements or from outside sources. A lot of unions simply haven't the money to put into the resource centre and the centre has had very limited success in getting it from anywhere else. Once again we come back to exactly the same problem we have with our own union — the union and the centre are both under-funded and under-resourced but there is a limit to what you can do about it when you are spending all your life dealing with workers getting low pay. When you are taking home maybe $180 a week and the mortgage is $150 every dollar counts, so union fees obviously can't rise faster than the actual wages going into the households. You've got a very delicate balancing act there which limits the amount of money that individual unions are going to be able to afford to put into the resource centre, so the centre continues to be in exactly the same position as the unions.

Where do you think the money should come from?

There are a number of places that have money for research grants and I think some of it should go to particular research projects. Information about the situation and the reality of women workers would be of benefit not just to the trade union movement, but to the whole community. Clearly the trade union movement needs to be putting in funding where it can, and perhaps we also need to look at places like the Ministry of Women's Affairs and some women's organisations which could provide funds. Working-class women always have gone out to work but overall we probably do see a large proportion of all women in the workforce. I think that women's organisations which are reasonably well-off need to accept some responsibility for supporting trade unions that are promoting women's issues. They should also realise that it may well be more appropriate to hand over the money to people who can work with women unionists rather than try to do it themselves, as members of trade unions are often mistrustful of outside groups.

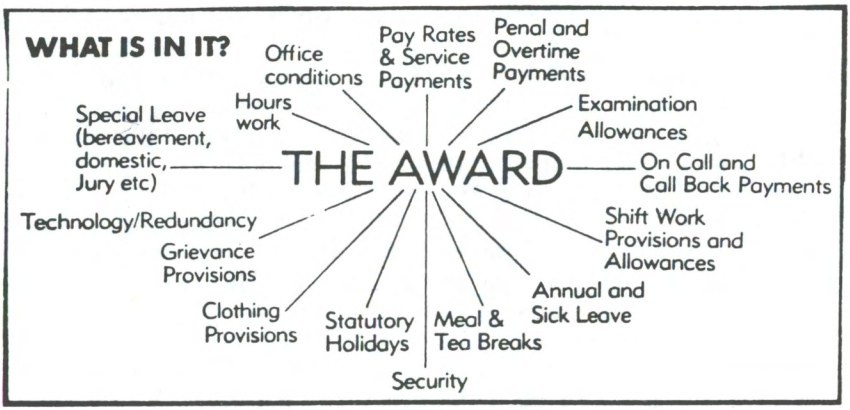
Notes

Thanks to Athina Tsoulis for transcribing the tape.

1. Voluntary group set up to help pregnant women, mostly by assisting them to get to Australia for abortions as the NZ law at that time was even more restrictive than it is now.

2. Shortly after this interview came the news that Sonja Davies, Vice-President of the Federation of Labour, was retiring from her job with the Shop Employees Union as advisory officer, because the union could no longer afford her wages.

Following are some examples of the information contained in pamphlets distributed to members of the Clerical Workers' Union.



WHAT IS AN AWARD?

It is a legally negotiated agreement between your Union and your employers to guarantee your wages and conditions of work.

WHAT IS IN IT?

WHAT IS YOUR AWARD?

The main award is the New Zealand Clerical Workers Award which covers approximately 30,000 workers throughout New Zealand. The Union does however, negotiate a number of smaller awards and agreements covering specific industries.

HOW IS IT NEGOTIATED?

The Union draws up a list of the things it wants (its claims) and sends these to the employers. The employers then draw up the list of things they want (the counter claims) and then both sides meet under the chairmanship of the Government official who is called a conciliator. When an agreement is reached the conciliator writes up the results of the discussions. These are sent to the Arbitration Court which approves them and issues a new award.

You should be aware of your rights as a worker
Do not accept that your employer has the automatic right to alter your employment to your disadvantage.

Certain actions can be challenged.

If you are dismissed
Under the terms of your Award (Personal Grievance Clause), you can challenge your dismissal.

Your first response to your dismissal notice should be to tell your employer you intend seeking advice.

Call the Union immediately.

On knowing your circumstances we can advise you accordingly.

If you are asked to resign or look for another job
Do not agree to your employer's request.

Call the Union immediately for advice.

Many situations have arisen where an employer has asked a worker to resign or look for another job without giving that worker a termination date. When the worker has then had to give a termination date, the employer has argued that the worker terminated his/her own employment or mutually agreed to resign.

If you are made redundant
Please advise the Union yourself.

Although your employer is legally bound to tell the Union under the terms of the Award, many fail to do so.

Like all dismissals, all redundancies can be challenged.

Under any cirumstances, where your employment is being affected to your disadvantage, know your rights and act quickly. Call the Union.

We will only every advise you in the first instance. If you wish your case to be taken up on your behalf, it will only be done so on your instructions.

N.B. If you are told that the Union has been called and has agreed with the employer on the course of action, don't believe it.

This is a tactic to put you off calling the Union. We are not in the business of advising employers how to get rid of their employees.

Remember,
Do not sign anything
Do not agree to anything
Do not hand in your notice under pressure
Call the Union — you are legally entitled to do so

That all-important call to the Union could save your job.

Playing at Happy Families: the State and Fertility Control

Allanah Ryan

This paper focuses on the state's involvement and control of women's fertility, through an examination of the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act 1977 (CSA Act) (1). Throughout history women's fertility has always been controlled or limited in some way (Gordon, 1977, 1979). Women's struggled this century for reproductive freedom have contested the dominant ideologies relating to motherhood, domesticity, romance and sexuality, because it is in the context of these ideologies and material conditions that women's oppression occurs. What I have attempted to do here is examine the particular way in which the state constructed and supports the stable nuclear family, and so articulates a link between sexuality and procreation. I then explore the implications of this for women. The theoretical framework is that of Marxist feminism and Marxist theories of the state and ideology. The Report of the Royal Commission (1977) and the resultant legislation are examined in terms of their ideological components and effects. I have also used ideas developed in Marxist, and radical feminist theory.

I believe that the state should be understood as acting within, and being limited by, relations within civil society (2). So we can say that:

> the state's overall functioning is determined by the laws of motion of the capitalist economy. Yet it does not respond directly to that economy, but in a mediated fashion, through the social practices constitutive of civil society (Urry, 1981, p.64).

Therefore the state 'functions' (3) both for capitalists and for men, and it attempts to establish and maintain the hegemony of these groups. This process is not won easily however:

> And in its efforts to transform civil society [the state] generates and reinforces resistance within it, and this in turn reacts back both on the state and on the economy' (ibid, p.65).

Marxist feminist analyses of women's relation to the state have not generally examined its specific form, but have tended to assume a capitalist state that embodies forms of male hegemony. The major theoretical point about the state's role in the oppression of women at a general level is that oppression is achieved indirectly:

> . . . through [the state's] support for a specific form of household: the family household dependent largely upon a male wage and upon female domestic servicing. The household system is in turn related to capitalist production in that it serves (though inadequately) for the reproduction of the working-class and for the maintenance of women as a reserve army of labour, low-paid when they are in jobs and often unemployed (McIntosh, 1978: 255).

Radical feminists maintain that the state also upholds this family-household form in the interests of men:

> The state controls the entry into marriage, regulates what marriage should involve and punishes those who default. It also increasingly, treats those men and women who go through some of the motions of being married (ie cohabitation, having children) 'as if' they were married. *Why should this be so?* . . . *The* most important reason is that in supporting marriage the state supports a particular, exploitative relationship between men and women in which the wife provides unpaid domestic and sexual services, childbearing and childrearing, and wage earning and contribution to the household income when convenient (Barker, 1978, p.239).

The state should thus be seen as utilising policies that construct and regulate both marriage and motherhood. The particular family-household that the state supports has benefits for both men and capitalism.

There has been much debate over the nature of ideology, and I do not intend to review that here (see Larrain, 1979, and Urry, 1981). For my purposes ideology may be viewed as sets of ideas which have effects.

Ideologies work in the interests of dominant groups in society, and they do not necessarily exhibit any unit or coherence — in fact they usually contain contradictions. Social practices display ideological effects when they satisfy two conditions. Firstly, the concepts embedded in that practice must in some way *conceal* what is really going on. So an ideological effect may result because concepts embedded in a practice do not allow explanation in terms of wide scale social and historical change and factors. Or the concepts *fail* to show that practices are historically produced and that they can therefore be changed. There may be a tendency to see objects or relations having powers that stem from 'natural' characteristics rather than social factors.

Ideological effects can also arise from the concepts imbedded in a practice hiding the conflict of interests between different groups or from obscuring the interactions between different practices. This way of looking at ideology stresses that there is not a true/false dichotomy, but rather one where ideas may exhibit *degrees of concealment.*

Secondly, it must be shown that this concealment of the material and historical determinants of a practice is in the interests of one or more of the dominant social forces in that practice; for example, of capitalists, men, Pakeha, Protestants, State bureaucrats, or heterosexuals etc. It follows from this definition of ideology that the state may be seen as seeking to organise and stabilise social practices, (such as fertility control), into a national framework:

> 'especially through manipulating popular sentiment into a coherent and comprehensive hegemonic structure' (Urry, 1981, p.45).

However this attempt is rarely completely successful because mobilisation around an issue creates a counter-mobilisation and competition arises between opposing ideological positions. It would be unwise to believe therefore that the outcome of ideological struggle is predetermined by the capitalist and patriarchal nature of the state. It

is constrained by this but in the very process of competing the boundaries of struggle are challenged and re-formed.

Sex has historically been linked to procreation through a prohibition on non-reproductive sexual activity. This link has always been considered to be much stronger for women than for men.
To break it would require a change in the dependence of women on men. Obviously it is in men's interests to keep women tied to them through ideologies of monogamy, domesticity, motherhood and romantic love. It has been through these ideologies that women's fertility has been controlled, and they have had their sexual activity directed towards childbearing and rearing, and away from sexual pleasure. When pleasure is allowed it:

> must be harnessed to responsibility. Sexuality is legitimate only in relation to procreation in the nuclear family' (Greenwood and Young, 1976, p.123).

Although it is possible now for women to enjoy some measure of sexual freedom through the increased availability of contraceptives and abortion since the 1960s, the dominant ideology for women is that sex should be linked to a stable, monogamous, emotional relationship, ie. at least a stable de facto relationship (Barrett, 1980);

> 'it is still seen as immoral for a woman to separate sex from love, if not from motherhood' (Bland, 1981, p.386)

Indeed, Greenwood and Young (1976) postulate that:

> . . . the battle for contraception could only be successful when the contradiction between its liberative sexual potential and the prevailing social order was resolved in the concept of family planning. For contraceptive measures removed the threat from free sexuality and it was only when their use was firmly embedded in the maintenance of the family that they could be tolerated (p.124-5).

Sex outside of marriage, in the context of love, is conceptualised as anticipation and preparation for marriage (Wilson, 1980) and so is tolerated.

The association of birth control with the family is illustrated in the very term 'family planning'. This euphemism indicates a certain construction of sexuality where primacy is given to reproduction

the family, for the provision of contraception and abortion has always been regulated through moral imperatives and assumptions. Wilson (1980) discusses this in terms of 'attempts at the ideological level to *reinforce* the connection between sexuality and childrearing' (p. 190), where the state plays an important role.

As a result of the struggle structured by the Royal Commission, the 454 page Report that was produced made recommendations that were drafted into the CSA Bill, and, with only minor changes, passed through Parliament to become law. The Report itself, parliamentary debates on the Bill, the CSA Act and the annual reports of the Abortion Supervisory Committee form the data base from which the following description and preliminary analysis is made of the state's involvement in contraception and abortion.

For the purposes of this discussion I have examined contraception and sterilisation separately from abortion. Although as I will show, the underlying issues are nearly identical, there are differences in the types of argument used.

In summary the CSA Act has made contraception and sterilisation readily available commodities that everyone from the age of 16 is 'free' to purchase or acquire if they want or need birth control. A restriction on providing contraceptives to young people is justified because of the 'different considerations [which] must be taken into account in considering the social and moral issues involved in contraception in the young' (Report of the Royal Commission, 1977, p. 57). It is considered undesirable that young women should become sexually active because they are 'at an age when they cannot cope with such relationships' (Mr Walls, Hansard, 1977, p. 3565) and they may be unaware 'that unsatisfactory personal and social situations all too often ensue from sexual intercourse outside of a stable relationship' (Report of the Royal Commission, 1977, p. 69). What is really at stake is an ideological concern with the nuclear family. Children are seen as being synonymous with the family, therefore decisions about them must therefore be made by the family or state appointed 'guardians'.

The overwhelming conclusion of the Commission is that birth control is a desirable thing because it helps to stabilise the nuclear family group:

> For all that was said to the contrary, the attitudes of society can only be seen as supporting overwhelmingly the morality of contraception within the family group, regarding this as improving the environment for children and helping greatly to enhance the quality of the marriage relationship (Report of the Royal Commission, 1977; 54).

This stable family is seen quite clearly as being of value to the state.

It would be hard to deny that effective contraception, which will enable couples to plan their families wisely, is socially desirable and that the State has an interest in helping its citizens to achieve this end (ibid: 56).

The promotion of stable families is a factor in solving social problems providing a place where acceptable behaviour and values are fostered:

> All too often family life has undergone such changes that it can hardly be said to exist at all. Divorce, broken homes, strained marital relationships, solo-parenthood, endless social engagements, mothers wearied by the day's work made necessary to meet financial commitments, all compound the problem. Fortunately, there still exist a great many homes where children can grow up in a caring, responsible atmosphere. A united family unit can face and cope with most of the problems that are part and parcel of the process of growing up. A divided family may be unaware until it is too late, that serious problems exist (ibid, p. 89).

> The State itself has a powerful interest in the maintenance of the family. There is no better place than the family for the inculcation of a proper respect for life, for other people, and for truth, from the adoption of which all within the community must benefit (ibid, p. 308).

The Commission regards 'family planning' to be the responsibility of all those who engage in sexual intercourse.

> Time and again we heard of stable, happy families where the parents had responsibly planned the number and spacing of their children. In contrast we were told of pregnancies which occasioned stresses with which other families could at that time scarcely cope (ibid, p. 55).
> eil0000Contraceptives are also acceptable;

> Within de facto relationships of a genuinely stable kind [because] provision . . . . and understanding of their use are socially desirable' (ibid).

The provision of free information on birth control by the state is regarded as a justifiable cost because:

> The immediate cost would be more than offset by the consequent saving in state funds from which family benefit and

> other social services are met (ibid, p. 85).

The quotes show quite clearly the way that sex and procreation are linked under the protection and jurisdiction of the family. There is however a recognition of:

> . . . great changes in the attidues of many to sexual relationships. While its whole educational policy is aimed at encouraging stable family homes and while it refuses to adopt the defeatist attitude that nothing can be done to stem the tide of permissiveness, the Commission cannot shut its eyes to the fact that large numbers do not at present accept the necessity for premarital chastity. For these, as well as for others, information on contraceptives is seen as essential to prevent large numbers of unwanted children being irresponsibly brought into the world (ibid, p. 113).

This information however must be related to the Commission's view of acceptable human relationships:

> . . . the Commission does not approve of the mere handing out of factual information but believes all information must be related to the moral, emotional, and social aspects of sexual development and treated with a view to producing stable and happy family relationships (ibid).

The greater part of the CSA Act was devoted to the control and supervision of abortion. One of the most important parts of the law was the establishment of the Abortion Supervisory Committee. This three member body is responsible for the overall administraton and review of abortion legislation. Committee members are appointed by Parliament and must submit a report to it every year.

The CSA Act also legislated for the provision of licences, and more importantly, in conjunction with the amended Section 187A of the Crimes Act 1961, gave the procedure and indications for the determination of when an abortion might be performed legally. For a woman seeking an abortion, this means that she must obtain the consent of two certifying consultants (one of whom must be an obstetrician and gynaecologist) who are in agreement that her case fulfils one or more of the following conditions:

- continuing the pregnancy would result in serious damage to the life, or physical or mental health of the woman;
- there is a high risk that if born the child will be severely physically or mentally handicapped;

- the pregnancy is the result of incest;
- the woman is severely 'abnormal' (in terms of the Act).

There are two main things that may be taken into consideration in determining whether the continuance of the pregnancy would result in severe danger to the life or health of the woman: firstly, if the woman is near the beginning or end of her child bearing years, and secondly if the pregnancy is the result of rape.

The legislation relating to abortion was based on the recommendations made by the Royal Commission. While the Commission stressed that the abortion issue was one which was overwhelmingly concerned with the moral question of the competing rights of the mother and the fetus, the real issues, as with contraception and sterilisatin had broader social implications.

> I hope that all members will consider the Bill as a measure that will have a profound and long-term effect on the basic principles that govern the development of our society, and that they go far beyond the isolated abortion issue that is central to this legislation (Mr Talbot, Hansard, 1977; 3347).

Of central importance is the maintenance of stable marriages and families. Abortion is generally only acceptable and sought outside of the family. The Royal Commission noted that 'abortion applicants are concentrated in the younger age groups' (p. 173) and that 'Single pregnant women are more likely to seek abortions than married women' (p. 175). It was also pointed out that:

> . . . it would seem that a woman who is determined to obtain an abortion will pursue her purpose, particularly where she is unmarried or not living in a stable relationship' (p. 260).

This is in contrast to:

> A married woman living in a harmonious relationship [who] is more likely than an unmarried woman to accept the child of her pregnancy which was originally unwanted (p. 262).

What appears to be at issue here is the marital status of mothers. The Royal Commission supports the idea that 'women are to be encouraged as mothers, [because] parenthood is a valuable function' (p. 195). However motherhood is really only considered legitimate within the family because there is a concern:

> . . . that to be born ex-nuptially is to be born at a risk which may largely be reduced by subsequent adoption . . . it was found

> that in almost all levels of home conditions the attainment, ability, and social and emotional adjustments of ex-nuptial children kept by their mothers were less satisfactory than those of legitimate children or ex-nuptial children who had been placed for adoption (p. 266).

The argument about abortion in or outside the family was also phrased in terms of competing rights. Talbot in the second reading of the Bill had this to say on the matter:

> I would . . . discriminate between the rights of the single woman and the rights of a married woman to have an absolute choice in what she does. I accept that any single woman, whether she is widowed, divorced, separated, or has never been married, should have an absolute choice. A married woman however, has entered into a contract with her husband, and I don't think I am being a chauvinist when I say that the two have equal rights (Hansard, 1977, p. 3543).

This position is born out in the reports of the ASC which show that of those women who obtained abortions in New Zealand in 1982, only 23.8% were married. This represents a decrease from the 1978 figure of 32.7%. It is the category of never married women that has increased from the 1978 figure of 50.7% to 61.9% in 1982. The numbers of widowed, divorced or separated women obtaining abortions has remained fairly constant around 15%.

Although abortion is not usually acceptable when the woman is married, there are exceptions which appear to be based on the same principle of keeping the marriage and family together:

> The decision to interfere with the continuing life of the unborn child is one in which the father of the child has an interest and responsibility. In those cases where a woman, contrary to her partner's wishes, seeks an abortion, and the abortion is justified on legal grounds, it is likely that the couple are not living in harmony. It would not be proper in our view to refuse abortion to a woman in those circumstances if sound legal grounds can be established (Report of the Royal Commission, 1977, p. 276).

These comments and quotes bear out what Greenwood and Young (1976) had to say about abortion and contraception in Britain.

> The history of the struggle for contraception in Britain parallels that for abortion. A seeming quirk in the parallel is that contraceptive advice was allowed least readily to the unmarried whereas abortion facilities are, in intention at least focussed on

> them and frowned upon in relation to the majority of married women. This anomaly can be explained in terms of maintaining the link between procreation and sexuality. For children and sexuality are the province of the nuclear family. The married woman is within such a structure, sex is legitimate for her, and contraception aids family planning — the unmarried woman on the other hand, would only be encouraged in her extra-familial sexuality by contraception. Abortion is the reverse of this, because the raison d'etre of the nuclear family is children. Abortion is seen as permissable only to those women who are either outside of the family, or whose family would not be threatened by it (p. 125).

In light of the theory outlined earlier in this paper, and the material examined, it is now possible to make some comments about the role of state in the oppression of women, through its organisation and control of the social relations or procreation. The proposition was made that the main way in which the state is involved in the oppression of women is through its support of the nuclear family — ie a family-household dependent on a male wage and female domestic and sexual servicing (McIntosh, 1978, and Barker, 1978).

Whether this proposition can be upheld or not will be explored through examining the ideological effects of the CSA Act. This will be done in two parts. Firstly, it is necessary to show, using Urry's conceptualisation of ideology, how the concepts and ideas embedded in the legislation conceal the real concerns of fertility control. I maintain that this is largely done through a particular construction of the link between sexuality and procreation. Secondly, it will be shown that the concealment is in the interests of men and capitalism.

The following description may be taken as a summary of how the social relations of contraception, sterilisation and abortion were constructed by the state through the CSA legislation. Contraception and sterilisation are considered to be desirable and necessary features of society and they should be readily available to those who are married or in a stable de facto relationship. (The one exception to this relates to individuals under 16 years of age). Information and education regarding contraceptive use must however be given within stable, happy families.

Abortion is a sometimes necessary (but undesirable) measure, to be taken only by women outside a marriage relationship, or in exceptional circumstances when the marriage is threatened by the pregnancy. Since families are the 'natural' place for chidren this is not considered to be the usual case.

There are three main ways in which this construction of procreation control is ideological. Firstly, there is an overwhelming assumption that women, by their nature, should be responsible for childrearing. Their function as potential childbearers is regarded as necessarily entailing their responsibility for child care. In terms of Urry's theory this represents the obscuring of:

> the social relations which underlie existent relations between material objects, hence, where such objects (in this case women) are seen to have powers which stem not from the social but *their natural characteristics'* (Urry, 1981, p. 61).

Secondly, although the Royal Commission did recognise that for women to achieve 'emancipation' they would need the ability to control their fertility, and state provision of protective employment legislation, this contradicted statements in the rest of the Report. The Report and legislation did not acknowledge that a woman's control of her own fertility was allied to her status in employment and in the home. This illustrates how the legislation obscured 'the interrelations between this practice and one or more other practices' (ibid).

Finally, there is no explanation of how fertility control affects women *qua* women in a capitalist and patriarchal society. In Urry's terms:

> the concepts embedded in that practice . . . hide the *conflicts of interest* between differently located subjects within that practice' (ibid).

There is no recognition that the interests of women, married or unmarried, are in deep conflict with those of men and capitalism — between women's need for control over her own fertility and the state's control over that same function.

The forms of concealment detailed above can be seen as serving the interests of two dominant social forces in society. Firstly, through the state construction of motherhood as central to the stable family unit, capitalism gains certain benefits. There is less cost to the state (which may be seen as acting in the long-term interests of capitalism) when women are responsible for child-care and domestic services. This represents a reduction in the costs being met by capitalists for the reproduction of labour power. Family planning is desirable and thought to help produce the stable family unit, which also reduces the costs to the welfare state of social problems such as divorce and solo-parenthood. Children are to be born and reared within the family and, as a result there is less call on the state for financial assistance.

The other dominant social group that has its interests served through the CSA legislation is that of men. The state's support for the

stable marriage or de facto relationship is in the interests of men who gain free sexual and domestic services from women who are bound to them through ideologies of romantic love and domesticity, and through material social relations, of which economic dependence is perhaps the most significant.

From this examination of the ideological effects of the provision and control of sexuality and procreation, it is clear that the state does play a role in the oppression of women through its construction and support of 'stable, happy families'. It is important however to recognise that the social relations of procreation were not simply imposed by the state, but were the result of a struggle around competing ideologies.

If there had been no 'second wave of feminism' in the late 1960's, what struggle there might have been for birth control would probably have taken a very different form. The feminist challenge to the state has resulted in important concessions for women. Contraception is now widely and readily available to all women 16 years of age and over, and abortion has become a little more accessible. Nonetheless these gains have been made within a constrained framework that still regards women as primarily mothers and wives. The provisons of the state for birth control are certainly not at variance with its role in serving the interests of capital and men.

What this paper has attempted to show is how the state, through its legislation on contraception, sterilisation and abortion, has constructed and utilised an ideology of the nuclear family, which supports the oppression of women by defining them as wives and mothers whose place is in the family. While some feminists might view with some consternation the co-option by the state of their demands for self-determination through free and accessible birth control (and they are right to do so), it is important to recognise that 'the state is not a pre-given instrument of oppression, but is *a site of struggle*' (Barrett, 1980, p. 245 — my emphasis).

While we have a state and society that is structured by capitalist and patriarchal relations, it will be inevitable that any gains won by women will also probably incorporate some elements that are beneficial to the dominant social forces. What is vital to remember, however, is that struggles by women for freedom from their oppression, will also entail a re-forming and challenging of the very boundaries that limit them.

In New Zealand the abortion issue has not been resolved finally. The Status of the Unborn Child Bill, introduced into Parliament in October 1983, was an attempt to restrict the grounds of abortion even further than the present legislation allows. The reaction in the House to this Bill was swift, and Marilyn Waring introduced a counter-

measure which made provisions for abortion to become more readily obtainable. Neither of these Bills passed the introductory votes, but the incident serves as a salutory warning. It is not unlikely that anti-abortion factions, supported as they are by the increasingly popular family organisations, will make more attempts to restrict abortions[4]. It is most important that those involved in resistance to any such threat be aware of, and act on the underlying issues involved in the abortion debate.

> In all social movements every gain by the exploited has been manipulated, 'coopted' by the rulers. Women fought for sexual freedom only to find themselves imprisoned in new forms of sexual exploitation; women fought for jobs only to find themselves exploited more intensely; women fought for education only to find it used to keep them in their subordinate places. But these manipulations are not part of an unending chain. Their limits are set by the strength and intelligence of the political opposition to them. Indeed, the twists and turns of the rulers of women attempting to adopt their supremacy to new situations, help to educate their subjects. The lesson to be learned is that reproductive freedom cannot be separated from the totality of women's freedom (Gordon, 1977, p. 418).

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Notes

1. For a much longer and more comprehensive discussion of this topic, including the historical development of state intervention in this area and an analysis of the submissions to the Royal Commission on Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion, see Ryan, 'Constructing "Stable, Happy Families": Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion in New Zealand' in *Working Papers on the State vol 2,* Massey University.

2. Civil society may be understood as the set of social relations that exist between the economy and the state.

3. The dangers of functionalism have been adequately discussed elsewhere (see Barrett, 1980 pp21-23). The term is used loosely here, and in no way implies a mechanical and perfect fit between the operation of the state and the oppression of women.

4. Rosalind Petchesky, in her recent article 'Antiabortion, Antifeminism and the Rise of the New Right' (1981) discusses this issue in the American context.

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Edmonds Cookery and Bernadine

Work in progress by Anne Else

I am writing a book about growing up in New Zealand in the 1950s. A number of women writers have suggested that since the genres as we know them are male-defined to suit men's experience, thought and writing, it is not surprising that women should have difficulties in working within them. As a result, they are now producing 'new' kinds of writing, which cross all the familiar genre boundaries. What I am attempting to do is to combine personal recollection (mainly my own but sometimes that of others) with cultural analysis. This method of working is not my own invention: I owe much to the models provided by writers such as Jane Lazarre (1981) and Rachel M. Brownstein (1982).

In order to set manageable boundaries, and also to be able to complete the book in discrete sections, I am using a structure consisting of a series of essays, each centring around one particular 'sign' from the period for example, the Edmonds cookery book, the *Janet and John* series of readers, the social studies textbook *Our Nation's Story,* the 1957 film *Bernadine* (with Pat Boone), the Mazengarb Report; then branching out to examine a related area — food, family, the image of the Maori, gender, sex, and so on.

I was born in 1945, part of the extreme advance guard of the famous

post-war baby boom outlined by C. James O'Neill (1979):

> The crude birth rate rose to a postwar peak of 27.64 in 1947 . . . the absolute number of births rose uninterrupted from 1949 to 1961 when it peaked at 65 390, or 31.6 per cent above the 1947 level.

But as O'Neill has pointed out, it was in fact not a true baby boom at all:

> . . . the reasons for this sustained increase in births have been largely misunderstood . . . Of the recorded increase, none can be attributed to increases in marital fertility, which although rising from the low point of the mid-1930s never matched the level of the 1921-6 period . . . The overwhelmingly important factor . . . has been changes in the nuptiality pattern of the non-Maori population, in particular the trend toward younger and more universal marriage. Nearly the whole of the increae in the number of births between 1945 and 1961 can be attributed to this factor.

So much for the facts. But facts have not played a large part in how the baby boom has generally been perceived. After a depression and a world war, there was no more potent or reassuring symbol of returning peace than the great flood-tide of children that swept through New Zealand's maternity hospitals, homes and schools:

> A stock joke at the time was that before going to bed it was just as well to check that another bed would be available at a hospital in nine months time. (Parry, 1982.)

Just as, during the 1930s, the falling birthrate was seen as evidence of (white) race suicide, and clarion calls came from the doctors, the press, the church and the state for an end to female 'selfishness' and 'the re-enthronement of the larger family' (Brookes, 1981), so the 1950s have been widely seen as the era when that re-enthronement came about and the (Pakeha) family at last came into its own. During the war, the men had become 'our boys', returned to childhood with a licence to kill (Frame, 1983); but now they were home and the life of the nation, freed of the necessary wartime aberrations such as women tram conductors, could resume its rightful, natural pattern: Dad at work, Mum at home with the kids.

Like the baby boom itself, very little about the 1950s turns out to be what it seems on the surface. I was drawn to write about that decade for two reasons: first, in order to look at some of the social factors that helped to shape me and my generation; and secondly, to bring a little more depth and reality to recollections of that time, so as to

counteract the vague image of a post-war golden age which is currently being so effectively evoked by the reactionary moralist right.

In *Taking It Like A Woman,* Ann Oakley (1984) writes:

> I felt and still feel an enormous nostalgia for the rural masculine-feminine idyll of my childhood. Such a nostalgia perhaps inhabits, in one way or another, the minds of all urban twentieth century people, since it stands for the successful merging of the human with the natural environment, for roses round the unmortgaged door and space around the peaceful self, for the idealised and unhurried dalliance of those whose currency is seemingly not money nor acts of violence of any kind.

It is precisely this type of nostalgia — though with a suburban, rather than rural, setting — which the moralist right is attempting to exploit, through its calls for a return to 'traditional values'. In its account of humanity's most recent fall from grace, several serpents entered the settled, godly, prosperous world of the 1950s: Maori activists, homosexuals, feminists — but the worst of these were feminists, since they sought to subvert the foundations of family life (and hence of national life) by stirring up selfishness and discontent among women, urging them to abandon their God-given role of caring for others and instead become as demanding and competitive as men. John Massam, the editor of *Challenge Weekly,* neatly summed up the historical view of the right in a recent interview:[1]

> We had a nation, the Western world if you like, based on a Christian premise, and our laws reflected Christian ethics and morality. These were the basic cornerstones of our society . . . now what has happened is there's been a slow concerted attempt to redirect our nation so that our values are the opposite of what has been traditional . . . I believe it's an anti-God movement, quite frankly . . . Our very natures tend toward evil, and this is anti-God.

However, some evils appear to be more anti-God than others: the focus is on extra-marital sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, abortion, and homosexuality. All of these issues have periodically been the subject of heated debate since European settlement began in New Zealand, and always (except for homosexuality) the debate has focused on women, because they are held responsible for the moral

standards (that is, the sexual behaviour) of the nation and for the wellbeing of the family. Men's sexuality was seen as naturally beyond their control; it was therefore up to women to control it, by denying men sexual access outside marriage.

How fortunate that God and nature had so arranged things that female lapses were very often made glaringly obvious by pregnancy! In 1945 the number of babies adopted, suddenly doubled, and I was one of them. The first chapter of the book therefore focuses on adoption. The moralist right recognises that sinful human nature being what it is, unmarried motherhood is a perennial problem. Adoption represents the ideal solution: a respectable but infertile married couple gets a baby (without resorting to morally dubious technology), and the natural mother is punished twice for her immorality — first by having to go through with the pregnancy, and secondly by the baby being taken away from her. Moreover, there is little call on the state's resources.

Kate Inglis, in her fine book, *Living Mistakes: Mothers who consented to adoption,* (1984) describes the situation of the unmarried pregnant woman in the 1950s:

> If her structural position was extremely difficult and her hold on material resources tenuous or non-existent, her moral position ws disastrous. It is difficult now to summon up the full range of both subtle and crude hostility drawn up against her from almost all quarters . . . She was the butt of lascivious jokes and speculations and the object of moral lessons for the 'good' girls from whom she was irrevocably separated. Her stock in the marriage stakes was lowered and her stain on the family feared . . . She would even override all her long and complicated training to see herself as a future mother in order to escape the ire of the community . . .

Like Inglis, I want my examination of adoption in the post-war years to set down 'a fragment of the unrecorded history of women in which the subjects have been bound to silence by taboo and self-defence . . . for these women (and for their children) the personal consequences of the interwoven customs and beliefs of the past are still permanent.'

But there are other, less dramatic areas of our cultural and social history which have been neglected. My second chapter looks at the series of reading books used by virtually every child in the 1950s. That famous pair, Janet and John, arrived in our schools in 1950 and were not superseded until the 1960s. Professor Marie Clay (1979) has pointed out that children learn to read in order to decode a message,

and everything on the page — typeface, layout, illustrations — contributes to getting the message across. But every book, even for beginners, gives out a second set of messages, conveying attitudes and values about the world, and in particular about human behaviour. Much attention has been paid to messages about the sexes, but the Janet and John books were in fact not particularly sexist: both children were energetic and co-operative, and neither hogged the limelight or denigrated the other. (The lack of appropriate sex-role training was later perceived as a disadvantage for boys, and misogynist supplementary readers were written in New Zealand specifically to remedy it.) What the Janet and John books did convey was a strong image of the only right way for children and their parents to live: a kind of cross between those other model families whose pictures were everywhere in the 1950s, Rupert Bear and his parents in Nutswood, and the Royal children with their Nanny in the nursery. Janet and John's model life-style was distinguished from that of their predecessors, Pat and May, by its forthright materialism: in line with the educational theories of the time, and the development of the mass market, Janet and John were unable to amuse themselves without a plethora of equipment, and storylines frequently revolved around real or imaginary shopping. Small wonder that Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1980) found her rural Maori pupils had extreme difficulty learning to read from those brightly-coloured pages which the Education Department was so pleased with.

Though classes at my suburban Auckland school were extremely large — never under 40, sometimes over 50 — they contained very few Maori children, and might as well have contained none. However, we spent a great deal of time studying the Maoris — the early explorers Toi and Kupe, arrival of the Great Fleet, the construction of the fortified pa, the deserved defeat of the rebellious tribes in the Maori Wars.

Through such studies, and in particular textbooks such as *Our Nation's Story,* we were well trained to think of the Maori culture (and even the Maori people) as thoroughly dead and gone, and little in the experience of urban Pakeha children contradicted this. The contemporary Maori, especially the Maori woman (save for a few crude stereotypes) was simply invisible in 1950s urban New Zealand culture. The implications and consequences of this invisibility, both for the Maori and the Pakeha, are only now beginning to be explored and recognised, and this section aims to be part of that process.

Janet and John spent much of their time out of doors, as good New Zealand children should, and the inside of their home was not shown. Yet the 1950s was the time when the House came into its own as a focus for middle-class women's creative energy. As the severe

post-war housing shortage eased and wartime scarcity (vividly described in interviews with older women) gave way to plenty, the media urged women to spend the time saved by vacuum cleaners and other modern 'home appliances' on Home Decorating. I picked up the message very early, mainly from the pages of my mother's fat weekly bundle of magazines, showing fascinating floor plans of the right and wrong ways to arrange furniture, or ten bright ideas for trimming lampshades; and I soon understood that these activities, which so easily became compulsive, were far more appropriate outlets for female creativity than Art itself. Yet they were in no way to be taken seriously, nor was their value to be recognised, by men; far from being of benefit to men, they were understood to be a burden on them, the topic of innumerable jokes and jibes.

Similarly, food and cooking took on a new, apparently 'creative' aspect. At first, you knew where you were with food in the 1950s — bread was white, salad dressing was made from condensed milk, and cheese was mousetrap or Chesdale. New Zealand women had long been famed for their baking; but soon cooking the main meals began to be sold as a fun activity, rather than a necessary daily task, and recipes tentatively became a little more daring, albeit still working with a limited range of ingredients (which gave rise to some bizarre inventions, such as 'Chesdale Jelly').

At the same time as the task of food preparation was being expanded in this way, the ideal female figure was being thinned down. Prewar advertisements frequently offered remedies for excessive thinness, especially in the bust, but also in arms and legs; soon after the war, articles on 'dieting', i.e. controlling food intake to lose weight, began to appear in the ubiquitous women's magazines, right alongside recipes for 'interesting' new dishes 'to tempt the family'. While women's relationship with food has probably always been problematic, it became particularly complicated and contradictory in the 1950s, not least because of the increased self-investment demanded in an activity where success is measured in terms of the speed with which the outcome is destroyed. Learning to be a woman included internalising these contradictions, abetted by the earnest ritual of school cookery classes.

As the children of the baby boom grew up, their sheer numbers made them a formidable force, and their unprecedented prosperity made them an irresistible target consumer group. The teenage subculture developed earliest in the United States, where mass marketing was most advanced; and the American influence on New Zealand culture, already heightened by the actual presence of US servicemen during the war, became much more pervasive during the 1950s, especially among teenagers.

The Hollywood movie was one of the principal agents of this

invasion: in order to capture the teenage audience, the industry starred pop idols such as Elvis Presley and Pat Boone in hastily dreamt-up vehicles which were ostensibly about the ups and downs of boy/girl relationships. In fact, like their more serious counterparts such as *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blue Denim,* these apparently light-hearted romps were obsessed with the dilemma of how boys could ever become men in the new 'feminine' age of comfort and consumerism. The answer was, first, to remove the power of the dominant mother who, even in New Zealand, undermined paternal authority by emasculating her husband, thus turning him into that pathetic figure, 'The Father Who Is Despised in His Own House'[2] and secondly, to make sure young women knew their place, and stayed in it.

The teen movie accordingly presented a contemptuous, narrow repertoire of roles for women of surpassing banality and triviality. The perfection of the female screen image was held up as a goal for girls everywhere; to achieve it, every detail of dress and grooming and behaviour was to be ruthlessly examined and 'worked on.' Men apparently carried round in their heads an endless checklist against which to judge every girl they met, and woe betide those who failed to measure up. Becoming a woman meant rising to the challenge of establishing and maintaining this perfection, in order to attract and keep a mate.

Girls' vast and detailed knowledge of what was supposed to attract the opposite sex was usually accompanied by an equally vast ignorance of sex itself; and despite some very odd features of boys' schools, such as enforced swimming in the nude, boys were very little better informed about everything connected with that region of the body evasively categorised as 'down South'. In 1954 the discovery that teenagers in the Hutt Valley were Doing It, and what's more enjoying it, was too much for a shocked nation. A copy of the report of the special committee set up to examine the situation (called the Mazengarb Report, after the chairman) was, astonishingly, sent to every home in the country. In line with the spirit of the double standard, it concluded that the girls were far worse than the boys, and recommended that any girl under sixteen who permitted a boy to have carnal knowledge of her, or handle her indecently, should herself be charged with committing an offence.

The blame for what was seen as a new and disturbing general trend toward juvenile delinquency, sexual (including homosexuality) or otherwise, was quickly laid at the door of the working mother, who neglected her children as well as undermining her husband. But worse was to come: the Parker-Hulme case, in which two schoolgirls, involved in a lesbian relationship, killed the mother of one, started off waves of alarm among teachers and parents. By contrast, the killing of

an elderly male homosexual by a gang of youths in Hagley Park was far less disturbing.

Jonathan Culler (1975), discussing 'signs', writes that every society:

> 'devotes considerable time and resources to the elaboration of systems designed to make the world 'heavy with meaning' — that is, to convert objects into signs'.

The more arbitrary these systems, the more energy is deployed. As the laws oppressing women were modified or repealed, more sophisticated controls took their place; in particular, enormous amounts of energy were devoted to the promotion of sharply distinct sex roles, especially among the young. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English (1979) have described how, in the 1940s and 1950s, sociologists, psychologists, and child-raising experts became obsessed by the problem of 'socialising' children into their appropriate 'gender' or 'sex role'. Indeed, such an elaborate system was set up that virtually every cultural object or activity was made to signify 'masculine' or 'feminine'. The force with which this sytem was propagated reveals the extent to which it was essentially arbitrary and artificial. Yet it was justified on the grounds that gender differentiation was 'natural'.

Today, 1950s-style sex roles are being held up by the moralist right as not only divinely ordained, but also 'natural'. (The emphasis varies according to the audience.) Paradoxically, sex itself (meaning the procreative act between a man and a woman) is also described as 'natural' — but only in the sense that it is a particularly unruly and sinful aspect of that unregenerate human nature which 'tends toward evil'. It must therefore be rigorously controlled — at least in women. At bottom, the stance of the moralist right is very close to that of the pornographic mind, for which the ultimate 'final solution' is to annihilate uncontrollable nature and replace it with culture (Griffin 1981).

But this is in fact the stance of patriarchy as a whole. In *Beyond Power,* Marilyn French (1985) explains how patriarchy is based in the desire to control and thus transcend nature through the exercise of 'power-over'. It follows that 'the only way to happiness, for patriarchal minds, is to blot out the real'; hence the content of the mass media, whose controllers are themselves ruled by:

> the powerful, unconscious desire . . . to realise a fictitious world in which humans are finally liberated from nature, necessity, and the human condition by the corporations of America'.

The most important product of these corporations is ideology, sold through the media, and its cornerstone is traditional sex roles, 'the division of experience that is fundamental to patriarchy itself'. My work examines some aspects of the New Zealand post-war generation's indoctrination with this ideology.

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Feminist Thought: Close To Home

A review article by Su Leslie

Myra Jehlen (1982:189) has suggested that:

> . . . feminism is really rethinking, an examination of the way certain assumptions about women and female character enter into the fundamental assumptions that organise our thinking.

The work of Christine Delphy, collected as a series of essays in *Close to Home* is then indeed feminist thinking.

Delphy is a radical French feminist who, over the last fifteen years has developed a sophisticated explanation of women's oppression by men which does not rely on biological arguments or those which she sees as based in patriarchial ideology.

Close To Home is a complex and in some ways eclectic book. Delphy writes about such diverse things as divorce, household food consumption, the state's generation of economic indices, feminism and academics; and men's involvement in the Woman's Liberation Movement. Each of these she draws into a single thread, comprising three main strands (Delphy, 1984:8-9). Two of these seem particularly worth exploring as they attempt to totally re-think existing ways of examining two important issues in feminist theory; that of women's labour and class position, and the importance of biology in our oppression.

The sub-title of *Close To Home — A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression* — tells us a lot about the first of these strands in Delphy's work. She is proposing an understanding of oppression which takes women to be a separate, subordinate social class. For Delphy the concept of class is central and she uses it precisely. She contends that the term implies a structural relationship of domination between two groups who 'cannot be considered separately from one another' (1984:26). Thus women are defined as a class through our exploitation by men through the domestic mode of production. In the introduction to the collection Delphy argues:

> . . . that patriarchy is the system of subordination of women to men in contemporary industrial societies, that this system has a material base and that this base is the domestic mode of production. (1984:18)

For Delphy, the domestic mode of production is a central concept. She argues that while this mode is analytically and concretely separate from the capitalist mode, it co-exists with and partially supports it.

The domestic mode of production rests on the performance by women of unpaid domestic work for men. Thus housework is central to an understanding of this mode. The importance of housework and women's class position in understanding our oppression has been the subject of much theorising, in the form of the 'domestic labour debate'. Given that Delphy's work involves, in part, a reworking of this debate it must be made as a criticism of her that she does not really locate her work within the context of other theorising on the subject, but instead allows it to stand alone. This means that it is often difficult to see the merits of the authors with whom Delphy is arguing.

With regard to the domestic labour debate, the recently published work by Clare Burton *Subordination* (1985) offers a wide and comprehensive review of the ideas and authors involved, and provides an excellent foundation upon which to read Delphy's work. Burton's work makes no reference to Delphy, although 'The Main Enemy' is cited in the bibliography. This is a pity, because Delphy's reworking of the question of women's labour does go further than that the authors Burton does consider. (1985:64-70)

The treatment of women's labour is characteristic of Delphy's whole approach of inverting ideas and old ways of seeing. She begins, in 'The Main Enemy' (pp 57 to 77) and 'Housework or Domestic Work' (pp 78 to 93) by showing that conceptualizing housework in terms of the tasks involved or as a type of work defined by what Delphy sees as a spurious distinction between the production of use value as opposed to the production of exchange value (cf.

Burton: 57-58) cannot adequately serve to distinguish housework from other forms of work (1984:7). Instead, we must understand it as:

> a certain work relationship, a particular relationship of production. It is all the work done unpaid for others within the confines of the household or the family. (1984:90)

Thus Delphy argues that all women do domestic work, unpaid, and generally within the institution of marriage, which she sees as a labour contract. This she contends, serves as a defining characteristic of women as a social class.

By locating such a material base, specific to women's oppression, Delphy (pp 23-24) frees feminist analysis from explanations which rest on either biology/naturalism, or which subsume women's oppression to a more 'traditional' Marxist notion of class struggle which takes capitalists and proletarians to be the two antagonistic classes.

Delphy identifies this view, in which women's oppression is a consequence of capitalism and housework only valuable in maintaining and reproducing labour power, as supporting male dominance by trying to locate women's oppression in the capitalist rather than domestic mode of production.

The implications of this thesis are far-reaching and affect several issues. These include the relationship between, or articulation of the domestic mode of production with the capitalist; the 'politics' of feminism, particularly with regard to alliances with men and 'the left'; and the role of the state in maintaining women's oppression. All but the last of these is addressed by Delphy in some detail. However, she has no theory of the role of the state within industrial societies, nor of the ways that State intervention affects women. In her essay on divorce 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Marriage and Divorce' (pp 93-105) Delphy considers the ways in which the labour contract in marriage is perpetuated after divorce through custodial arrangements and welfare payments. This she does, however, without explicit reference to the ways in which laws influence this. Burton argues (1985:130) that:

> . . . it is impossible to discuss domestic labour without reference to state policies. The law defines and enforces the obligations between spouses and between parents and children. The welfare services effectively penalise any arrangement which violates the criteria by which families are defined.

Burton provides in the concluding chapter, a sound discussion of the ways in which the state, through family policies and through control of formal education, acts to reinforce women's subordinate position.

While it is fruitless to criticise a work for what it is not, and Delphy

acknowledges the fact that her theory does not explain everything about women's oppression; one can only hope that at some point in the future she will turn her attention to consideration of the state in industrial societies, as this will serve to further enhance her contribution to our understanding.

A further problem in Delphy's analysis stems from trying to avoid the situation arising from the argument that women form a single class. Using this concept, bourgeois women are then defined as oppressed while working class women are exploited (Burton:68). This conceptualization assumes that bourgeois women's work produces no value, and that their oppression is purely ideological. Delphy shows that all domestic work produces value and thus all women are equally exploited.

The problem is that while objectively all women may form a single social class, the life experiences of women who belong to men of different classes are often radically different. Politically, this is important. Delphy is arguing for a unified woman's movement, incorporating all women, and excluding all men; but she does this without any consideration of women's subjective class experiences.

In the second strand of her thought also, Delphy challenges many of the 'taken for granted' ways of thinking which 'support and continue male dominance' (1984:8). She suggests that **much social theory takes women's oppression for granted, and cannot therefore explain it.** Her radical inversion of our 'ways of seeing' is both exciting and controversial, especially with regard to her contention that the hierarchy of the division of labour created gender (the technical division of labour) which then created anatomical sex to explain and justify this hierarchy.

For Delphy, 'one of the axioms, if not the fundamental axiom, . . . is that women and men are social groups.' She starts 'from the incontestable fact that they are socially named, socially differentiated and socially pertinent' (1984:24) and argues that there is no **necessary** equivalence between men & women and males & females; that their anatomical sex is made meaningful by the pre-existence of oppression.

Delphy makes a distinction between the hierarchy of the division of labour and the technical division of labour. The latter she takes to be the separation, to a greater or lesser degree, of tasks by gender. This, she argues, 'does not really exist. For instance women keep accounts for their husbands, i.e. they do the same work as highly paid . . . accountants'.(1984:202). The former comprises the different value given to the work of men and women. Delphy argues that to focus on tasks, and not jobs is misleading. Hierarchy precedes and creates a division of labour. Work is valued highly, or not, on the basis of the gender and thus authority of its performer, not on some notion of intrinsic value. Thus, as in her definition of housework, it is not the content of

the role which is important, but the social relationships within which it is carried out.

While these ideas offer a new, and seemingly logical way of seeing and explaining women's oppression which does not rest solely on arguments about ideas or women's sexuality (MacKintosh, in Young et al, 1981:7-9), the notion that hierarchy precedes and in fact creates gender and sex is problematic. If a hierarchical division of labour occurs in a society, and then those with social power develop an ideological justification for this on the basis of physical characteristics which are then, and only then, made meaningful as social characteristics, we still do not know why such a hierarchy and division came about to begin with. How did men derive the power to decide that the physical characteristics associated with sexual difference would be socially significant as a means of defining hierarchical social roles? And how did they enforce such a definition?

Delphy argues that attempting to locate the origins of a phenomenon in history does not serve to explain the present existence of this phenomenon. This is logical enough, but leaves me feeling that accepting her inversion of biology and hierarchy is a leap of faith necessary to support her arguments about the contemporary face of patriarchy.

Delphy seems to face twin dilemmas in this strand of her thinking. As a materialist, she cannot entertain a location of women's subordination at the level of ideas, divorced from material conditions; as some other social constructionists seem happy to do (See Sayers, 1982:107-124), nor can she accept that the oppression of women is biologically determined, for as she says:

> if it could be 'proved' that the oppression of women is due in the final instance to our 'weakness', this would equally establish that this oppression is legitimate (1984:204).

> If women's oppression then, is natural and inevitable, it is not contested terrain. **'People do not revolt against what is natural, therefore inevitable.'** (Delphy, 1984:211).
>
> Some social constructionist writers have argued that gender inequality is the result of societies' belief that women are somehow inferior, or naturally subordinate to men — rather than this inferiority coming from objective sex differences. Ortner suggests that women are universally seen, because of their biology, as closer to nature than men, and as human societies define themselves in terms of the production of culture, women are consequently devalued (in Sayers, 1982:108).
>
> Ortner's thesis, according to Sayers, is idealist. It locates

women's subordination at the level of beliefs about women's biology, not relating these to concrete social conditions and practices. Sayers, arguing from a Marxist position owing much to Engels, contends that the importance of women's biology in explaining our oppression coincided with the development of private property and men's need to pass this on to their children. Thus, women's reproductive function, for Sayers, became socially and historically significant at the juncture of capitalism and patriarchy (1982:198-201).

Sayers finds in Engels the notion that women's oppression by men is not, in fact, a form of class oppression; though both result from the historical development of private property. Engels argued that with private property came men's **need** to ensure that this was passed on to **their** children; thus control of women's sexuality became necessary. This argument is problematic in the same way as Delphy's; if women were not oppressed before that advent of private property, on what basis did men have the power to then enforce this oppression?

In many ways, Sayers is trying to overcome a similar dilemma to Delphy's. She argues that women's biology does have some direct importance in explaining our oppression — through the development of private property — which quite conveniently implicates capitalism, rather than men, per se, in this historical atrocity.

However, while Sayers does argue for some biological determinism, to overcome the 'idealist' dilemma, she cannot acknowledge some common class position for women on this basis. Lacking Delphy's analysis of the domestic mode of porduction she can find no materialist base for considering women as a class, and thus falls into the trap for which Delphy criticises other left or Marxist thinkers for (1984:72-3); that of assuming a pre-eminence of social class in terms of antagonism between capitalists and proleterians, on the basis that women's relations to reproduction distinguish them as a group, rather than their relations of productions (1982:199). It is in overcoming this problem that Delphy opens the way to a sophisticated materialist analysis of women's oppression.

It can be seen that both Delphy and Sayers are attempting to come to terms with the issue of women's biology in our oppression. For Sayers the resolution is in the work of Engels; for Delphy, a sophisticated argument about the social construction of biology. Delphy's argument in this respect is far more sophisticated than Ortner's, who suggests that real differences in men's and women's biological make-up are evaluated differentially, while Delphy seems to argue that awareness at all of anatomical sex is constructed as a part of a patriarchial

ideology.

Close To Home is complex and controversial. Delphy approaches a number of issues central to feminist social theory in radical and exciting ways. The arguments are not without flaws but they force us to confront both the theoretical and political dimensions of those issues which are necessary for understanding and action, in order that we can overcome.

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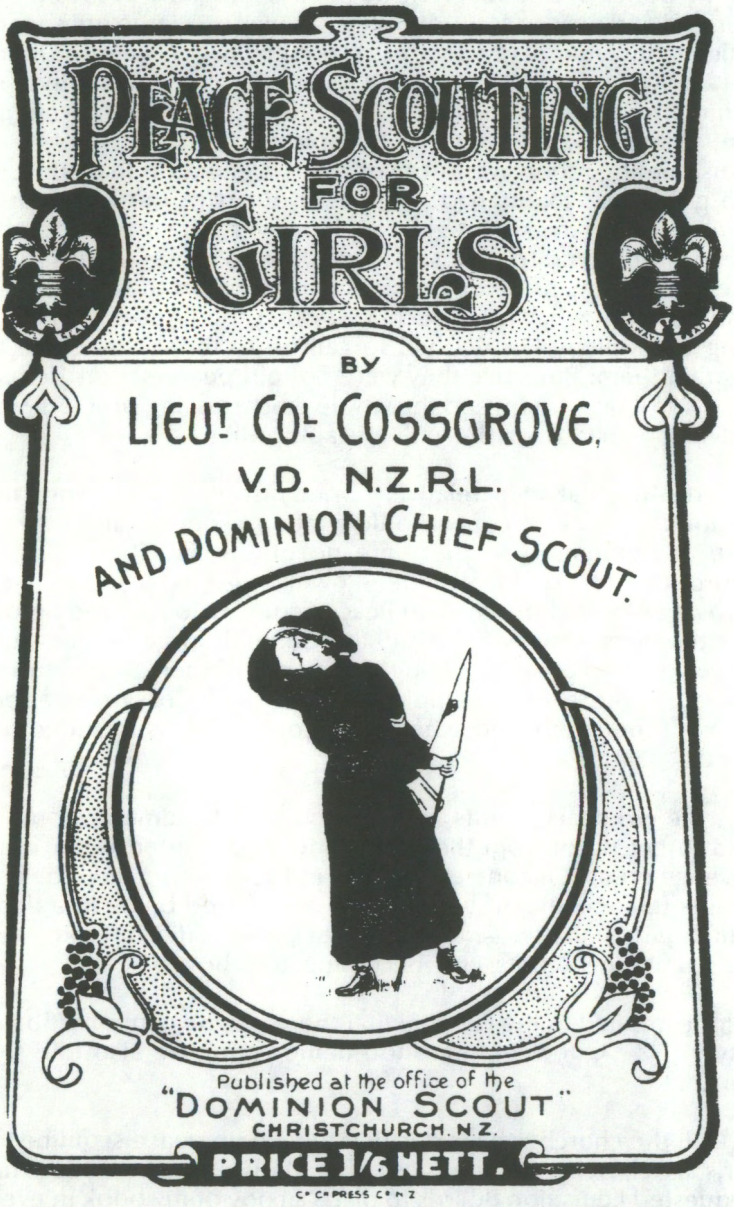
Archives: Peace Scouting for Girls

Introduced by Margot Roth

The policy of the *Journal* is to include only women's work. However, we have made an exception in this case, as this is a small piece of our history that deserves recognition — and anyway the wife and the youngest daughter of the author Lieut. Col. Cossgrove (1910) apparently played a significant part in the production of this handbook for Girl Peace Scouts.

According to an account of the first 50 years of scouting in NZ by Culliford (1958: chapter three — whose title is 'Girl Peace Scouts and Bull Pups'):

> In September of 1908, only a few months after the first boys' troops had been formed . . . Miss Muriel Cossgrove, the Colonel's youngest daughter, persuaded 24 of her schoolmates at Rangiora to form patrols. The troop was duly sworn in and Miss Keith, M.A. became scoutmistress . . . Colonel Cossgrove . . . in [the handbook] . . . acknowledged his indebtedness to other people for assistance with the work, in particular to his wife, who contributed chapters on Home Nursing, Child Management, and Invalid Cookery.


PEACE SCOUTING
FOR
GIRLS
BY
LIEUT COL COSSGROVE,
V.D. N.Z.R.L.
AND DOMINION CHIEF SCOUT.
Published at the office of the
"DOMINION SCOUT"
CHRISTCHURCH. N.Z.
PRICE 1/6 NETT.

> . . . As the movement progressed Miss Muriel Cossgrove took up the duties of Headquarters Secretary, and early in 1910 there were 100 girl peace scouts enrolled, 'as well as a large number of officers, including lady doctors, school mistresses and prominent ladies.' . . . patrols were recorded as being active in Dunedin, Timaru, Rangiora, Christchurch, Blenheim, Wellington, Wanganui, Greytown and Napier . . .
> A disquieting report was received from Wellington that some of the girl peace scouts had been seen out with the boy scouts during their games at night . . . However, the villains in the piece were found to be a self-formed troop of girl guides, who added to their sins by boarding a man-of-war in the Wellington Harbour and behaving in such a way that the Officer Commanding the Military District had to call on Colonel Cossgrove to restrain them. But since they were not girl peace scouts he had no control over them, and the whole embarrassing problem was left in the hands of the military authorities.

(It is interesting that in a relatively brief history of scouting, the chapter about girl peace scouts should contain a somewhat irrelevant anecdote of this nature — there are no others like it).

Culliford reports on General Baden-Powell's visit to NZ in 1912, and his approving words about the Girl Peace Scouts who paraded before him with the boys. However, in 1919 the General, forgetting his kind words five years ealier about seeing 'thousands of their sisters during his travels', wrote a long complaint to Colonel Cossgrove about 'variations of the authorised scheme of scouting'. This included the comment:

> . . . the girl peace scouts were started here by a man whom we had to get rid of from the scouts and who wanted to have his revenge on us. Of course the name girl scouts damaged the boy scouts to some extent because the boys hated being in a thing which girls imitated — and the best parents did not like their girls imitating scouts and becoming tom-boys.

The Colonel replied to the General that there was no centralisation of authority in NZ. 'Our people are too democratic'. He also told the General that:

> . . . all the churches have decided to take up peace scouting for girls as church organisations. The Minister of Education has requested Education Boards to place a copy of my book in every school library . . .

(It was at that period too that Plunket Sir Truby King's book on

child-rearing was given to every newly married couple. There was, then, no lack of wholesome advice).

Apparently the Peace Scouts never had the same following that the boy Scouts attracted, but their numbers grew steadily until in 1923 they merged with the first Girl Guides.

Following are some excerpts from the handbook:

> Scouts do not wear a showy uniform, because they would attract attention, but all the Scouts in a patrol should wear the same colours, and, if possible, dress alike. A very neat and becoming uniform has been approved by the 'Chief Scout' in New Zealand. It is made of khaki drill of the same colour and quality as the boys'. It consists of a B.P. hat, a shirt blouse, and a plain skirt. This is worn with a neat leather belt, with ring and swivel, from which hangs a neat little patrol tin for making tea when out scouting or tracking, and a haversack to carry food slung over the left shoulder. Black stockings and boots, staff 4ft long, and marked off in inches and feet; badge, "Be Always Ready". Leaders and sergeants wear it on a disc of red cloth; corporals on a disc of white cloth; scouts on a disc of blue cloth, and Scoutmistressess, and all other officers on a disc of green cloth. Whistle, with lanyard, for patrol leaders and sergeants; ribbon for necktie 2½ inches wide of colour registered for troop or battalion. A sergeant wears three white chevrons on left arm above elbow; leaders two; corporals, one. Scoutmistresses, and all officers wear three white chevrons on left arm above elbow; leaders, two; corporals, one. Scoutmistresses, and all officers wear white colour badges, and sergeants red and white.

In addition to detailing the right uniform, the handbook has quite a lot to say in a section called 'the use and abuse of dress' which is part of a chapter on health, while the nutrition piece points out the danger of too much sugar and damaging the system by:

> . . . taking the many unknown substances which are used to colour, flavour and cheapen the sugar of . . . candy. Pies, cakes, and the various 'goodies' . . . are also poor stuff . . . . Colic, headaches, neuralgias, lassitude, mental depression, irritability of temper, and many other bad feelings, difficult to describe, result from this 'sweet-meat plague'.

The exhortations towards proper food and enough sleep and exercise do not strike this reader as particularly out of date. The discussion of

clothing is old-fashioned in today's terms, but its fervour suggests a banner-carrier with a cause.

> As far as possible without sacrificing health, comfort, or modesty, dress should be made to enhance good looks and attractiveness. But any style of dress that is immodest, uncomfortable, or unhealthful, is not only cruel — it is wicked. You must, therefore, resist in every way you can any custom or fashion that brings in these modes of attire.
> We regard the actions of certain Indians, who flatten their children's skulls, as foolish and cruel, because it prevents the natural expansion of the skull; and we regard the Chinese custom of deforming their baby girls' feet by compression as unpardonably cruel, but how few of us regard the corseting of our girls' bodies as anything but right and proper? Medical men and women tell us that our custom of putting corsets or stays around the bodies of girls and women is more injurious to health and comfort than either of the customs above-mentioned. Every Girl Scout should put her stays off without delay if she should be so unfortunate as to have them.
> Women as a rule are more indoors than men, breathing impure air, and their habits are less active than men's. They require, therefore, to breathe deeper and have freer circulation, which they cannot possibly have if they wear corsets. There are other dangers, too, from the compression of the waists of growing girls, which your Scoutmistress will explain in her confidential talks with you . . . .
> As a growing girl you should be so absolutely easy in your clothing that there should be no possible restriction to your growth. You should be so free that under all the movements of the body in bending, lifting, leaping, or lying down, no organ or muscle should be unduly restrained in its natural action. The first thing for you to do is to leave off corsets and to loosen the dress, so that there may at all times be freedom of motion for every part of the body.
> Wear loose-fitting boneless waists. On these sew buttons for the support of your skirts, thus taking the weight off your back and hips.
> The second is to lighten your garments to the least you can wear with proper protection. You can safely lighten both underskirts and overskirts, and in winter you can dress the legs and arms in warm flannel underwear, and select good, stout, sensible shoes or boots. The union undergarment covering the arms, legs and body in one piece is the best. Then there will be the stockings and the waist, the stockings being supported by suspenders attached to the waist. Over this, cotton drawers can be fastened

> directly to the waist, or the waist and drawers may be combined in one garment. Over this again is a single skirt. This, with a dress in which the waist and skirt are made in one piece, completes a costume which will give the greatest amount of comfort and freedom, with the least amount of injury to your body. Dress neatly, cleanly, and laydlike at all times. Never allow yourself to drop into careless habits of dress, even before your brothers and sisters. Every Girl Scout should remember that she is to bring joy and happiness into the home and be a pattern to others; she cannot do this if she is a slattern.

Part of the emphasis on health ('A sick Scout . . . is of no use . . .) is placed on growing strong by means of 'jiu jitsu for girls':

> Every muscle in your body is developed in a natural way . . . a perfect figure lovely in every line of its contour, such as is produced by no other known system. None of these exercises may be performed with corsets on . . .

There are different exercises for specific bits of the contour: to strengthen the lungs, heart, waist line and organs, the small of the back ('Take off the corsets and burn them, as they cause weakness, and not strength . . .') and so on. In view of the nostalgic view often presented that Those Were The Days when modestly (if loosely) dressed young women Were Respected, it is very interesting to find at the end of the jiu jitsu instructions a section called 'self-defence':

> As it is possible that a Scout may find herself in such a predicament that she is in danger of bodily harm or insult, I give below a few simple rules of jiu-jitsu tricks of self-defence, which, if followed, will enable any girl of average strength to be more than a match for the greatest bully she is likely to encounter.

There are three of these tricks explained with pictures to go with them showing cads being overcome by a Peace Scout in uniform. They are: the wrist lock (. . .' if you cannot get out of his way, keep cool and watch his hands'); release from waist hold ('. . . run your fingers into the nose of your assailant'); and thumb twist ('one of the most beautifully simple tricks. . .')

Throughout the handbook there are camp-fire stories which have moral endings, appropriate booklists and hints to Scoutmistresses. In the section on health, the Scoutmistress is advised:

> to encourage her patrols to talk freely of their health to her, so that she may be able to advise and direct them . . . for their best

> good . . . or she may arrange to give them confidential health talks for girls and women . . .

The open air was important not just for learning the names of plants and animals ('Your Scoutmistress will show you how to tell a mushroom from a poisonous fungus') but also for promoting independence through practising putting up tents and preparing food outside as well as inside.

> Tennis and hockey do not matter a snap of your fingers — though, no doubt, they are very good games to play, and come in useful in training a girl's eye and muscle, as well as her temper. But they are not to be talked of in the same day as scouting, which teaches young people to be men and women in the truest sense.

Girl Scouts were encouraged to take the outdoors in by asking their parents to let them take their bedroom windows right out and replace them with wirenetting: 'you would enjoy such refreshing sleep'.

A suggestion like this seems to assume a certain standard of housing — separate bedrooms for example — and this assumption is reinforced by the comment that it is wrong not to be polite to servants. Scouts should discourage such conduct: 'be kind and considerate towards your servants as well as towards your equals.' One of the hints to Scoutmistresses is:

> Show Scouts how they may devise means of getting on. Girls in poor circumstances may be shown various ways of making money, making picture frames of shell work or cork, or fir cones, making nets, wood-carvings, bee-keeping, selling flowers, needlework, plain and fancy, and a hundred and one ways that will suggest themselves to you. Read books on 'Thrift,' by Samuel Smiles.

However, no Scout could spend her day collecting shells and cones and honey:

> When you get up in the morning, remember that you have to do a good turn to someone during the day; tie a knot in your handerkerchief . . . to remind you of it . . . . If ever you should forget to do the good turn you must do two good turns next day . . .

An interesting reflection of the life (or rather death) and times of that era comes at the beginning of Ms Cossgrove's chapter on the 'Care of Infants.' She says:

> . . . few things in a girl's education are more overlooked than instruction in the care of those dear, helpless little beings, hundreds of whom are done to death every year through ignorance.
> Figures are not always interesting, but I am sure your loving hearts will ache to learn that over 1,500 infants, under one year, die annually in this fair land of ours (New Zealand), and that since the youngest scout in your patrol saw the light of day, over 20,500 children under 5 years have been cut off as flowers from their stems. Now, as our watchword is 'Be Always Ready,' every Girl Scout must be ready to take charge of an infant if required. She must know how to wash, dress and feed it, to diagnose and treat its little ailments, and help to pull it through the most trying time of its life.
> Without proper knowledge the most careful and loving hearts may err, they may even kill with their kindness.

In addition to a thorough introduction to looking after babies and young children, there are also directions for home nursing (including invalid cookery). Most important is:

> . . . good old Scout Rule No. 7 — 'Obey orders! If there is a doctor in attendance obey his instructions most faithfully . . .

The Scout attending a patient 'must have regular exercise in the open air' and should remember: Scout Rule No. 8 — 'Go about with a smile. It helps you and cheers others.'

In addition to the useful and practical skills Scouts and Scoutmistresses could learn from the handbook, they were also required to be God's Police to fit themselves for their future happy destiny in their own homes.

> A Girl Scout must always be on the look-out for good turns. The knots on her colour-badge remind her of this, and as she is always so bright and cheerful, much notice is taken of her by all, especially by boys and young men. They love a bright and sparkling eye and a merry laugh.
> Scout Girls should, therefore, be very careful of their conduct at all times, and never, by word or look, approve of any wrong doing, bad habits, improper language or discourteous remarks by young men. If they are friends or relatives of the offenders, they should, in a kindly manner, point out the impropriety of such behaviour, and try, by every means in their power, to win them to a better living. Many boys and youths, through the very excess of animal spirits, do and say things thoughtlessly, which, when pointed out in a kindly spirit, they will feel ashamed of. If

at a party or picnic a Girl Scout is asked to dance or walk by a youth who smells of liquor, she should refuse at once and most decidedly, and if asked for a reason, she should say, "I am a Girl Scout, and must have nothing to do with one who smells of drink." In this way the Girl Scout is carrying out Rule 3 of the Scout Law, for she is useful, and doing all she can to help others.
Do not, be in a hurry to form close friendships with those who are strangers to you. Keep yours eyes and ears open, and your mouth shut, as becomes a good Scout, and if you find that they are like yourself, trying to follow the Scout law in spirit as well as in word, you may form friendships that will last till death. Never, under any pretence, associate with a girl who talks scandal, or repeats filthy stories. A pure mind is a priceless gift, yet, strange to say, it soon becomes tarnished, and the purest cannot banish evil words at once from their minds if they have heard or read them: Then, as you value your eternal happiness, keep your mind as well as your body pure.
As you grow older and approach womanhood, your conduct and habits in your associations with gentlemen, and your relation to general society are very important.
Be particularly careful in your personal friendships and relations with young men. Let your visits and associations always be in the presence of others. Let there be no holding of hands and sentimental talk. Let your conduct always be so genuinely dignified as to make it impossible for any young man to attempt familiarities. Let kisses and caresses from men be restricted to your father and your brothers, until to the circle you add the husband, that one to whom exclusive of all others, you entrust your life, your confidence, your person and your honour. The young woman who, by a dignified but cordial, ingenuous conduct, compels a young man instinctively to keep a proper distance in speech and behaviour, commands, thereby, his most profound respect, and, at the same time, she secures for herself the best reputation, the purest character, and the keenest satisfaction.

To end there without any more comment would be doing the Peace Scouts an injustice — it is all too easy to make fun of the conventions of an earlier time. While we may have reservations about the instant obedience and the patriotism and so forth, there are still questions here. What happened to all those Peace Scouts? There was a group of young women being taught about nutrition (food additives) the importance of daily exercise ('a romp with other Scouts' could be compared with the daily jog), body-building with jiu-jitsu (aerobics?), self-defence (come in Sue Lytollis) rational clothing (bra/corset throwaway) and confidential health talks with the Scoutmistress

(women's health support group). The tone of the book suggests they probably had fun too. Where did they go?

If you find this evidence of yet one more omission from our folk memory somewhat depressing, remember Scout Rule 8 again.

> True scouts never . . . use cruel or naughty words when put out. When vexed or annoyed she endeavours to look pleasant. If possible she hums the Girl Scouts' Chorus and she will soon feel all right.

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WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION NEW ZEALAND (INC),
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This Association is a feminist organisation formed to promote radical social change through the medium of women's studies.

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- to inform and educate women about women.
- to encourage the preservation of existing material about women.
- to facilitate the establishment of women's studies courses with a feminist perspective.
- to undertake and promote the publication and dissemination of material about women.
- to organise and participate in activities, conferences, seminars and displays in furtherance of the objects of the Association.

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JOURNAL: The Association produces a Journal twice a year.

Full membership of the association is open to all women. Other individuals may become associate members. The membership year runs from August 1 to July 31 and the annual subscription is $15. For more information write to P.O. Box 5067, Auckland.

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