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Cover image
Daisy on Campbell (2006). Photograph by Robin Peace

Contents

Women's Studies Association (NZ) Inc.

WSA (NZ), PO Box 5043, Wellington
www.womenz.org.nz/wsa/

The Women's Studies Association (NZ) is a feminist organisation formed to promote radical social change through the medium of women's studies. We believe that a feminist perspective necessarily acknowledges oppression on the grounds of race, sexuality, class and disability as well as gender. We acknowledge the Maori people as tangata whenua of Aotearoa. This means we have a particular responsibility to address their oppression among our work and activities.

Full membership of the Association is open to all women. Other individuals may become associate members. Annual membership includes three newsletters per year and inclusion on the wsanz e-list.

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Kia hiwa ra! Kia hiwa ra! Kia hiwa ra ki tēnei tuku, kia hiwa ra ki tēnā tuku!

Kei apurua tonu koe ki te toto, whakapuru tonu, whakapuru tonu. Haumi e, Hui e! Taiki e! He mihi tēnei ki ngā ūkaipo o ngā iwi, ki a koutou ngā wahine toa!

Hukarere Valentine: Kua tipu ake au i te rohe o Heretaunga, Ngati Kahungunu. I was raised in Paki Paki, Hastings, and am a descendant of Ngati Kahungunu. I am currently a Doctoral student at Massey University School of Psychology, Palmerston North.

Bronwyn Campbell: He uri au o te Tairāwhiti, ko Ngāti Porou toku iwi. I am a descendant from the East Coast (of the North Island) iwi, Ngati Porou and am currently employed as a lecturer at Massey University by both Te Pūtahi-a-Toi (School of Māori Studies) and the School of Psychology.

While the broader area of mātauranga Māori has enjoyed increased availability through written publication, in particular, there are a number of dynamic and vital wahine in various disciplines who have produced challenging and scholarly kōrero/writings, working the difficult area of weaving western academic practices with mātauranga Māori. We are keen to cast our kupenga widely in order to produce a forum in which we can celebrate ngā matatini Māori. Your contributions are not only welcome but entirely necessary! Nau te raurau, naku te raurau, ka ora ai te manuhiri.

Each submission will be peer reviewed by both Hukarere Valentine (takuta_hook@clear.net.nz) and Dr Bronwyn Campbell (B.M.Campbell@massey.ac.nz).

Contributions should be 5000–8000 words long, including tables, notes and references. APA referencing preferred, but footnotes or endnotes also welcome. The deadline for submissions is 13 April 2007.

All submissions should be sent to the **Coordinating Editor:**
Jenny Coleman, J.D.Coleman@massey.ac.nz
Women's Studies Programme
School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work
Massey University
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
Aotearoa/New Zealand

Editorial

In February this year, a study which found that women were equally as violent as men in relationships became headline television news. The research, completed by Professor Ferguson at the University of Otago, used methods that have been discredited by many researchers in the area of gendered violence. Immediately following reports of the findings of this study, Women's Refuge and the National Network of Stopping Violence Services released a media statement explaining that the Conflicts Tactics Scale used in the Otago study distorts the reality of domestic violence by ignoring the context, impact and meaning of violence.[1] Professor Ferguson's research, and the way it was so readily picked up by the media, sends some important signals to feminist activists and academics alike. Research, even that produced by high-standing academics, should not be accepted at face value. For decades, feminists have critiqued some of the most fundamental assumptions that underpin research designs and have emphasised the need to always contextualise research findings within an analysis of the operation of power. Similarly, feminists have a long tradition of recognising the media as a double-edged sword. As the recently-released report from the Global Media Monitoring Project 2005 highlights, news stories are more likely to reinforce than challenge gender stereotypes.[2] Not surprisingly, the recent Special Issue on Women and Violence (*Women's Studies Journal* 19:2, Spring 2005) did not make headline news in mainstream media; however, it did touch a nerve for many feminists working and conducting research on the impact of gendered violence. Three of the five articles in this current issue continue to explore this theme.

In 'Women and their sheltering experiences: A cross-national perspective', author Dorothy Gilson presents the results of research which compares the experiences of domestic violence support agencies in Canada and New Zealand. Drawing on a range of sources, including interviews and textual material, Dorothy highlights the contradictions faced by these organisations as a result of their reliance upon State funding. As she points out, the requirements of the organisations, their clients and governments as primary funders are often very different, and may even work in direct opposition to one another. This is evidenced mainly by a lack of fit between the

regulatory demands of statutory agencies, the feminist aims of the support agencies studied (a New Zealand women's refuge and a Canadian transition house), and the immediate needs of clients. This is an article that will definitely strike a chord for those with experience of feminist-based support agencies.

On the other side of the equation are the hundreds of paid and unpaid women working as refuge advocates. As Shelly Hindle and Mandy Morgan point out, these workers provide a vital service that is an integral component of community response to violence against women by partners and ex-partners. These are the women who provide around-the-clock support and assistance for women and children seeking protection from violent and abusive relationships. These workers are exposed to accounts of family violence on a daily basis, and are often in situations in which they may also be physically vulnerable. In their article 'On being a refuge worker', Hindle and Morgan consider the psycho-social impacts of the advocacy of these workers. Based on in-depth interviews with refuge workers, they explore the impact of domestic violence work on their lives and well-being.

An important component of the work of agencies such as the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges is community education about how to work towards violence-free communities. In their article, Betsan Martin and Jennifer Hand make an argument for community responsibility in freeing women, men and society from abuse. They bring to their understanding of community responsibility the relationship between those most affected by the abuse, alongside the institutional (or professional) knowledge and State policies, to work towards lifting the burden of responsibility from the individual women to the community – as a collaborative approach effecting social justice.

In the context of finding ways to achieve violence-free communities, Martin and Hand argue a framework of responsibility that links with local and international initiatives for social and environmental health. Sarah Combellick-Bidney's contribution to this issue is concerned with environmental health from the perspective of ecofeminism. Beginning her analysis with the premise that ecofeminism has failed to achieve academic legitimacy, Combellick-Bidney offers a critical analysis of ecofeminism in a cross-cultural context. The article identifies a number of fissures in ecofeminist theory, such as the woman–nature connection; the conflation of 'ecosystems' cultures of

rural Third World women with the experiences of women from poor First World communities; and the ethics of cross-cultural connections between Western feminist groups and 'subaltern' groups. Combellick-Bidney goes on to suggest that the integrity of the ecofeminist ethic is damaged by the failure to address the ethical questions that arise when environmental interests are at odds with a social group; she explores this issue via a series of case studies. This article is at once a critique and an attempt to fill some of the identified gaps in ecofeminist analysis.

Lorena Gibson's review article connects well to Combellick-Bidney's article, discussing three related publications concerned with global feminism. In this piece Gibson explores the main features of each book and then goes on to draw out common themes. Most important for Gibson is the 'connection between women's lived experiences – the stuff of daily life – and neo-liberal macro-economic policies'. As she notes, while the methods used by each of the authors are very different, they still effectively communicate the idea that development policies based on the needs of global capitalisation, and the drive for economic growth, have not, and will not, benefit women or improve their lives.

Once again, we are sure you will find this collection of feminist scholarship stimulating and challenging. We would also like to acknowledge that since the previous issue we have had a change in the Editorial Collective. Celia Briar has retired from academic life, and we both thank her for her valuable contribution to the production of the *Journal* over the last two years and wish her all the very best in her current pursuits. We welcome Michelle Lunn to the Editorial Collective, and look forward to the *Journal* benefiting from her expertise in social policy, feminist theory and disability studies.

Ang Jury, Jenny Coleman, Leigh Coombes, Lesley Patterson, Mandy Morgan and Michelle Lunn.

Notes

[1] For an analysis of research that claims women are equally as violent as men, see Janice Giles, 'Woman bites dog – Making sense of media and research reports that claim women and men are equally violent', *New Zealand Medical Journal*, November 2005, Vol. 118, No. 1225.

[2] For the findings of the Global Media Monitoring Project, see: www.whomakesthenews.org.

Women and their sheltering experiences: A cross-national perspective

DOROTHY GILSON

Introduction

In 2003 more than 23,000 women and children sought various kinds of support from the fifty-one battered women's refuges spread throughout New Zealand. More than 5,500 of these women and children sought safety and shelter and spent, on average, twenty-six days in refuges (Hann, 2003).

There have been significant changes experienced by the battered women's movement since the establishment of the first shelters[1] in the early 1970s, including changes to both structural and operational arrangements. These changes will be explored more closely as they relate to two shelters, a Canadian transition house and a New Zealand refuge. Currently, battered women's shelters maintain many aspects of collectivism[2] throughout their organisations but also have adopted a hierarchical structure that is more in keeping with a '… traditional welfare, social service bureaucracy' (Ferraro, 1983, p.291; Lupton, 1994; L. MacLeod, 1987). Shelters adopted new structures to accommodate the compliance requirements, insisted upon by various governments, in order to secure continued operational funding. This has occurred in both New Zealand and Canada (Beaudry, 1985; Currie, 1989; Department of Social Services, 1984; Gadbois, 1999; Lynch, 1998; L. MacLeod, 1987; New Zealand Community Funding Agency (NZCFA), 1995; Vis-à-Vis, 1989; Walker, 1990).[3]

The analytical framework within this paper refers to changes within the battered women's movement as 'co-optation' (Ahrens, 1980; Barnsley, 1985; Currie, 1989; Sullivan, 1982; Koopman-Boyden, 1992).[4] Co-optation has resulted from the decline and change phases within the battered women's movement.[5] In order for the work of these organisations to be sustained and maintained, it was necessary to place increased reliance on external linkages and supports. The necessary introduction of hierarchical structures and rules led to a transformation of the previously inherent goals, and the adoption of a more institutional model (Ferguson, 1984; Ianello, 1992; Lipsky & Smith, 1989–90; Rothschild-Whitt, 1976; Zald & Ash, 1966).

Co-optation within the battered women's movement meant that in various ways shelters conformed with the requirements of government. Political action was replaced by a focus on service delivery, and collective, non-hierarchical structures were merged as hybrid formations with hierarchical structures. This created what Schechter (1982, p.100) called 'modified hierarchies or modified collectives', in order to deal with issues of external compliance and internal changes. These organisational and financial constraints, brought about by increased reliance on external financial supports, meant that battered women's shelters shifted their focus from a radical social change agenda to one in which organisational preservation was the norm, as they strove to remain viable within a sector that was becoming increasingly competitive (Ahrens, 1980; Davis, 1988; Koopman-Boyden, 1992; National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR), 1998; Potuchek, 1986; Schechter, 1982).

Government funding within the battered women's movement has differed between Canada and New Zealand generally, and also differed for the Canadian transition house and the New Zealand refuge involved in this research. In the early 1980s the Canadian federal government agreed to fund transition houses in all provinces – including the province in which my research took place – and territories in Canada.[6] Transition houses formed incorporated societies so that they could benefit from their newly-established tax status and meet the compliance requirements of government, which would only fund transition houses that were incorporated societies (Department of Social Services, 1984; F. MacLeod, 1989). Provincial governments funded services, operations, staffing and programmes and provided transition houses with up to 75 per cent of their total funding needs (Vis-à-Vis, 1989) and, in so doing, brought them under the regulatory control of provincial governments who provided the funding (Gilman, 1988; MacDonald, 1995). Funding for transition houses has historically been the domain of the provinces, with each province and territory deciding the amount to fund for transition house services. Consequently transition houses have received different amounts of funding (Vis-à-Vis, 1989).

Historically, in New Zealand refuges have been under-funded for services, programmes and operational costs; for example funding for refuges has only provided 25 per cent of their total needs (Lynch, 1998; Smith, 1996; Snively, 1996). Refuges are supported by the

NCIWR which negotiates a national contract with government to provide each of the refuges with operational funding. This operational funding is also regulated by government (Lynch, 1998).

Although battered women's shelters have actively engaged with mainstream organisations in order to further a feminist agenda, the impact of transformation and preservation has nevertheless been significant. The consequences of enforced compliance requirements by governments included the establishment of bureaucratic practices that influenced the structural, operational and philosophical aspects of shelters – but enabled shelters to continue to be an essential source of support to battered women (Beaudry, 1985; Schechter, 1982). These bureaucratic practices could be found within the Canadian transition house and the New Zealand refuge that were research sites. The operational arrangements, and the establishment of policies and procedures by the two shelters, will be examined, as they had a direct bearing on the experiences and expectations of the battered women seeking shelter and services.

In more recent times the Canadian government has provided First Nations peoples with their own transition houses, and in 2002 fifty transition houses were located in First Nations communities across Canada (Health Canada, 2002). Furthermore, an Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence was established, by First Nations transition house representatives, to address family violence issues in their own communities. It has been critical for the Canadian government to acknowledge, and provide funding for, First Nations communities that enables them to be empowered, as they seek out their own ways of addressing family violence. 'The use of holistic traditions and practices and the need to strengthen connections between women, their families and communities is essential' (Health Canada, 2002, p.27). To this end, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)[7] has partnered with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to provide transition houses and related services within First Nations communities (Health Canada, 2002). Between 1997 and 2002 over $30 million Canadian dollars was given in operational funding to the transition houses established by First Nations people.

The New Zealand refuge movement has policies that are bicultural in focus. Within the four regions, there are refuge representatives to the NCIWR national governing body, from both the indigenous population, that is tangata whenua, and from tauiwi (the non-Māori

population). In 2003 46 per cent (6315) of women using refuge services identified as Māori, and 43 per cent of workers identified likewise (Hann, 2003). However the number of Māori women seeking refuge services is over-represented, in terms of the total number of women seeking refuge help (13,729) and the number of Māori refuges (twelve) available to Māori women. The twelve refuges operate from a kaupapa Māori perspective (Women's Refuge, n.d.).[8] The NCIWR promotes parallel development in women's refuges, focusing on partnership, equality, fairness and a feminist perspective within refuge work (Women's Refuge, n.d.).

This paper examines the impact that government funding had on the transition house in Canada and the refuge in New Zealand, as they developed policies and procedures to meet reporting requirements imposed by governments; and the direct bearing of this government funding on the experiences and expectations of battered women seeking shelter and services (Gilman, 1988; MacLeod, 1987; Tennant, 1993). I will explore the development and use of these policies and procedures, and how they were used to invoke structural control and authoritarian processes on battered women during their sheltering period. The adoption of new structural arrangements that monitored and regulated shelter living not only illustrated ways in which women were disempowered, but also showed that outcomes did not always match expectations. Furthermore, confidentiality and safety policies were sources of concern for women. The dual issues of confidentiality and safety – that is, not telling anyone where the shelters were located, or identifying who was being sheltered – helped to shape women's perceptions and responses, as they sought uneasy alliances with each other, and with workers, in order to comply with policies that were at times felt not to be in their best interests.

I will review the methods (including case studies) used for the research, before examining policies and procedures that were used to regulate behaviour in the two shelters.

Case studies
This paper examines two battered women's shelters in Canada and New Zealand, and the manner in which their operational arrangements forced them to establish policies and procedures that had a direct bearing on the experiences and expectations of battered women seeking shelter and services.

The paper draws upon case study research undertaken from 1996 to 1998 with two battered women's shelters in New Zealand and Canada. The momentum for the research resulted from personal experience of working with battered women in Canada, from the mid-1980s through to the mid-1990s. The work included supporting women in crisis and the development of long-term rural services and programmes. An important component of this work, and one which provided the impetus for the study, was the impact of a federally-funded demonstration grant,[9] which changed the structure, organisation and service delivery interventions within the battered women's service in which I worked (Gilson, 1994).

The use of feminist ethnographic methods to investigate the battered women's shelters in Canada and New Zealand provided an opportunity to gather a wide range of data sources, which included historical and organisational documents and focus group interviews that I conducted (Yin, 1994). Four focus groups were held with women who had sought sheltering to escape abuse. These included two groups of shelter and refuge residents and two groups of ex-residents. All interviews were taped and transcribed. Key themes were explored from the data sources of the accounts of the battered women.

Using a case study approach meant that I was able to explore similarities and differences between the experiences of the women being sheltered. It was an opportunity to focus on battered women as users of battered women's shelters, rather than asking them always to speak of the abuse they had experienced. The need to ask women what they thought of services, how they experienced shelter living and what they expected from the shelters was critical, as responses provided knowledge and understanding of battered women's shelters generally and individual experiences specifically (Gadbois, 1999; Violence Research Programme (VRP), n.d.; Women's Domestic Violence Health Project (WDVHP), n.d.). The research enabled women to discuss their experiences openly, yet in confidence, for the first time.

Examining the data from multiple sources, and exploring themes that emerged, furthered my understanding of the two shelters as they adopted more bureaucratic forms of structure and operation. The development of policies and procedures were aspects of this adoption. Rothschild-Whitt (1979) stated that the development of policies and procedures in organisations tended to be reflected in hierarchical

and bureaucratic organisations. Broom (1991) characterised the development of policies as the crisis phase within organisations. Riger (1994) identified them within the formalisation stage and Koopman-Boyden (1992) explained them as the stabilisation phase. This fits with Zald and Ash's (1966) perception of social movement organisations that become transformed, and focus on sustainability issues.

The two battered women's shelters, like many established during the 1980s, developed voluntary management committees to provide a governance role in line with each of their government's requirements. In Canada the transition house became an incorporated society, a requirement of its provincial government; and in New Zealand the refuge adopted the NCIWR Code of Ethics and Code of Practice (Department of Social Services, 1984; NZCFA, 1995). The role of management committees was to develop and formalise various policies and procedures. This ultimately influenced the structural and organisational arrangements of shelters, the women who were being sheltered, and the workers who were expected to conform to the compliance requirements of their respective governments (Lynch, 1998; L. MacLeod, 1987). Both the transition house and the refuge developed written policies and procedures, in order to meet the approval standards laid out by the NZCFA (1995) and the Canadian provincial government under the auspices of the Department of Social Services (1984).[10, 11] Furthermore the NCIWR, in assisting its member refuges, developed Standards of Practice (NCIWR, 1999) within its Quality Assurance Programme, so that refuges could meet the requirements of the NZCFA and their own service delivery requirements (Lynch, 1998). These policies and procedures, therefore, were developed to regulate and account for shelter living, including how women and children should conduct themselves while staying in the shelters and how they should prepare for life after they left them (Department of Social Services, 1984; NZCFA, 1995).

Institutional living – Life in a shelter

The introduction of written policies and procedures, within both the transition house and the refuge, included establishing structural and operational arrangements that demonstrated how women should conduct themselves and manage their time as they prepared for life outside of the shelters (Davis, 1988). For example, in the Canadian transition house policies were established that identified structural

arrangements for scheduling communal meals, completing chores, specifying women and children's bed-time and wake-up hours, and implementing curfew restrictions. Policies also identified requirements for a report to child protection services if women did not return at night;[12] the number of times women could return to the house annually; the use of the in-house pay telephone; attendance at residents and staff meetings; and participation in programmes. In the New Zealand refuge, policies also identified how women should conduct themselves and manage their time, and were concerned with the practical living arrangements, such as women being supervised regarding household chores, laundry and the cleaning of bedrooms before leaving the refuge.

The benefit of establishing policies was not only that they provided a structure for women who, in all probability, had never shared a house with other women before; but also to ensure that they complied with health and safety regulations based on government requirements. The establishment of regulatory control mechanisms is a factor in institutional living where individual behaviour is standardised and, in the cases of the two shelters, it influenced the way in which women were expected to manage their time during their stay. This was exemplified in the New Zealand refuge where regulations directed women regarding their behaviour in the laundry and bathroom:

> Don't leave wet, soiled clothing or linen etc lying on the floor, in the dryer, in the tub, washing machine or on the floor in the bathrooms. There will be someone else wanting to use the facilities after you... Understandably sharing a house can be difficult, we encourage you to DISCUSS SHARING the task with each other. (Display notice)

The attention placed on monitoring and directing women's behaviour through control mechanisms dictated by policies and procedures had some adverse reactions. Disempowerment and lack of control over their living arrangements, in both the transition house and the refuge, was keenly felt by some women. In the refuge, women noted parallels with the personal situations from which they had escaped:

> Since I've been here other women have come in with absolutely nothing and they've been given nothing... No toothpaste or toothbrushes... no one's enquired to find out whether they've actually got those kinds of items. And the food has been kind of a little bit sparse and I think

... I mean that's one of the reasons why we're in an abusive relationship is because we've been subservient to our partners and you know we've been frightened to say anything as though, you know that comes across because our self-esteem is so low that we feel frightened to ask for things. (Refuge resident)

However the expectation that women conform to shelter requirements was experienced differently for some women. In the refuge, women had no real concerns about household tasks and responsibilities, and understood that the refuge's structure enabled them to take care of themselves and their children. But in the transition house, not all women were happy at having to leave their own homes to come and live in a communal environment where tasks were shared and cooking duties appeared onerous. They felt that they should not be expected to deal with the additional responsibilities imposed on them, and indicated that they would change this aspect of the transition house if they could. The women stated that they were not given the opportunity to make decisions about taking on household responsibilities:

When you come from a relationship and you leave that relationship that night and as soon as you come in, your name is there and I know we have to do our part, when you're so used to, you do this and you do this and you cook, until you get through that grace period it's like, I can do this at home, why do I have to do it here? (Transition house ex-resident)

An important example was the insistence by workers that women sign up for household duties in the transition house as soon as they came in. In her study of American battered women's shelters, Loseke (1992, p.123) argued that house maintenance, for all that it was shared among residents, was still demeaning work and not empowering, as it did not address positive ways to change women's lives:

Each of the ensuing tasks held the status of dirty work – activities having nothing to do with the organisational goal of transforming clients' lives, activities which, in fact, interfered with establishing the preferred 'supportive' type relationship. Further and critically, when clients did not act grateful, it was difficult to see the meaning of shelter work.

The structural and organisational arrangements found within battered women's shelters influence the perceptions and realities of the women who use them. Notwithstanding the institutional nature

of shelters, as illustrated by the various regulatory and monitoring components associated with policies and procedures (Department of Social Services, 1984, NZCFA, 1995), the attitudes and personal situations of women were also factored into their understanding of shelter living. For example, when interviewed, women identified a range of personal situations and expressed attitudes regarding their sheltering experiences. Whilst some women felt empowered for the first time, other women found it difficult to deal with overcrowding, lack of privacy (on occasion women had to share bedrooms), and the number of children being sheltered. When women were asked their views on the influence of changes, overcrowding and lack of privacy were cited as being important issues:

> Some of the people are kind of upset because they need the room and everyone's taking over so you couldn't really relax. No place for the children to go. Children were running around and the parents were trying to get organised.

> Unless you were in the bathroom there was no place to go to be by yourself. (Transition house residents)

Living in cramped and often overcrowded conditions with other women and many children of various ages was problematic, as women were brought together to address their multiple problems as recipients of violence and abuse, and to try to make sense of their individual situations. The estrangement that some women felt belies the underlying assumption that battered women can be self-reliant and self-sufficient. The paradox is that they have different needs and concerns. For example, some women wanted to be safe and to maintain some distance from abusive partners; others did not want to admit that they had had to resort to sheltering; others wanted assistance with options that included possible reconciliation with partners; and some wanted practical support with housing and legal needs. Thus the objectives set out by battered women's shelters may not always coincide with what women want or need (Murray, 1988), as they struggle to make decisions in an environment that is not ideal:

> At no stage [when I was in the refuge] ... was there any kind of encouragement to try and sort it out. I don't think anyone in particular said that it was a man-hating place but I just got the feeling that 'now I want to make contact with him and try and sort it out' ... because maybe if

I did have contact with him there was a chance that I'd leave. (Refuge ex-resident)

The transition house and the refuge had no choice but to impose written policies that were a source of social control as workers '... understand and implement the aims of those at the top' (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979, p.513). The formal requirements that were imposed were not meant to be disempowering for women, or to be so regulatory that women lost their sense of autonomy; but they were in contrast to the ethos of the original collective shelters and refuges that preferred to address issues as they arose, and called upon personal and moral values in order to maintain accountability for decision-making (Pizzey, 1974; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Srinivasan & Davis, 1991).

Confidentiality and safety – Protection or censure
The regulatory nature of shelters has meant that confidentiality and safety issues have been addressed through regulations defined by government requirements and by management groups established within shelters. Maintaining women's safety and keeping shelters confidential has been of paramount importance (Schechter, 1982; Weisman, 1992). The transition house and the refuge established policies that related to confidentiality and safety. Adherence to written policies ensured that women did not disclose the address or the whereabouts of their shelter, or who was staying in it, thus keeping all women, children and workers safe.[13] Visitors were not permitted, nor were they able to telephone women directly. In the transition house, only workers were permitted to answer the door, which was kept locked at all times to ensure the '... safety of residents and their children' (Transition House Guidelines, January 1996, p.4). In the refuge, workers were the first point of contact with people who were requesting information about women being sheltered.

In both the transition house and the refuge significant penalties could be imposed if safety was breached. In the transition house a curfew applied to all women being sheltered and if this was breached women were likely to be asked to leave. These rules were made in the best interests of all resident women and children, and understood by residents as being critical for safety maintenance:

Safety is excellent. Non-compliant residents they do not tolerate. If women violate rules and regulations or puts themself at risk, not tolerated by [transition house], it's a safe house. If out past curfew it is my

responsibility to call, to check in, has to be a valid reason for staying out. If return to husband for one evening invalidates ... [transition house]. (Transition house ex-resident)

In the refuge, similar penalties were imposed if confidentiality was breached:

In fairness to other residents we will not be able to have you back. The freedom this secrecy gives you will enable you and your children to sleep safe at night. (Information booklet, 1997)

In Canada, the transition house was monitored at all times. Closed circuit television was in operation, and workers were the only people allowed to answer the front door which remained locked. Workers were *in situ* twenty-four hours a day, to ensure that women were protected, remained safe and had sources of support if they needed them. It was also done to meet the residency requirements of the provincial government that funded the transition house (Department of Social Services, 1984). In the transition house, however, women likened shelter life to being imprisoned:

When you think you are going to a place and it's just like jail and it's just what you're thinking in a lot of ways. You know better but it's still what's in your mind... **I'm going to be locked up** [emphasis added]. (Transition house ex-resident)

The New Zealand refuge employed a degree of flexibility in terms of enabling women to be responsible for their stay by providing keys to the refuge. As part of the new policy and procedure document, developed to meet the requirements of the NZCFA (Lynch, 1998),[14] the refuge ensured that there were systems in place to guarantee women's safety, including dead locks on windows and doors, an outdoor sensor light, an emergency contact telephone number if required and access to a telephone at all times. They employed no workers after hours or at night to stay with women. They relied on volunteers to provide support if required. This degree of flexibility, which promoted self-help, self-sufficiency and empowerment for women, was however somewhat problematic, as women left alone for long periods of time were vulnerable, as confidentiality and safety could be undermined.[15] Although women were not to disclose the whereabouts of the refuge or invite visitors, they were not always aware of the consequences of being left alone at night or on weekends. One woman's account of

women being left alone illustrates that they needed to be made more aware of how to act in emergency situations:

> [There's] this confidentiality thing where you're not allowed to say where you are or anything like that. But [there was] an incident ... [where the women thought a resident's partner had entered the refuge grounds] ... So [the women] rang the police and they wanted to know where [the refuge was] and [the women] said 'we can't tell you' and then [the police] said 'could you give us your phone number'. [The women said] 'we don't know it' ... [Women] tried to explain that [they] were in a refuge and that [they] were scared for [their lives] but [they] weren't allowed to give the address. (Refuge ex-resident)

As a consequence, maintaining confidentiality about the refuge's whereabouts was especially difficult to monitor. This state of affairs is incongruent with notions of empowerment, as women were left alone at night in the refuge in a situation where they had no resources on which to call. Fundamentally they didn't know what to do. The manner in which confidentiality was understood by the women being sheltered potentially placed them at risk, as they were without the support mechanisms that vulnerable women often require. It is essential for funding requirements that refuges remain safe places for women at all times. The development of comprehensive policy documents required by the NZCFA (Lynch, 1998) during the late 1990s enabled refuges to codify their safety measures more clearly, as they conformed to the requirements of their funding body (NZCFA, 1995).

Safety remained an important issue for women in the refuge, and some felt that workers *in situ* twenty-four hours a day would alleviate concerns that they did not always feel safe:

> I've often thought they should have someone actually living in. I must admit sometimes even though this is a safe house sometimes you're not even really safe in a safe house ... I'm a mother myself and I'm just so much more aware and you just don't know who you're getting in (the refuge) ... It's almost like you're putting a knock on the safe house business, you know the fact that you're running away from your partner, but are you actually safe within the safe house ... because you really don't know who you're living with. (Refuge resident)

Safety concerns were expressed by women who had also stayed in other refuges, as they talked about experiences of living with

women with medical and drug problems. At the time of the interviews, women felt the need to monitor other women's activities whilst also feeling the need for increased personal security and support. Thus, for some women in the refuge, the philosophy of self-reliance and independence precipitated problems over which they had no control, and potentially jeopardised their stay.

It must be noted that not all women staying in these battered women's shelters experienced the negative aspects of institutional living. For many women, the shelters provided a means to take stock of their individual situations; they felt empowered to make decisions, and utilised choices in framing their futures as well as continuing to be supported by workers.

Policies and procedures that focus on maintaining confidentiality and safety may be in conflict with what is intended by shelters, and what is in the best interests of women. It is difficult to maintain confidentiality regarding sheltering, and to ensure the safety of all women and children, if women allow partners into the refuge, or when women are left alone for long periods. In the refuge, women could come and go without being monitored, but did not always feel safe when left alone. In the transition house, women were monitored and kept safe at night because of policies that ensured that the transition house was always locked, and a worker was always on duty to provide the women with support. But locking women up is also a form of censure and, although it is meant as a protective mechanism, women may not understand that these policies are developed first of all in their best interests and also that shelters are obliged to conform to government regulations.

Conclusion

When the battered women's movement was established in the 1970s, women helped and supported women who were abused. Erin Pizzey (1974) and other courageous women opened their homes (and condemned buildings) so that women could be safe enough to speak out about the abuse they experienced. Refuges were operating piecemeal, as they relied on donations and contributions to support their work. They operated as collectives, with women supporting each other within a non-hierarchical, informal environment, where it was expected that every woman would be treated equally. Eventually this changed, as the battered women's movement realised that they

needed security of funding so that they could continue to shelter and support battered women.

The introduction of secured government funding during the 1980s brought with it compromise, compliance and contradiction, as the movement gradually adapted its collective philosophy so that it could better meet the requirements of governments. In order to receive funding, the movement typically adopted more institutional and hierarchical structures to comply with the demands of governments.

The battered women's movements in New Zealand and Canada experienced similar changes. In New Zealand the NCIWR regulated the activities of refuges, and ensured that they were accountable to the NCIWR and to the funding agency, the NZCFA. In Canada transition houses established themselves as independent incorporated societies so that they could receive funding. Being a society meant that they were also subject to regulations, upon which the provincial government insisted before funding could be provided.

The examination of the impact of government funding within the transition house and the refuge enables a better understanding of the similarities and differences between the two. Both established structural and operational arrangements were codified through policies and procedures that monitored and regulated the activities of the women being sheltered. Furthermore the women were not always aware that various regulatory controls were forced upon the shelters by governments.

The ability of shelters to interpret and action regulations imposed by others is open to considerable debate. Written policies and procedures, requirements for both the transition house and the refuge, can be administered with some flexibility. The women's experience of their time in the two shelters was somewhat different. The transition house identified very clearly the manner in which women should behave, and even imposed a time for going to bed for both women and children. Furthermore, women were unhappy with the sharing of household chores and the making of meals for everyone as soon as they entered the transition house. Many felt that choices and options were not available to them. In the refuge, there appeared to be a greater degree of flexibility about refuge life. Household chores were supervised, and women were directed as to their behaviour, as the example with the laundry and bathroom facilities illustrates, but women had flexibility in other areas such as meal preparation and

caring for their own families. Furthermore, as women were alone at night they were not monitored about bed-time hours or curfew restrictions. This level of flexibility was not without its problems, however, as women expressed concern that they could not easily approach workers. They felt that there were barriers between them, and they were uneasy about their surroundings. The women felt that they were being subservient all over again.

Life in shelters cannot be easy. An institutional environment, where activities were monitored and regulated, was not what women expected when they went to the two shelters. The disadvantages were not inconsiderable and, although women were safe, they found it difficult to adapt to the unfamiliar surroundings, overcrowding, lack of privacy and lack of autonomy – as they were expected to participate in a communal life that was seen to be the most beneficial. The estrangement that women felt illustrated the disconnected relationship they had with workers. This is problematic, as the battered women's movement prides itself on ensuring that women remain empowered and able to make informed decisions independently, but with help and support. The loss of flexibility, lack of familiarity and estrangement from other women who were there to provide support appeared to be detrimental to positive outcomes for the women. Although the concerns expressed by the women cannot be generalised to the whole of the refuge population, they do help to further our understanding of the impact of the need for the transition house and refuge to conform to and comply with requirements imposed by their respective governments, in order to ensure the continuation of funding.

The battered women's movement was established to ensure that women could flee abusive relationships, and be safe and secure in the knowledge that they would not continue to be harmed. Safety was paramount in both the transition house and the refuge, and policies and procedures were in place to ensure that women remained secure. In the transition house the level of security *in situ* and the availability of workers ensured the protection of women during their stay. Not so for the refuge, where women's arrangements were more flexible, and they had keys and were left alone after hours. Both situations were not without their problems, as penalties could be imposed if confidentiality and safety were breached. Women's experiences of safety and confidentiality were viewed differently. One woman in the transition house likened her stay to being in prison; she was being

locked up, not the perpetrator. In the refuge a woman recounted a story of several women being at risk because they were left alone in the refuge and were fearful that an abusive partner had gained access. Workers also knew that sometimes partners came into the refuge to help women leave, thus undermining the confidential location and safety of all women being sheltered.

The understanding that shelters are able to keep women safe at all times means that women should feel secure and protected. Protecting women is a number one priority, and that is why the address is not given out or the location of shelters disclosed to anyone. But there are two issues that require attention. One is that women may feel that they are being penalised when they appear to be locked inside shelters; the second is that women do not always feel protected and safe when they are left alone for long periods of time without the ongoing support of workers. The dilemma is that these two approaches, designed to secure the safety and protection of women, caused anxiety for women in the refuge and the transition house. Women were not always aware that the policies in place were there to codify the means of safety and protection, as well as to comply with government regulations.

Two assumptions arise when women use battered women's shelters. The first is that women are a homogeneous group who are relieved to escape violence, and therefore willingly subject themselves to conditions they might not ordinarily experience. The second is that women enter shelters voluntarily and consequently, if they are unhappy with the situation, they have the option to leave (Loseke, 1992; Murray, 1988; Wharton, 1989). These assumptions are fraught with difficulties, as battered women's shelters tend to measure their achievements in terms of the women actively responding to their ideology and practice (Wharton, 1989). When women express displeasure or dissatisfaction they may not be heard; or may even be thought to be unco-operative and ungrateful, as they experience discontent with the practical situation in which they find themselves. Under the compliance arrangements imposed by governments (Department of Social Services, 1984; Lynch, 1998; NZCFA, 1995) and adopted by battered women's shelters, ideology and practice conform to government interventions and restrictions. Consequently, when these factors are combined with battered women being treated as victims, then disempowerment and dependency occurs (Davis, 1988; Loseke, 1992; Srinivasan & Davis, 1991; Sullivan, 1982).

The changes that occurred within the transition house and the refuge, and the battered women's movement more generally, illustrate the movement away from women sharing and supporting each other in collective ways to women being expected to adapt to new operational arrangements that have been imposed to accommodate the requirements of governments. The opportunities for women to be more closely involved with the development of policies and procedures in the battered women's movement have diminished. Women can be volunteers and paid workers after they have addressed the abuse in their lives, but generally battered women are not asked about their needs and views on shelter living whilst staying in the shelters (Gadbois, 1999; VRP, n.d.; WDVHP, n.d.). This failure to explore more immediately the experiences of these women needs to be remedied by further investigation, which will add to the body of knowledge; and which will further our understanding of how and why the battered women's movement has evolved and changed, and what remains to be accomplished if the movement is finally to achieve the goals which began to be articulated with Erin Pizzey's high street march in 1971.

DOROTHY GILSON *received her PhD from the University of Waikato in 2002. The thesis examined the impact of government intervention on the structure and organisational arrangements of battered women's shelters in New Zealand and Canada. Her current research interests include exploring the needs of battered women and mental illness.*

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Notes

[1] Different terms have been used to identify battered women's shelters. In New Zealand they are called refuges and reflect flexible arrangements for sheltering women (Hann, 2003). In Canada they are called transition houses and are short-term, secure facilities regulated by government which decides on the length of stay (Department of Community Services, 1994). For ease of usage I will use the term 'shelter' to represent the general sheltering of women. Where specific reference is made to the individual shelters, I will use the terms 'refuge' and 'transition house'.

[2] The early shelters were founded on the principles of collaboration, co-operation and collectivism espousing non-hierarchical structures, equality and informality (Ahrens, 1980; Banks, Florence & Ruth, 1979; Beaudry, 1985; Cammock, 1994; Pizzey, 1974; Saville, 1982; Schechter, 1982; Synergy Applied Research, 1983).

[3] The inadequate funding of battered women's shelters remains a long and

protracted cause for concern for advocates and their organisations (Beaudry, 1985; Lynch, 1998; L. MacLeod, 1987; Snively, 1996).

[4] Co-optation is derived from resource mobilisation and feminist theory, where social movement organisations experience three phases of development, growth, decline and change (Broom, 1991; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Riger, 1994; Staggenborg, 1989).

[5] Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have generally been subject to change, as they have become more involved in providing government services at a fraction of the real costs of providing services (Higgins, 1997; Lipsky & Smith, 1989–90; Ministry of Social Policy, 2001; Smith, 1996; Woods, 1996). The change from grants to contracts led to the increase in service demands, and an increased reliance on government-based funding to meet these demands and maintain operations and administration of organisations.

[6] Ground-breaking research in 1980 identified that one in ten women in Canada had been battered by a partner (L. MacLeod, 1980). This research provided the impetus for the Canadian government to take violence against women in a familial setting seriously.

[7] A crown corporation of the federal government, established after WWII to assist returning servicemen to purchase housing in peacetime Canada.

[8] For my purposes in this paper, the Māori word 'kaupapa' may be translated as including elements of the English terms and phrases 'basic idea', 'rule', 'policy', 'convention', 'customs' and 'principles'.

[9] Health and Welfare Canada provided funding for the development of innovative rural services and programmes in the form of a demonstration grant.

[10] The NZCFA required the establishment of written procedures before they agreed to fund the refuge (Management Minutes, June 1994).

[11] Correspondence between the Nova Scotia Department of Social Services and the transition house, 21 February 1985, stated that funding was conditional on continuously meeting guidelines adopted by the government department.

[12] Children remained the responsibility of their mothers at all times. If women stayed out at night then children could be placed in the custody of the Children's Aid Society, a non-profit charitable agency funded by the Canadian government to provide a range of services including custodial care for children at risk.

[13] The *Ottawa Citizen* (12 June 1999) reported that Ginette Roger, a 42-year-old woman, was murdered by her husband, Michel Samson, whilst she was staying in a shelter in Saint-Jean-Sur- Richelieu, near Montreal, Quebec. 'Ms Roger was hit by seven bullets from a shotgun in front of stunned women and children in the shelter. Mr Samson is accused of breaking the shelter's door down, shooting Ms Roger and then trying to set fire to the building' (Mofina, 1999: A5).

[14] KOPPS – Key Operating Policy and Procedures.

[15] Refuge workers had been told that sometimes women brought partners to the refuge after hours to help them pack.

On being a refuge worker: Psycho-social impacts of advocacy

SHELLY HINDLE AND **MANDY MORGAN**

Women's refuges are critically important for ensuring the safety of women and children (Fanslow, 2001). Refuge workers provide a vital service that is an integral component of community responses to violence against women by partners or ex-partners. In Aotearoa/New Zealand the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR) has been in existence for twenty-five years, and forty-nine refuges belong to this organisation. Despite this long history and broad affiliation, little research on women's refuge has been conducted in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In Hand's 'Free from Abuse' research (2001), the participants were predominantly positive about their experiences with refuge. They commended refuge on its vigilance towards safety issues, knowledge of pertinent information for their clients, and willingness to spend a great deal of time in helping women, whether they are willing to leave the abusive relationship or not (Hand, 2001). This research speaks to the valuable work of refuge advocates in providing intervention services for women who are victimised. How this work impacts on the lives and experiences of the women who undertake it has been largely neglected in research.

It has recently been recognised that counsellors and therapists working with victims of trauma may be affected by secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma (Jenkins & Baird, 2002) as a result of repeated exposure to their clients' accounts of traumatic experiences. Vicarious trauma refers to an adaptive process of self-development that occurs in the context of recurrent exposure to accounts of trauma by clients. For counsellors working with sexual abuse clients, vicarious trauma can result in threats to personal safety and security, loss of a sense of personal control, feelings of helplessness, emotional withdrawal, increased anger and self-doubt (Trippany, Kress, Wilcoxon, 2004). Given that refuge workers are exposed to accounts of domestic violence on a daily basis, there is a potential for the advocates to experience increased emotional distress and the detrimental effects of vicarious trauma. Little research has been conducted on this possibility internationally. One study of

shelter workers in Israel (Dekel & Peled, 2000) did find high levels of work-related emotional disturbance among shelter staff. However, the impact of working to support and advocate for victimised women is poorly researched.

This study was designed to come to an understanding of the experiences of women working for refuges. Overall, we were pursuing an agenda of developing and refining violence intervention services, by listening to the problems and needs encountered by service providers. In this paper we explore the psycho-social dimensions of women's experiences of working as refuge advocates, so that we can identify detrimental impacts of providing advocacy and support services. We also explore the ways in which service providers negotiate and mitigate these negative impacts.

Background

The impetus for exploring the possibility that refuge advocacy work may involve detrimental effects for the women involved was based on our own experiences with refuge and refuge advocates, and our understanding of the extent and severity of domestic violence in this country.

Domestic violence has been called an epidemic (Hand, 2001) and is recognised by the New Zealand Ministry of Health as a serious concern for the health care sector (Fanslow, 2001). Any form of physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic and spiritual abuse, perpetrated by someone that the victim knows, can be understood as domestic violence. This understanding is supported by the NCIWR (Hann, 2001).

According to the New Zealand Safety Survey (Morris, 1997) 44 to 53 per cent of women have been victims of psychological abuse in the past twelve months. In the last year, 15 to 21 per cent of women have been subject to physical abuse. The lifetime prevalence rate for physical or sexual abuse is 15 to 35 per cent for women. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, a woman is killed every five weeks by her partner or ex-partner (NCIWR, 2001) and 40 per cent of homicides are a result of domestic dispute (Patrick, Foster & Tapper, 1997). Heise (cited in Robertson, 1999) estimated that 25 to 75 per cent of all women are battered at least once in their life. Over 400 women are hospitalised each year as a result of domestic violence (Hand, 2001). Emotional and psychological abuses such as social isolation,

degradation and economic deprivation also have a detrimental effect on women (Robertson, 1999). Anxiety, agitation, depression, enraged behaviour and increased drug and alcohol consumption are all symptoms of abuse. Femicide and suicide are linked with domestic violence (Gondolf, 1998).

It is within this context that the NCIWR refuges work towards a vision of 'Women and children [living] in violence free communities, Whanau, Hapu, Iwi living Te Tiriti o Waitangi' (Hann, 2001: 1). The four cornerstone stances of NCIWR, which are common to all affiliated refuges, are non-violence, parallel development for Māori and Pākehā, lesbian visibility, and feminism. Refuge provides many services for women and children. Such services include support advocacy, liaising with other service providers, one-on-one support for daily needs, legal and financial advice, assistance in moving house, medical assistance, emotional support and counselling, educational and support programmes, child care, and transport and community care (NCIWR, 2000). NCIWR also engages in political advocacy, seeking to raise societal awareness about domestic violence, lobbying at government level for legislative changes, providing policy advice to community agencies and the government, delivering training, and developing relationships and agreements with other agencies (Hann, 2001). During 2001 women's refuges assisted 7766 women and 9241 children (NCIWR, 2003). In three weeks over the Christmas and New Year period in 2004, 3172 women and children were assisted (NCIWR, 2005). Most women who work for refuges are volunteers. Only one-quarter of refuge advocates are paid for their work. A longitudinal study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2000 found that the true cost of services from women's refuge was over 17 million dollars. Volunteer work met over 70 per cent of this cost (NCIWR, 2001).

Methodology
Against this background, we interviewed nine women's refuge advocates from the Pākehā caucus about their experiences of working for refuge, their relationships with other services providers and their understanding of domestic violence and its impact on women who are abused.

Theoretically, we took a feminist standpoint approach to the women's accounts of their experience (Riger, 1992). Standpoint

theory traditionally asserts women's epistemic privilege in relation to their own experience (Riger, 1992; Wilkinson, 2001). While there has been considerable critique of standpoint epistemology on the grounds of its propensity to unify the category *woman* and generalise from some women's experiences and knowledge to all women, recent reformulations of standpoint epistemology question the conflation of gender identity and social location (Jackson, 1998). Accordingly, it is not women's identities *as women* that privilege their knowledge. Rather, women are privileged as knowers in relation to the meaning and significance of *their* specific experiences in particular social locations.

This recent attention to meaning and significance in women's knowledge of their experiences also challenges the view that women's *accounts* of their experience provide transparent access to experience itself. Instead, after Riessman (1993), we understand interview transcripts as consisting of narrative representations of experience. Riessman suggests that research participants select details and negotiate meaning within the context of an interview dialogue, and it is through this social process that they make coherent sense of their experience. From this point of view, narrative involves structuring and ordering experience so it makes sense of events and relationships in the social context of storytelling. The stories that we tell as narrative representations include our understanding, interpretation and moral evaluation of events (Riessman, 1993; Sarbin, 1986).

Through our own experiences working as and with advocates we were aware that refuge workers often convey their understanding of domestic violence issues, and their work, through stories. Thus our experiences enabled us to recognise a fit between Riessman's theoretical writing on narrative, and the everyday sense-making processes of women with whom we had worked. Narrative theory enabled us to use a methodology that examined the meaningfulness of experiences (Oliver, 1998) and respected the way participants used stories to answer interview questions (Mishler, 1999).

During the interviews, participants were asked questions but they were also free to talk about any issues that were relevant to them. Only the opening question was repeated in each interview because participants were encouraged to lead the discussion. Interview questions were designed to generate a conversation between the interviewer and the participant, and they were fifty minutes to two

hours in duration. Interviews were taped and all the tapes were transcribed by the interviewer (Shelly).

The first phase of our analysis involved identifying specific stories within the interview transcripts. These stories concerned the events and relationships that refuge advocates selected as significant. They were identified through their structural components, specifically their orientation, complicating action, evaluation, and resolution (Labov, 1972). Having identified these stories, the next stage of the analysis involved grouping these stories according to themes that were common among the participants' accounts of their experiences. This thematic analysis allowed us to identify shared experiences, interpretations and evaluations among the diversity of the individual stories.

In the broader project, four themes emerged from the collection of interview narratives: relationships with other service providers; working for Women's Refuge; being a refuge worker; and myths and misunderstandings about refuge. In the following analysis, we draw on the theme of being a refuge worker to represent the women advocates' accounts of the impact of domestic violence work on their lives and well-being. We use quotes from the transcripts to provide examples of the women's accounts in their own words. Not all the stories told in the interviews have been included in these examples. The quotes were chosen for their ability to convey the shared thematic approach of the story. Although we present this analytic narrative in two parts – the first concerned with identifying detrimental impacts, and the second with how the women mitigate against these negative impacts – this separation is a result of the analysis. In the interviews the women frequently told stories where negative impacts and mitigating strategies were intertwined.

Detrimental impacts

The refuge workers talked with Shelly about the emotional impact of their work on themselves and their lives. In relation to their personal feelings, they told stories of emotional distress that they experienced as a result of their work.

> But the effects of the work here, I think there are effects, definitely from working in this environment. I mean having to go in and do some of the things that we do is quite full on and I think some of the things that we are exposed to emotionally is pretty full on as well. (Anna)

Often this impact was connected most closely to the advocates' relationships with their children.

> When I first started I had a huge problem. It affected my sleep, every- thing and I used to say, like if the kids wanted something I was using work, saying 'you should see the wee girl who is in there at the moment, she's got none of this and none of this and here you are…' Yeah it did, it did affect me. (Mavis)

> I was just actually sitting in the van probably six weeks ago and I looked at [my daughter], because she comes to work with me as well and I was looking at her and this thing just dawned on me 'what memories will [she] have before she goes to school? Sitting in the bloody refuge van'. (Albry)

The stories of detrimental emotional impact of refuge work on the advocates' psychological well-being and their closest emotional relationships, with their children, suggest that secondary or vicarious trauma may well be affecting refuge workers here in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

As well as the emotional impact of the work, advocates spoke of detrimental effects on their family life. Because of the nature of the job, the advocates are often needed outside of work hours and have no warning of when they might be needed to attend a crisis.

> … there are often times that [my children] have to be with me because of refuge or they will be staying at mum's because I'm on call and I've had to go out or will be at a meeting till 11'oclock at night … anything that takes that much from me impacts on them as well. (Janet)

> … with other jobs you wouldn't get that, you would get all your public holidays without even thinking about it. You would get weekends with- out thinking about it. You'd go home from work and that's it, you don't think about it again till the morning. Quite often you take home your work in your head. Yeah, because I used to work in [another job] which I would never ever do again, but you know at least I know that when that bell went I was home. I didn't think about it again until I turned up again the next day. Whereas refuge is not like that. Yeah it owns you I suppose. Yeah it takes over your life and that's it. (Petra)

The refuge workers also told stories of other psycho-social relationships that were detrimentally affected by their advocacy work, including public relationships and relationships with friends

as well as family. They also spoke of aspects of the work itself that they found difficult and stressful.

Regarding public relationships, advocates talked about refuge often being understood as a feminist organisation, and feminism being commonly confounded with being 'anti-male' or connoting lesbianism. Advocates often find themselves being accused of 'man hating'. Often the terms 'man hating' and 'lesbian' are connected.

> ... the only thing that I've had in regards to refuge that's been negative is other people's remarks in regards to the whole 'oh, you're one of them' you know, 'you're a man-hating lesbian' or you know, that whole '[you think] all men are abusive'. (Nicole)

> I think there's still a huge perception of refuge workers as being man-hating lesbians. We've had the odd situation in family group conference here where I will offer the woman a place on our women's education programme and the man will say, 'I'm not having her working with you lezzies' and things like that. (Barbara)

> I get tired of being bad-mouthed as a man hater and those sorts of things. It's such nonsense, and I think it's frustrating ... it does hurt – It's not nice to be known as something unpleasant. (Barbara)

In a similar way, advocates also encounter comments that position them as 'home wreckers' because they support women who are leaving dangerous relationships. Refuge workers find this difficult and may even question whether it is morally right to help the women and children to leave.

> Like we are all just a pack of lesbians and go round breaking up families and all that crappy stuff that went on years ago, they're still holding on to a lot of that. (Mavis)

> We had an interesting one with the Appeal, when we were standing outside The Warehouse and a woman came past as I said 'would you like to make a donation to the Women's Refuge?' and she said 'it's disgusting what you women do'. (Anna)

> ... and they don't understand the extent of the work that we do either ... we are home wreckers ... You know, at first those comments used to affect me and I used to go home and think 'Am I really wrecking homes?' (Nicole)

Within these stories of public encounters, the frustration, hurt and questioning experienced as a consequence of comments made by others constitute an emotional cost for refuge workers. In more personal social relationships, refuge workers also face comments which portray working for refuge negatively or question some aspect of their advocacy work. Such negativity may leave the advocates feeling unappreciated, misunderstood and disconnected from others in their social worlds.

> And so it's quite unreal sometimes the comments that you have and the things that you hear from people you know. People will say 'what do you do' and I say 'I work for Women's Refuge' and they say ... 'why do you work for women's refuge because there isn't a problem, what do you guys do all day?' ... kind of thing – 'there's nothing to do, there's not really domestic violence, not an issue with it – not in this town'. (Anna)

> ...The first question that people ask me when I say that I work for refuge is 'how do you cope with the women who just keep going back?' (Nicole)

> Since I've worked in refuge I've let quite a few friends go because their views are too narrow, too racist, too homophobic that I've got nothing in common with them anymore. Yeah, my whole circle of friends apart from a few very close friends has changed quite considerably, because I just don't want to be around people who don't have the same world-view as me, around women particularly. (Leslie)

As well as these personal and public relationships that are affected by working for refuge, there were aspects of the job that were also emotionally detrimental. In particular, the advocates spoke of the difficulties of having so little funding for the organisation, receiving such low wages and having to work unpaid hours. They felt the work they do is unappreciated at times and often goes unnoticed. They also spoke of the frustrations of not being able to help women as much as they could if there were more money and resources available.

> I think it's harder. I get outraged at the lack of funding we get. I believe all refuge workers should be paid really well because the job they do is hard and its stressful and as you know, there are hours and hours that you do for nothing, all our roster work that we do at night, we do for free. (Barbara)

There is not enough money, but you know, in an ideal world there'd be lots of things that we could do, but realistically with budget cuts and all sorts of things going on, the reality is that women will continue to struggle and agencies like ours will continue to struggle. (Maxine)

We have this culture of making do. Refuge has this culture of making do. Always being the poor cousins. (Janet)

I think there are limitations in the service that we provide which comes back to a funding thing predominantly because I believe that I've seen a lot of women [advocates] come and go through refuge, they don't stay, like we lose a lot of talented women in refuge because they go on because they need to make a living. They have a real passion for the work but we can't afford to keep them. The work is really demanding – well it is in [location] any way – it's really demanding here – we all work as many volunteer hours as what we get paid for. And that's just the reality of providing the service that we do. But when you've got families to feed and things to do sometimes that's just not possible and people have to make decisions to move on. (Janet)

From the advocates' accounts of their experience, it was clear that being a refuge advocate does have detrimental emotional impacts on their well-being. Working with women in crisis is exhausting both physically and emotionally. Detrimental impacts are also felt in their closest relationships with children and others in their families, and with their friends. The stereotyping and misunderstanding they face in other public social relationships is also felt as a cost. This is compounded when having to deal with being underpaid and under-funded, and feeling that the clients cannot get all the help that they should because of a lack of resources. On top of these stressors are the complicated and difficult political debates and problems that occur in the public sphere. The advocates spoke of times when they felt like leaving their refuge work because of these issues, yet they have remained there for other reasons.

Mitigating negative impacts

All of the participants in our study told of strategies that they used to mitigate the negative impacts of refuge work, and to provide themselves with the ongoing resources to continue working to advocate for victimised women. These strategies included valuing

the personal and social changes that their work makes possible, keeping the political necessity of their work to the foreground of their experience, and valuing the commitment of refuges to work collectively. It is through understanding the work they do from this perspective that the advocates can find meaning and personal satisfaction in the job, and maintain their passion for working with women and children.

The refuge workers talked about what is important to them in their jobs, and the meaning that they get from the experience of working with women from abusive relationships. They recognised that they help women make significant positive changes in their lives and felt that this was the main purpose of their work. Because of their training, the advocates have specific views on domestic violence which they utilise daily in order to make their jobs meaningful. For instance, advocates feel that with every contact they have with their clients, they are empowering the women to make positive change by giving them the 'tools' for change – via education. The refuge workers are able to manage the disappointment of seeing a client return to an unsafe relationship by knowing that they have still helped her on some level by giving her further knowledge and awareness of domestic violence, and the reassurance that she does have options. By re-framing a situation that others would call a 'failure', the advocates can see the positive in the work they do every day. The ability to do this is taken from the specific analysis of domestic violence that is taught during refuge training.

> I've found working with the women is really good, even though we get a hell of a lot of disappointments and the few that do make the big change is really a big up. (Petra)

> This new [refuge worker] was saying … 'I just feel totally useless' … and I said 'you're not mate, because next time she [the client] will know that she has good support, you were there for her … and she will take that little bit with her'. (Albry)

> Well, the meaning I get from working at refuge is that we really do make a difference in peoples lives. (Lesley)

> A lot of times, you know, I think that I need to get out of this work because I'm so cynical and everything's so ugly, but then you'll be talking to a woman and you can actually see something click in her

head and that's what keeps you going, because that one person, that click in her head has made a change that's actually helped maybe three children. (Petra)

The refuge workers all told stories of how difficult the job can be in both a practical and an emotional sense. However, through their job they feel that they are fighting against patriarchy and oppression which gives them a sense of collective understanding and camaraderie with other women's rights advocates, and allows them to feel as if they are fighting for the 'greater good' or the 'bigger picture'. It is this interpretation of the political necessity of their experience at refuge that enables the refuge workers to continue to do their jobs, despite being discouraged on a daily basis.

What stops me from leaving? The bigger picture I suppose. Probably because I have a granddaughter, I want to know that there's going to be something there for her if she gets herself in a situation where she's going to need refuge and yeah, it's for the future as well. I realised that I'm here for, you know, all the women, but I'm there for the future women, you know, for my granddaughter to make sure that – to get as much education so that she doesn't be like her mother was, in bad relationships. You know, violent relationships, not bad relationships – violent relationships. (Petra)

… And one of the realisations for me when we got talking about the oppression of women is that my daughters still experience the same thing that I did and I know that, and the feeling of that just really hit me that they are going to experience the same stuff that I did. And it was like 'alrighty, take a deep breath, here we go again' like, that pulled me right back focused into why I was doing this – you know when you get busy and tired and you can't pay the bills and all that stuff's going on and it's just 'fuck it!'? That's the stuff that pulls me back in. Like, 'right. What else could I be doing that would be better than this?' And those are the things that I never would have been exposed to outside of refuge. (Janet)

The refuge workers spoke of how working collectively empowers them and gives them the freedom to follow their own process and make decisions informed by actual experience gained from working with their clients. Working together collectively is understood as a continuation of the political project that underlies refuge advocacy.

I like our management structure – for want of a better word – I like working as a collective. I find it incredibly frustrating at times (laughs) and really struggle with how could we do that better, cause I don't believe we do it as well as we could. But I believe it's a vision, it's something we can keep working towards. And if we get it right we will be stunning and amazing … Oppression's what keeps women in an unsafe place, so as long as we have a management structure where someone will tell us what's good for us, someone will always be oppressed. (Janet)

From these stories it appears that the feminist political agenda of social change, combined with advocating for specific women within the context of a collective, provided some protection for the advocates from the detrimental social and emotional impact of their work. It was also apparent from the women's stories that refuge training was a central and highly-valued dimension of the experiences that supported the women's ongoing commitment to difficult and distressing work. All refuge advocates complete a training package before joining a collective. This consists of a minimum of fifty hours of training on various issues to do with domestic violence and refuge. Through their stories, the advocates identified a process that seems to be started by their training and which alters the workers' sense of self and who they are in the world.

I know that forever, no matter whatever I do, that the feminism will be the biggest thing for me. Whether I carry on doing it within refuge or wherever I go, that will be the one that I take with me. (Petra)

I learn something every time too [in the women's programmes], like it's a great place for me as well. Personally, I learn something every time I'm in there, about myself or professional growth, everything, it's just a great place to be. (Janet)

I'd say it's a greater understanding, it's clearer, my thinking around D[omestic] V[iolence] is clearer, even the societal stuff too, the understanding, the linking of all the oppressions together. I always had this – as a young person I was always just angry – I was just really fucked off with everything – and I couldn't figure out why, it was just 'life isn't fair' and 'fuck it!' and I had no way of pinning it on to anything. So I had always individually been a strong woman and advocated for women's rights, and thought I could do anything I wanted to. But then getting some formal education through [polytechnic] and coming into refuge, sort of gave me a base – gave some clarity to that picture. Yeah

– it enabled me to be able to think, 'oh, this is why it is, this is why I feel this way or think this way is because of this, this and this'. (Janet)

The advocates found that the training they received from refuge, alongside the experience of working for this agency, has helped them in a practical sense in other areas of their lives. It has supported them in dealing with other stressors in life more easily, and provided the strength to be able to change for the better.

> I've got a better awareness of domestic violence now that I work for refuge obviously, so in areas of my own life, I'm able to identify the warning signs where I hadn't been able to before and had found myself in relationships and situations with friends or whoever, that were really abusive in many ways. And I'm unfortunately the type of person that opens arms and lets anybody in, regardless, and gets shat on and shat on shat on. Used to. Until – refuge has given me … it's given me the confidence to stand up for who I am and to fight for my rights and not take bullshit from anybody or abuse. And it's given me the confidence to challenge anyone I come across whether they be friend or not, in regards to the way that they treat other people, or sexist comments or racist comments that they make that I will more than happily stand up and challenge them about their behaviour, when its inappropriate, or even if its like, you know, sexist jokes or whatever, I'm more than happy to – and now I have the confidence to be able to stand up and say 'look' and have my say. So I mean in a lot of areas of my life it has changed. (Nicole)

These changes mean that advocates often understand that their work is not just a job, because so much of their sense of self and identity is interconnected with refuge and advocacy. The values that advocates become committed to stay with them twenty-four hours of the day.

> Oh I think refuge becomes … well for me it's a life-long commitment, it's not just a job, people say 'why are you still working in refuge?' I think I'll be here – it'll be my job forever. Yeah it does affect you. (Leslie)

> … they all know I work for refuge and just treat me that way. And that way, it's just 'don't fuck with her' its basically their attitude, because I'll go there. They know I won't put up with shit, and I'll say what I think and do whatever I want to do. So they've put me into a place that that's who I am, like its become part on my identity in the way people interact with me. Some people find it intimidating, but that's their stuff not mine. (Janet)

I'm more into educating my children you know – on values and also on the dangers. You know my 13-year-old watched Once Were Warriors the other night with me and one that I was not quite sure if he should watch, but he wanted to watch, and actually there's a change in his attitude towards the work that I do. And why I do the work that I do. And he also commented on the suicide of the young girl who the uncle raped – the daughter. He asked me if I would do that if I was raped and I said 'no,' and he said 'why?' and I said that I would want to tell the world what kind of a man that man was, so that he wouldn't do it to anyone else. And he said, 'Oh, well that's a good thing.' And this is a 13-year-old boy, you know, who has been quite sheltered. (Maxine)

The refuge advocates made it clear that they feel their job is more difficult than other jobs because of the pervasive nature of the work. They felt that you could not go through the refuge training without it impacting on who you are as a person, but could not do the job without having made these changes to yourself. The training enables the advocates to do the job in a way that is safe for them because it mitigates the detrimental effects of the work. They all felt that being a refuge worker was not just about doing the job, but about choosing a life path, one that is based around a political struggle to end violence against women.

Conclusion

In summary, it is apparent, from these refuge advocates' stories of their experiences, that the potential for detrimental psychological and social effects of working to support women who have been victimised is often realised. Emotional distress and disturbances to personal, social and public relationships are all apparent in the women's accounts. However, these detrimental effects are mitigated by positive experiences that support the women's ongoing work. Refuge advocacy is personally and politically meaningful, and empowering other women through education and support is particularly satisfying for the women who took part in this study. They also experienced the collective organisation of refuge as a support in their work. The feminist social change agenda that guides refuge provides a political context in which the meaningfulness of refuge work sustains refuge workers, through the frustrations and difficulties of the job. More personally, the opportunities that refuge work provides for self-care, training and transforming their identities made the work 'more than

a job', and something closer to a life-changing commitment.

In their study of the prevention of vicarious trauma through organisational change, Bell, Kulkarmi and Dalton (2003) recommended that addressing workload issues, group support, self-care and education would assist in mitigating the detrimental effects of working with trauma clients. Our research suggests that women's refuges in the National Collective of Independent Refuges in Aotearoa/New Zealand already provide an organisational context in which these issues are addressed – with perhaps the exception of workload. While there is clearly a need for further research, and the development of strategies to facilitate the well-being of refuge workers, the issue of funding for refuge services remains problematic in the field of interventions to support women experiencing victimisation in their homes.

SHELLY HINDLE works as a Clinical Psychologist for Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Service, MidCentral Health, Palmerston North. Her research interests focus on women's issues, especially the effects of trauma and abuse. This article is based on her Master's thesis which explored the experiences of Women's Refuge advocates and their views on service provision.

MANDY MORGAN is a senior lecturer in critical psychology at Massey University in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Her theoretical interests generally focus on the relationship between feminism, poststructuralism and psychology. She has also been facilitating the The Domestic Violence Interventions and Services Research Programme which is concerned with the ways in which service and intervention providers understand their experiences. The research programme aims to identify possible solutions to problems of service delivery by systematic analysis of discourses mobilised by service providers to explain domestic violence within the context of their work.

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Community responsibility for freedom from abuse

BETSAN MARTIN[1] (PhD) AND JENNIFER HAND[2] (PhD)

Introduction

Abuse has far-reaching implications for societal health. Our concern here is with refinement of discourse on domestic violence to extend responsibility for prevention, effective interventions and sustainable change from individual women to society as a whole. The responsibility of individual women to take action, and the need for institutional interventions, is acknowledged but communities and families are the fulcrum. The abuse of women is an economic, social, educational, developmental and human rights problem, and solutions must accordingly address these areas (Huda, 2005). This is a complex undertaking, requiring the committed collaboration of a wide range of stakeholders. This is unlikely to happen without a rebalancing of responsibility among individuals, professional and institutional policies and services and the general community.

Violence against women, men and children is socially and economically costly (Snively, 1994; Heise, Pitanguy & Germain, 1994). It contributes to personal and social fragmentation and to debility. This debility is borne personally, in families and by the sectors with a mandate to respond, such as health professionals, police, lawyers, the courts, schools and refuges. Yet the problem of violence has been constructed as an individual problem, in the sense that it takes place between individuals and is therefore amenable to individual and private solution. While there is wide scope for research on abuse, our concern in this paper is with the refinement of discourse on domestic violence – so that responsibility is widened to include society as a whole.

A woman living with abuse is, in fact, part of a wider situation in need of remedy. We view social responsibility as a large umbrella, with the fabric consisting of community knowledge and action. The spokes comprise legislation and the review of legal procedures; the implementation of statutory responsibilities emanating from the law, such as the Domestic Violence Act 1995; public policy and family violence prevention strategies such as those embodied in the

Ministry of Social Development *Te Rito* Report (2001); and public service regulations and procedures. Other spokes, such as institutional commitment to eliminating violence, include: public health, primary care and other health professional sectors; housing policy; the field of psychology and counselling professionals; social work; religious institutions; and the criminal justice system. When all the supporting spokes are in position, the social fabric will be able do its work of safeguarding society from violence.

The concept of responsibility, here identified as community responsibility, is used to enhance awareness of a relational approach to violence, and to value a sense of obligation for each other's well-being and safety in the public arena. Collective responsibility often has to be encouraged in a context where safety can be perceived as private and individual. Our interest in collective responsibility is an outcome of research that addresses violence against women and is linked to a wider international project to disseminate a Charter for Human Responsibility. In this project, 'human responsibility' has been identified as complementary to human rights, because for every right, such as a right to safety, there is a corresponding responsibility for ensuring the implementation of such entitlements (Charter for Human Responsibility, 2004). Shifting the emphasis from rights to responsibilities engages more collaborative undertakings to embed movements for social justice in communities, and in this way contributes to social cohesion and to environmentally sustainable ways of life.

Dynamics of abuse and escape

The argument for community responsibility is supported by illustrations from a study of Māori, Pacific Island and Pākehā women, who had become free from abuse, which was carried out in Auckland, New Zealand between 1997 and 2002 (Hand *et al*, 2002). The study drew on the stories of forty-two women. One of the major themes that emerged was a progressive and gradual movement out of abuse, that was achieved in very varied timeframes. Citations here are drawn from the stories of some of these women. All the names cited are pseudonyms. Appropriate responses from people in women's communities were profoundly significant in enabling women to be free from abuse, and the research concluded that a consistent and sustained campaign to promote community responsibility was needed

to eliminate violence against women, to make restitution and to ensure that women and their children are reconnected to society.

Women in the study embarked on a process out of abuse, a process of accumulating insight, knowledge and information, a gathering of resources. Although the details of leaving an abusive partner varied, the process was characterised by seemingly repetitive and elastic movements away from and towards the abusive partner. Women can be observed as being in a vortex of violence but they are at the same time acquiring resources that eventually enable their release (Hand & Martin, 2005). Responses to violence can be interpreted metaphorically, as part of a complex energy system: a force inwards, that entraps and holds, and another force that pushes a woman outwards – away. The two intertwined forces create trauma and turbulence through which both *in* or *out* seem untenable and risky. Understanding this pattern as a process of experience and evaluation by women, which ultimately led to movement away from abuse, and locating responsibility for assisting women in that process with 'communities', provided a more complete account of the provisions required for women to move away from violence and of the dynamics of becoming free from abuse.

The power of communities to enhance safety

Community attitudes to violence were key influences on whether women were held in violent situations or shifted outward. 'Community' here refers to social circles and networks beyond women's immediate family. Community includes neighbours, schools, health agencies, housing agencies, social services, WINZ, employers and colleagues. In daily life, these varied faces of community translate into encounters with people with whom women interact as part of their family and working lives. The influence of such people could be in either direction: in support of the woman's safety or in collusion with violence. Other factors which affected women's direction were income and housing, the way in which statutory requirements were implemented through the police and the effects of the criminal justice system – they could facilitate safety or be further hurdles in the process.

Attitudes of and actions taken by family, friends, community and professionals were pivotal in supporting women in the assessment of the danger of abuse to themselves and to children, or in implicitly condoning violence. Police, lawyers, therapists and counsellors, health

professionals and those carrying out the responsibilities of the criminal justice system all influenced women's decisions for their own, and their children's, safety.

If parents, siblings and friends know that a woman is being pulled back towards abuse, and that she can be assisted towards a movement outward, their response can be informed, unpressured, patient and persistent. Rather than take the common stance of 'why doesn't she leave?', they are able to appreciate the to and fro and spiralling process concurrent with building her resources to act for the safety of herself and her children. Where friends and family and other closely connected people work on the 'cycle' principle, they are working with a false ideology of women's implication in repetitive abuse, and are in ignorance of the psychological damage that accompanies abuse and of the accumulation of resolve and knowledge needed for women to reach safety (Hand *et al*, 2002).

It was the sensitivity of a friend at work who approached Larissa, and suggested she seek safety at a refuge, that helped her act in hope of change.

> She approached me and said 'Look, things aren't right.' I hadn't told anyone, but she picked it up. And she took me to the women's refuge that day. I had to tell my boss at work. She was stunned….So I went to a refuge and they sent me along to a lawyer. So I lodged a protection order. And my boss at work offered for me to go to her place to stay. So I packed up what I needed for the baby and myself….I thought, you know, this protection order is going to wake him up, and just turn everything around and it's got to stop. It's my only way, it is my cry for help.

Larissa's husband pleaded with her to return, with promises to 'work this stuff out', until he prevailed, but as soon as she returned he went 'crazy' at her again, pressuring her to remove the protection orders. He caused a commotion with shouting and when she tried to leave he dragged her back into the house and forced his hand into her mouth to stop her talking. Neighbours rang the police.

For Larissa, being approached by a friend, and being believed by her colleagues, functioned like a pin at the base of a fan enabling the ribs to open and the fabric of support to appear. Support and practical intervention were pivotal for her, opening the way to informal services as well as formal services such as support groups and counsellors, refuges, police, lawyers, doctors and WINZ.

Another woman, Holly, would have been better assisted out of abuse if her family had been supportive, if she had stayed in her home, if she had received medical and psychological help and if her children and been assured of safety. Instead she was forced out of the house and was subjected to further trauma from ongoing court processes and custody disputes, and was at risk from further attacks from a man who was still free in the community. The irony of the family's increasing poverty, while both she and her husband were receiving State income support, was not lost on this woman who was trained as an accountant. In addition she noted the lack of information and co-ordination of help from services:

> There's not one person you can go to and say 'What are my options, what can I do?' … You just need help at this stage. But there isn't anything. There's so many things I didn't realise that I was entitled to … I had to wait three weeks. Um, they said it is just tough.

She received some ACC counselling and help from a school public health nurse, and saw her personal doctor frequently. She described her friends as 'really nice' and 'like a family'. Her mother and her sister were not emotionally supportive and offered no practical help when she was ill and in the process of separation. She said, 'My mother thinks I made my bed and I should lie in it. My sister lives in a white house with a white picket fence and…she doesn't understand'.

The sympathy expressed by her family and some individuals for her husband, and his ability to use the courts and counselling services in contrast with her negative experiences with services such as the bank and the real estate agent, reinforced her feeling that 'it's a man's world'. She said, 'That is so unfair. They look at him as though he is a good guy'.

Holly's experience demonstrated a mixture of well-exercised community and statutory responsibility, along with failures in support from her community, as well as from her mother and sister, and from some professionals such as the psychologist. There was also a failure of coherence. She was subjected to protracted and aggressive legal processes by her husband and had to leave her house after separation, in contrast with the sympathetic treatment and minimal censure her husband received regarding his violence. Having to leave her home and stop work were both traumas, acting as mechanisms of isolation

and degradation. In a situation of clear community and institutional strategies for safety, these burdens could be avoided.

The significance of communities for safety

Many women described Court processes after separation which protracted their trauma. Ruth, a resourceful, articulate woman who had separated to become free from abuse, was still entangled in her husband's unrelenting Court processes to change custody agreements.

> I'm not helpless and I try and get myself sorted out but it seems like you go one step forward and then two steps back sometimes. You just get something sorted out and then another whopping great bill comes in or something breaks down or something happens ...

The stories of Ruth and Holly illustrate how isolation and disconnection from communities are likely experiences for a woman in the murky processes that require her to keep evaluating her situation, and can drive her into an abyss of inward psychological and emotional disturbance and disassociation (Kirkwood, 1993; Herman, 2001). Isolation acts as a barrier to the information-gathering process necessary to free women from abuse. If left to themselves, women and children are at risk of extended damage from an abusive man.

Breaking the ties in women's relational life is a strategy to cut women off from support and draw them into the world-view of the violent man: 'The more frightened a woman is the more she is tempted to cling to the one relationship that is permitted, the relationship with the perpetrator' (Herman, 2001: 81). Unhealthy identification with a man and psychological withdrawal are symptoms which may be hard to identify, though they are more likely to be recognised by those who know a woman personally. Because of her isolation from the wider community, it is likely that a woman will speak about violence to her family or friends first. Family and friends, therefore, are key contacts for information and feedback that can lead to decisions to bring safety. Liz Kelly (1996) and Judith Herman (2001) both emphasise this aspect of abuse, and illustrate the effects on women where 'the creation of isolation is a deliberate strategy, intended to separate the woman or child being abused from information, advice and emotional support' (Kelly, 1996: 79).

Given the strategies of isolation common to abusers, family, friends and community contacts have key responsibilities, both directly and indirectly, to bring women into contact with agencies with formal or statutory responsibilities. Information on help and safety measures is a key to unlocking the doors that lead to safety. Appreciation of the likely effect of isolation is imperative in any strategies for the prevention of and intervention in violence against women. Correspondingly, knowledge of the vital role and responsibility of people in every layer of women's communities – from family and neighbours to formal agencies – is equally important.

Reconnection with community: Freeing women and society from abuse

Reconnection with community and building healthy relationships is a bridge to restorative measures. Kelly (1996) and Herman (2001) approach rebuilding community generically, in a context of patriarchal violence. However community connection is to be understood as culturally specific, with corresponding language to link women with cultural discourses. The ways to friendships and services needs to be carefully thought through with suggestions that are sensitive to the context of the woman. The *Free from Abuse* study highlighted that for women of indigenous cultures, community may be primarily formed from genealogical ties, and extended family relationships and responsibilities, which may be damaged by an abusive relationship. A major theme in the Māori research was enabling women to rebuild their lives through reconnection with whakapapa or genealogically-based relationships (Rauwhero, in Hand *et al*, 2002). Correspondingly, in contemplating separation, women from more collectively-oriented cultures may face not only leaving a man, but leaving their primary networks with extended family.

Every point of contact for a woman who is abused is a potential opportunity either to enhance safety or sanction the use of violence. Knowledge of the ways in which entrapment works is vital information for coming out of the vortex of abuse. People in everyday social settings can effect movement by enlarging the scope of resources for safety. Barbara's friend took her to refuge. Puriri's Dad took her to Social Welfare. Puataua's Dad took her to a lawyer. A receptionist at an anger management agency gave Suzy practical advice. These experiences demonstrate that assistance came from encounters in

women's everyday communities – from people who responded with care and responsibility, formed an interface between the confusion of abuse and the sanity of freedom and provided pathways to safety through contact with agencies or professionals. Informed individuals are threads in the fabric of communities which, in turn, weave the larger institutional systems of society as a whole.

Conclusion

A wide, ecological, co-ordinated approach is imperative to support women in living without abuse. There are numerous ways to assist women and these opportunities need to be grasped wherever they arise, so that 'attempts to create meaningful change for individuals and broader social change need to embrace all the locations in which toleration persists and where the potential for resistance exists' (Kelly, 1996: 69).

The forces which hold women back can be the same forces which, when intensified over time, empower women to leave, or flee. So a process of being held in and pivoted out must be taken into account when supporting women. In addition, spreading knowledge of the dynamics of violence widely in the community, and directing action at perpetrators of violence, will improve women's capacity to interpret their situation in a proactive and woman-affirming light.

The *Free From Abuse* study similarly found the key mechanisms identified by Kelly (1996), Heise et al (1992) and Mullender (1996) which draw women back into abuse:

- Psychological, emotional and physical injury
- Negative attitudes of family and friends
- Isolation and damage to relational life
- Systems tolerant of and minimizing abuse
- Fear of further danger
- Financial considerations.

Systems and support which enhance community responsibility for safety include:

- Wide understanding of dynamics of abuse
- Sanctions directed at perpetrators of violence
- Safety outweighing financial barriers and housing uncertainties
- Well-being of children

- Public agencies and systems committed to elimination of violence against women and the implementation of effective policies
- Informed community support
- Building supportive community relationships
- Cultural integrity in services
- Appreciation of entrapment and women's processes
- Public information and education
- Symbolic as well as material enhancement of the rights to life and safety of women and children.

We need to ensure the provision of education programmes that go hand in hand with public health and social policy strategies, to restrain and minimise subjection to abuse. The shift towards community responsibility is necessary, to lift the burden of responsibility from individual women. Actions through a whole-of-government approach, local and regional authorities, NGOs, communities and individuals, professional organisations and government agencies need to be orchestrated as a fully-engaged strategy to free society from the costly effects of violence. Just as communities bear the weight of violence (Snively, 1994), they need to build the capacity to counteract the fragmentation that is an outcome of violence.

The framework of responsibility links in with local and international initiatives for social and environmental health. This shift from rights to responsibilities has the potential to engage collaboration aimed at ensuring that knowledge and social justice are embedded in communities and contribute to social cohesion. The shift towards community responsibility is a strategy of rebalancing, so that both women and men can flourish.

JENNIFER HAND (PhD) AND BETSAN MARTIN (PhD) *worked together on a four-year study of the supports and hindrances to women becoming free from abuse. This study developed a premise of cultural integrity in research, working through cultural issues in research that arose in the project which consisted of a larger general stream and Māori and Pacific Islands streams. In New Zealand a methodology has been developed in which Māori, Pacific Islands and 'general/western' researchers work from cultural frameworks and with participants from corresponding cultures where possible. Along with respect for different*

cultural world-views, the feminist analysis was the methodology for analysis of data.

Alongside her position with Auckland Regional Public Health, Jennifer teaches in the School of Population Health at the University of Auckland. She has a special interest in health promotion and social policy, and engages in a wide range of research and advisory fields, including evaluation and social impact assessment. At present she is contributing to a research project on gambling in the Tongan community in Auckland.

Betsan held a Claude McCarthy Fellowship in 'Building Ethical Relations with Indigenous Communities'. She has an enduring pleasure in philosophy, and facilitates adult and community education courses – in particular on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and ecological education. As a member of an international committee for a Charter for Human Responsibility, Betsan is co-ordinating initiatives in New Zealand, the Pacific and Australia.

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Notes

[1] betsan@paradise.net.nz.

[2] Auckland Regional Public Health Service: jhand@adhb.govt.nz.

Ecofeminism and cross-cultural analysis

SARAH COMBELLICK-BIDNEY

Broadly speaking, ecofeminism is a theory about the connections between patterns of oppression in human societies and gendered relationships with the natural environment. Uniting the agendas of environmentalism and feminism, ecofeminism seeks to work against systematic subordination by raising awareness of unjust practices and advocating non-violent, ecologically sustainable and non-exploitative social restructuring. To this end, ecofeminists transgress the boundaries between academic speech and practical action by associating themselves with a range of social movements, particularly those that push for ecological and women's rights.

I am a young feminist scholar based in the United States, but I deliberately sought a non-North American, regionally-oriented publication for this piece. As I deepened my study of ecofeminism, I discovered the movement's emphasis on forging paths between distant communities. In keeping with this theme, I offer my findings to an audience across the globe, in an effort to both test and strengthen the relevance of ecofeminism for the world feminist community.

In her 1992 essay on ecofeminism, the New Zealand feminist writer Christine Dann began to explore why the term ecofeminist 'would not be a preferred label for most of the strong and influential women ... with a feminist awareness, and currently active in the environmental movement'.[1] This fact is the Achilles' heel of ecofeminism: even though many feminists and environmentalists, notably Greens, seem to share the goals of ecofeminism, they do not self-identify as ecofeminists. I feel that Dann speaks for many feminists in objecting to the assumption associated with ecofeminism that women are more 'natural' than men – equating women with nature is in fact seen by many as a reactionary or anti-feminist assertion, and it is at the heart of the debate about ecofeminism. However, Dann herself acknowledges that ecofeminism no longer bases itself on woman–nature connection in its original form, and that figures in the movement are now doing work to address this question. Then, why do so many Greens and environmental feminists,

Dann included, still avoid the ecofeminist label? In this paper, I seek to explore this question by looking at the strengths and weaknesses of ecofeminism with attention toward its rise as a popular approach for cross-cultural feminist analysis. I look at the major questions debated within ecofeminism, the reasons for its increasing appeal in exploring cases across cultures and some of the main outstanding challenges to ecofeminist cross-cultural research.

The emergence of ecofeminism

The ecofeminist conception of social movements emphasises their ever-changing and strategic nature, and their capacity to shape strategic political identities for those who participate.[2] Casting the ecofeminist movement itself in this light means seeing the history of the theory in tandem with the changing political contexts of ecofeminist action. While the disagreements that occurred within the movement might suggest an insurmountable gap between past and current perspectives, consideration of context reveals a coherent trajectory in ecofeminist thought.

Ironically, the beginnings of ecofeminism are to be found among the very movements that later became notorious for painting a simplistic and 'essentialist' picture of women. However, I believe that modern readings of early ecofeminists reveal more about modern ecofeminism than they do about its origins. The term 'ecofeminism' first gained salience among women in the anti-nuclear and women's rights movements of the late 1970s and 1980s, when 'third wave' feminism had not yet begun. Feminists worked on legitimising a pluralist notion of women's lifestyles and struggling for women's rights in the workplace, and feminism on the whole was centred on the concept of 'woman power'. Ecofeminists positioned themselves accordingly as champions of women's political power to protect the natural environment.

The 'ecofeminist' label was adopted by feminists wishing to link women's political struggles with environmental issues. A 1980 conference called 'Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the 1980s' is widely acknowledged as the event that began the ecofeminist movement.[3] The statement of the Women and Life conference best suggests the tone of ecofeminism at its nascent stage:

> We enter the eighties with alarm for the future of our planet. The forces that control our society threaten our very existence with nuclear weapons and power plants, toxic wastes and genetic engineering ... We see

connections between the exploitation and brutalisation of the earth and her people and the physical, economic and psychological violence that women face every day. We want to understand and try to overcome the historical divisions of race, poverty, class, age and sexual preference that have kept women apart and politically powerless. Our concerns are many, but understanding the problems that confront us helps us imagine how we would like to live.[4]

Some of the organisers of the conference, most notably Ynestra King, became prominent figures in the ecofeminist movement. Ecofeminism grew in popularity with the anti-nuclear movement, and its theoretical parameters broadened dramatically. Adherents to ecofeminism claimed to be following in the traditions of such thinkers as Rachel Carson, Donna Haraway and Alice Walker, all of whom are variously defined in the literature as inspiring the ecofeminist movement.[5]

However, the focus of the movement changed significantly during the 1980s with the growth of woman-based spirituality. While some women argued for a more spiritually-based movement, others saw the spiritual focus as discrediting the political and scholarly work of ecofeminists. As one author notes in a recent reflection on ecofeminism, this debate distracted many strong feminist theorists, and threatened to derail the entire movement:

> Feminist environmentalism has become bogged down in tiresome 'pro-/anti-ecofeminism' reprises: is the earth our mother? Are women closer to nature than men? Should they be? Is ecofeminism even feminist (or is it a complicity with the patriarchy that would inexorably bind women to nature, to the disadvantage of both)? We have interrogated these questions to the point of exhaustion, and well past the point of diminishing intellectual and political returns.[6]

However, those same internecine debates continue to divide would-be ecofeminists, so that some have been led to question the usefulness of a label that has become so charged with apolitical questions of feminist spirituality. While Sturgeon and many others continue to defend the term ecofeminism as denoting a 'political intervention' of environmentalism into feminism and vice versa, I agree with Seager that the semantics should take backstage to the substantive political perspective. (For that reason, I choose to subsume all feminist environmentalisms under the heading 'ecofeminism' for the purposes of this essay.)

Since the statement of the Women and Life on Earth conference was written, ecofeminism has become a much wider and more global movement than its founders could have envisioned. Two major expansions have been in terms of theoretical and geographical territory.

As ecofeminism grew as a movement, theorists worked on defining an overarching project that could be actively expressed through engaged work in any field. Joy Anderton's *Towards an Ecofeminist Praxis Within Social Work Pedagogy* demonstrates possibilities for embodying ecofeminist principles in the classroom, the ultimate 'practical' setting of the academy, where knowledge is defined and promulgated. Citing abundant evidence that ongoing well-being in human communities is dependent on sustainable interaction with the environment, Anderton argues that social workers should be taught to integrate notions of social and environmental sustainability. She uses ecofeminist praxis to bring this new, integrated notion of sustainability to her teaching, and 'starting where experience is known and felt' (179) invites students to work together on problems of unsustainability in their own communities. Disclosing her own teaching experiences then serves as a way to explore how ecofeminist praxis might be enacted, the obstacles that might arise and the doors that might be opened with respect to real people in the context of real communities. Anderton issues a challenge to 'teachers, researchers, and activists' to be the vehicles for similarly advancing ecofeminist praxis in their own work (189).

Anderton's challenge has been echoed by others in fields such as anthropology, sociology and political theory. Prominent examples include Ariel Salleh, an advocate of an integrative ecofeminist approach to science and political economy, and Catriona Sandilands, who argues in *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy* that ecofeminism should be understood to advocate radical democratic pluralism. Karen Warren may be the most prominent figure in the move toward a more inclusive ecofeminist framework, with a constant stream of books and articles articulating, revising and expanding the parameters of ecofeminism.[7]

The second development was a rapid increase in cross-cultural applications of ecofeminism. Vandana Shiva has been a catalyst in this process, claiming the approach as the only viable form of feminism for

Third World and minority communities that face environmental crisis. Her book *Staying Alive* brought out into the open how environmental exploitation was affecting rural women in the form of seed patents and destruction of native crops, deeply affecting the ecofeminist movement and, with it, the western feminist consciousness. Shiva's recent work *Water Wars* similarly discusses issues of resource privatisation that have become prime concerns for ecofeminists. Shiva's work has inspired such thinkers as Starhawk, who decries the silencing of indigenous perspectives in the United States, and Maria Mies, who studies women in Third World political movements.

It is difficult to generalise about what distinguishes theorists who espouse the 'ecofeminist' label from those who do not, especially with regard to feminist analysis of cross-cultural ecological issues. I have found that the most significant determinant is date of publication – later works are more likely to be called 'ecofeminist', where earlier ones might have used some other term denoting a feminist or environmental focus. Taking this variation into account, feminism-environmentalism has had an illustrious history in cross-cultural analysis. Such volumes as *Feminist Political Ecology: Global issues and local experiences*, along with more recent ones such as *Ecofeminism and globalization*[8] attest to the breadth of ecofeminist cross-cultural studies that bring together diverse perspectives on issues that affect women and communities across the globe.

In the big picture, ecofeminism may still be in its formative stage. Its recent growth has left some areas well articulated and defined, while other areas undergo continuous change in light of ongoing debates about what should be the nature, role and implications of an ecofeminist perspective. One of the most swiftly-evolving debates surrounds the question of the woman–nature connection, as a core element of ecofeminist theory that has far-reaching implications for cross-cultural analysis.

The woman–nature connection

The ecofeminist premise that the subordination of women and nature are connected yields many questions for those who are feminist and environmentally-minded. And, while ecofeminist discourse has refined the original premise to a great extent, a few major questions are still generating intense debate among ecofeminists: What is the relationship between women and the environment? Are women

'closer' to nature than are men? If so, is this a natural or socially constructed connection? If not, how might this assumption be destructive to the goals of feminism?

The increase of cross-cultural research has pushed these questions into the forefront of the ecofeminist movement, as theorists have encountered the significant limitations of the original premise about the woman–nature connection. Scholars and activists have raised concerns about the political implications associating women so closely with nature, and have questioned the accuracy and empirical basis for ecofeminist concepts of women.

First, is the assumption that women are closer to nature even a feminist idea? Many feminists have said No. In fact, the proposition of a connection between women and nature has raised a red flag for feminists since ecofeminism began. 'Such a reduction essentialises women and domesticates nature as if gender were a natural product and as if nature were describable in terms of particular cultural conventions of femininity', writes Sandilands.[9] As feminists moved beyond 'essentialist' notions of women, many ecofeminists still dwelt on the idea of 'naturalness' as an inherent female virtue.

However, few feminists recognise how the debate has divided ecofeminism itself. In her book on the strategy of the ecofeminist movement, Sturgeon locates the woman–nature assumption as the origin of the split between feminist activists and scholars. While scholars critiqued the essentialism of this early feminist concept, activists continued to use it as a forceful tool for uniting women. The most prominent figures in the ecofeminist movement, including Sandilands, Sturgeon, Salleh, Warren, Lorentzen, and Eaton, have all deliberately called for ecofeminists to abandon simplistic and essentialist assumptions about the inherent 'nature' of women, and to scrutinise the social, cultural and economic factors that tie women's fate to that of nature in any particular context. In an article published last year, Sturgeon points to the failure of feminists to recognise this change within ecofeminism, and their tendency to use ecofeminism as a 'straw woman' to critique the essentialist and non-feminist concepts actually used in development literature and elsewhere.[10]

But, while it is important to note that the debate over the woman–nature connection has changed the face of ecofeminism in recent years, the insistence of some kind of link between women and natural

environments still serves as the basis for ecofeminist analysis. Even if we suppose the woman–nature connection to be socialised, or the result of a political process of marginalisation, does it hold true for women everywhere?

The central ecofeminist assumption that women are more ecologically aware than men, and that they are subordinated by a culture that is inherently 'male', does not apply to situations in which women and men are equally connected to nature, or where 'culture' is intimately associated with women. Lois Ann Lorentzen, an ecofeminist social ethicist herself, critiques the ecofeminist claim that the domination of women must be somehow connected to the domination of nature. Using the example of a traditional society in Chiapas, Mexico, Lorentzen notes that 'empirically, it may be difficult to sustain the notion of indigenous and Third World women's greater care for nature vis-à-vis men'.[11] Celia Nyamweru supports this critique in her case study of forest usage in Kenya. Nyamweru refutes the work of Shiva and Maria Mies, and shows how Kenyan women actually feel less connected to forests, where men do not allow them to join high-status environmental protection initiatives.[12] A study by Bina Agarwal reveals similar findings among Indian communities.[13]

Individual ecofeminists have responded to these critiques in a number of ways, but the movement as a whole has not yet demonstrated a widespread willingness to engage counter-evidence. However, while some ecofeminists have stayed far from the debate, I believe ecofeminists cannot help being affected by the discourse. Those who respond, therefore, and especially those who engage in rigorous empirical research, are mapping the future course of the movement to a great extent.

Rochelau, Lorentzen, Sturgeon and many other feminists respond to the counter-evidence by emphasising the need to consider both the context of macro-political change and the content of women's own voices in conducting empirical research. Gendered power shifts take place, as demonstrated in the work of Nyamweru and Agarwal, in reaction to larger changes in the political environment. This, in turn, affects men's and women's interactions with nature. Lorentzen herself concludes that ecofeminism has the flexibility to re-evaluate its own formulations of the woman–nature connection without throwing out the concept of linked social and environmental power dynamics.

A universal ecofeminist ethic?

Taken together, the ecofeminist canon seems to form a loose collection of observations, rather than a cohesive ethic. But 'social ethics' has been one of the most active branches of ecofeminism in the last few years. So, is there an ecofeminist ethic?

Chris J. Cuomo proposes an ecofeminist ethical perspective in her book *An Ethic of Flourishing*.[14] In her view, ecofeminism is breaking new philosophical ground by emphasising the value of life in every form. While founding theories of western civilisation have advocated various views of progress, individual liberty and human nature, ecofeminism begins philosophical inquiry with a completely different premise: that human society's role in its environment is of paramount importance. Ecofeminist philosophy thus looks at the micro, and also the macro, level of human behaviour, to evaluate the dynamics that affect the well-being of all entities that play a part in human life. Ecofeminism is inherently concerned with equality, because 'flourishing' and well-being are valued above all.

However, it is unclear from Cuomo's work how we might approach the more difficult questions that are raised by such an ethic. If ecofeminism simultaneously takes issue with domination of disenfranchised classes, ethnic groups, the natural environment and non-human animals, conflicts are bound to arise when such interests are countervailing. How broadly should theories of domination that were originally identified in feminism be extended to apply to other entities? How will an ecofeminist ethic respond to such conflicts? (That is, to quote the feminist theorist Ann Phillips, 'Which equalities matter?')

Karen Warren has approached these questions with numerous books and articles on the ethical guidelines for ecofeminist practice and theory. In her book *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A western perspective on what it is and why it matters,* Warren defines the 'boundary conditions' of the ecofeminist ethic. Most useful when thinking about cross-cultural analysis in particular are: an attention to the many voices that exist in any one society, and an active attempt to bring out their plurality and differences; a demonstrated opposition to the logic of domination on all levels and with regard to all entities; a regard for context – that of history, politics, culture and individual circumstance; and an openness to potential differences, but also potential commonalities, of those entities who experience domination.[15]

Wishing to clarify the cohesive ethic of the movement beyond its functional deployment in individual studies, certain theorists have assiduously dedicated themselves to articulating it. But the project is clearly a continuing one. As Gaard remarks in her case study, 'Although ecofeminism is internally, with ecofeminists working in North America, South America, Asia, Europe, and Australia, [developing this project], ecofeminists have yet to develop theory for a cross-cultural ecofeminist ethics'.[16]

Overall, we can regard ecofeminism as containing an evolving or potential ethic. Warren's boundary conditions touch on many of the questions that arise when considering ecofeminism's history of cross-cultural analysis. In the next section, I discuss them in more detail, and consider why ecofeminism might be a useful approach for cross-cultural analysis in particular.

Ecofeminism and cross-cultural analysis

In recent years, feminist and environmental scholars alike have begun to push for broader consideration of cross-cultural issues within their disciplines. Hence the rise in the popularity of ecofeminism, a subfield of both that has long been preoccupied with a concern for cross-cultural analysis. Characteristics of ecofeminist theory, as well as the questions that have historically concerned ecofeminist theorists, make it a natural vehicle for examining cases across cultures.

Ecofeminism's focus on the interaction of power structures in determining resource usage have characterised it as a natural theoretical tool for analysing cases involving environmental action, women, the poor and other disenfranchised groups affected by globalisation.

Another argument for the use of ecofeminism in cross-cultural analysis invokes its singular history as a movement-led theory. Historically focused on social movements as a means of raising awareness of environmental and women's issues, ecofeminists have developed methodologies for analysing a broad range of social movements within local contexts.

In particular, ecofeminists have insisted on the concept of cultural embeddedness in the analysis of case studies. While the 'contextualist' nature of ecofeminism has been seen as prohibitive of general ethical prescriptions, Warren regards this contextualism as a defining element of what she sees as a universal ecofeminist ethic: '... a contextualized

ethic is a shift from a monist focus on absolute rights and rules to a pluralist focus on various values, principles, narrative constructions and forms of intelligence ... For ecofeminist ethicists, *how* a moral agent is in relationship to another – and not simply the nature of the agent or 'other', or the rights, duties and rules that apply to the agent or 'other' – is of central significance.[17]

In emphasising context, ecofeminism ultimately advocates casuistry, or the weighting of the particular history and circumstances in which a person finds her/himself. In other words, circumstances comprise an entire ethical background for understanding a specific situation. Greta Gaard, an avowed vegetarian ecofeminist, takes this principle into account in her article 'Tools for a Cross-cultural Feminist Ethics: Exploring ethical contexts and contents in the Makah Whale Hunt'. She considers the cultural context of the hunting practices of the Makah and other traditional societies, concluding that 'subsistence carnivorism' is not within the jurisdiction of the ecofeminist 'advocacy for contextual moral vegetarianism'.[18] This casuist practice can be understood to be in opposition to the manner in which many mainstream feminists and environmentalists have advocated progressive politics – that is, without much attention to context.

Lastly, ecofeminism has been a primary locus of the feminist debate about the appropriate relationship between White, western activists and scholars and those who identify as non-White or Third World. The work of Gaard, Mellor and Sturgeon is exemplary of the ecofeminist concern with situating theory and object within political contexts, and thus defining and redefining one's role as a member of a particular movement.[19] Given the ecofeminist preoccupation with societies' relationship to their environment, ecofeminists have offered some of the most penetrating critiques of how social movements relate to each other. Members of privileged classes and regions who identify as ecofeminists are centrally implicated in the struggle to create a discourse that preserves the integrity of collectivities and actively addresses power differentials.

However, even while ecofeminists work within these guidelines, problems and disagreements emerge about how broadly a primarily western feminist ethic of any kind can be (or should be) applied to cases across cultures. How can a movement that is primarily White, western and middle-class associate itself so enthusiastically with

those who are most oppressed? For many, there is much work to be done before ecofeminists can responsibly engage with others' experiences. Aotearoa/New Zealand postcolonial theorist Donna Matahaere-Atariki has called for resistance movements such as feminism to 'take account of how particular representations and voices are produced', and specifically to be critical of the dynamics that produce our privileged views of 'subaltern' groups.[20]

With such critiques in mind, how can ecofeminist ideas be meaningful cross-culturally and locally? What is the role of White American ecofeminists in global politics? What can we learn from the mistakes of past feminists? Such questions are taking centre stage as ecofeminists attempt to apply their theory to diverse cases.

Problems with cross-cultural applications of ecofeminism

Many contemporary observers within and without the ecofeminist movement note the problems with applying traditional ecofeminist ethics to all societies and communities. Critics accuse ecofeminism of manifesting the same kind of self-righteousness and United States-centrism that are attributed to feminism and environmentalism: simplistic valuation of communities and social groups, impractical and dogmatic insistence on a certain lifestyle, and a disregard for the cultural embeddedness of social practices. For example, some ecofeminists' demand for vegetarianism is derided as impractical or impossible in many parts of the world. But, the most cutting critiques extend much farther than the tactics of particular figures in the movement, to question the fundamental assumptions of ecofeminist theory.

In *Ecofeminist Natures,* Sturgeon looks at the array of problems that have accompanied ecofeminism's shift of focus to cross-cultural questions. Looking at two classic ecofeminist works, *Healing the Wounds: The promise of ecofeminism* (Judith Plant, 1989) and *Reweaving the World: The emergence of ecofeminism* (Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein, 1990), she investigates a variety of pitfalls that characterise modern ecofeminism. The pitfalls are a product of ecofeminists' desire to work against oppressive, racist and reductionist notions of nature and women on the one hand, and to claim the practices of non-White, 'native' and Third World-identified women as inherently ecofeminist – and to associate themselves with such women – on the other. Sturgeon gets to the heart of the dilemma

experienced by mainstream western ecofeminists who are trying to create a cross-cultural ecofeminism from a privileged social location. Her observations can be summed up in the following list:

1. Ecofeminists identify Native American, African American and Third World women's movements as ecofeminist, often against the intentions and wishes of many individual members of such movements.

2. They are not careful about how they characterise these movements. Ecofeminism has a history of exoticising and idealising 'other' women's movements. By explicitly contrasting 'other' women's movements with a perceived dominant culture, and implicitly associating them *with each other,* ecofeminists actually reduce these women to political tools for western ecofeminist theory.

3. Ecofeminists create problematic dichotomies when they idealise the movements of non-western women and women of colour: the non-western is dogmatically valued above the western, ironically devaluing the movements of Native American and African American, as well as White, women in the United States.

4. Women are seen as a uniform and single-minded group that is necessarily environmental, erasing important differences in identity, background, social role and motivation of individual movements and women themselves.

5. Men are cast as an even more uniform and faceless group, which ironically obscures the power relations of a given community. Poor men and indigenous men are divorced from the movements in which they participate alongside women, and are absurdly misidentified as oppressors of all women.

6. As in feminism more generally, praising a universal female identify as inherently ecofeminist implies an essentialist notion of women's 'nature', which actually functions to normalise the conditions they face. It is important to recognise how women's actions might be socialised or socially necessary responses to the circumstances in which they find themselves.

The last item on the list is symptomatic of the perennial difficulty faced by progressive affluent western scholars in discussing the struggles of poor communities. With regard to the place given to

Native Americans by ecofeminists, Sturgeon says, 'Their poverty is implicitly seen as part of their "sustainable" ecological practices, equal to the "ecosystem" cultures of rural women in the Third World, rather than the result of the specific interaction between racism and classism in the United States'.[21] I believe this critique can be applied to all ecofeminist studies of poor women's movements.

Beyond the issues of cultural insensitivity and instrumentalisation discussed by Sturgeon, I would add a problem that has been raised by critics of ecofeminism, and that has surfaced in my own research of cross-cultural case studies: while ecofeminists consider the many 'voices' in a particular society, they often fail at confronting the substantive disagreements between these voices and the political ramifications of a particular compromise. Ecofeminist case studies exhibit an alarming reluctance to consider the most difficult ethical questions that arise when environmental interests are at odds with the needs of a social group. In my view, the integrity of an ecofeminist ethic is damaged by such reluctance. In Gaard's analysis of the Makah whale hunt controversy, a clear conflict is demonstrated between environmental principles and the request of the Makah to resume their traditional practice of whale hunting. However, a 'happy medium' is found that seems to perfectly satisfy the twin requirements of environmental and feminist ethics: resurrecting the voice of a minority of tribal elders, many of them women, who disagreed with the resumption of the whale hunt. In this particular case, the point is valid (women elders argue that 'shooting a whale with a machine gun is not a spiritual way' and that 'no one in this village has a direct relationship with the whale any longer'),[22] but Gaard ignores the obvious questions that occur to anyone familiar with environmental movements in traditional societies. What if the elders condoned the hunt? What about the conflict that often exists between the commitment to environmental sustainability and respect for community? Ecofeminists often stay away from this difficult question, for fear of violating one of their core precepts. But such conflicts drastically affect the lives of human communities and ecosystems worldwide, and should be at the heart of an ecofeminist discourse.

These objections, some raised by ecofeminists and some raised by their critics, are profoundly affecting ecofeminist theory as it struggles for visibility in academic and activist circles. In the next

section, I look to ecofeminist analyses of local cases to delve deeper into the on-going dialogue, using specific cases to illustrate the various ways that ecofeminists are changing their strategies to apply an ecofeminist ethic cross-culturally, with particular attention to how they are responding to the difficulties discussed above.

A new cross-cultural ecofeminist ethic?

Sturgeon addresses the dangers and promises of cross-cultural ecofeminism in her analysis of constructions of gender and race in transnational environmental politics. She suggests that, while it is important to critique the degree of 'essentialism' of particular ecofeminist concepts, those concepts should also be evaluated as political strategies for articulating a common cause. Rhetoric should define 'a network, a space for debate, a mechanism … for intervention',[23] as the only means through which enduring political action is possible. This argument has gained saliency within feminism, where more and more women are emphasising political agency over the 'identity politics' and 'politics of difference' that took centre stage in the 1980s and 1990s.

The following studies illustrate how ecofeminists are adapting their approach to cross-cultural case studies to incorporate some of the new ideas about the usefulness, as well as the limitations, of original ecofeminist premises. While some may be seen to rely on essentialisms, they also deconstruct theories, and in some cases, radically refine ecofeminist concepts.

I would like to return to Gaard's study of the Makah to frame the discussion of the viability of ecofeminism across cultures. In a typical ecofeminist analysis of a local environmental issue, Gaard uses the Makah whale hunting controversy as a testing-ground for ecofeminist precepts. Her approach is to go beyond a surface analysis of the two main points of view in the controversy – that of the Makah tribespeople and that of the White environmentalists – to explore the dynamics of the debate within each camp. Using the ecofeminist principle of considering all voices, she uncovers the story of the dissenting elders, a silenced minority within Makah society who believe that modern conditions would compromise the traditional meanings of whale hunting.

While Gaard's chosen case does not reflect the true extent of the conflict between environmental and social needs in traditional

communities, she does take an implicit stance about the applicability of ecofeminist goals across cultures: 'feminists and ecofeminists are right to be concerned when it appears that our support of marginalised cultures requires the subordination of feminist and ecofeminist goals'.[24] But, to use Gaard's own insightful terminology here, the ethical context (native, non-dominant cultural traditions) too often suggests a different course of action than a consideration of the ethical content (the resumption of an environmentally damaging practice). What is an appropriate ecofeminist response to these kinds of conflicts?

Simplistic assumptions about women and nature can obscure the experiences of women and undermine their struggle to be heard. In this sense, the woman–nature connection is not just a philosophical issue – it is a practical concern. If we are to retain the concept that social and environmental exploitation are linked, we must respond to this exploitation and seek to end it. What should our response be? How will our response affect the natural world and the lives of women?

Jessica Hutchings considers these questions in her work on natural resource development in Aotearoa. For her, the only way to ensure that Māori women benefit from State decisions is for them to participate in decision-making. Specifically, the Resource Management Act of 1991 was a step in the right direction, but one that will only nominally benefit Māori people and the environment, since the Māori are rarely involved in implementation. Recognising that Māori women are culturally, socially and economically tied to the environment, she suggests a new model for implementing the Resource Management Act in consultation with Māori women.

Hutchings' work is an appropriately radical step toward benefiting Māori women, primarily because it calls for recognising how Māori women are different from other women and men in Aotearoa. However, she insufficiently touches on how to recognise differences *among* Māori women. Some individuals in Native American societies welcome the 'development' of their natural resources for outside profit, while others oppose it. If it is obviously erroneous to assume that any one opinion is more indigenous than the next, how can we begin to hear and understand this diversity? More importantly, how can multiple voices be translated into policy?

While Hutchings, like Gaard, does not explore questions of indigenous diversity to their fullest potential, her notion of

consultation offers a partial answer to these and other questions surrounding the woman–nature connection. Consultation is a step toward privileging the discourse of Māori women, and toward validating every disagreement, consensus, and deliberation that might arise among them. Consultation with a group allows members of that group to raise their voices and bring their concerns to the fore. The problems inherent in the woman–nature connection can only be resolved through privileging those voices that have previously been left out of the discourse. Such an approach may also offer mainstream academic feminists a crucial but too often overlooked way of expressing their support for the oppressed: to step back and listen to them. Many feminists already claim to be doing this, but there are clear examples of the failure of (White) academic feminism to incorporate indigenous women's concerns. Genetic modification is such a concern, as Hutchings explains in her article 'Mana Wahine me Ta Raweke Ira: Māori Feminist Thought and Genetic Modification'. It is now clear that mana wahine (Māori feminist discourse) has already produced a body of work rejecting genetic modification (GM) research and practice, but scientists and academics in Aotearoa continue to ignore the mana wahine critique. In doing so, they assist the neo-colonial imposition of GM in Aotearoa. Citing work already being done with GM on land supposedly under jurisdiction of the Māori, Hutchings makes a strong case that the work of Māori women is not fully recognised as legitimate. Women's voices are needed not only to fulfil the Treaty of Waitangi, but also to uphold the principles of tino rangatiratanga (Māori sovereignty).

Another major trajectory of ecofeminist research has focused on uncovering the dynamics of humans' relationship with nature within particular communities, and what factors lead them to engage in ecologically sustainable practices versus unsustainable ones. A volume entitled *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experiences* (Rochelau *et al.*, 1996) includes a study of women's small scale enterprises in three island communities in the Philippines. The article is a good illustration of how ecofeminist research can be receptive to the ways in which women adapt, both sustainably and unsustainably, and what drives that adaptation. Interestingly, the label 'ecofeminist' is avoided in the title of the anthology, but used repeatedly in the introduction as well as in many of the articles within.

In Philippine Islands communities, women are socialised to engage in small, home-based projects to generate supplemental income, so their work is decentralised, self-directed, and highly variable on their day-to-day circumstances. The study examined the contextual factors that influenced women to switch to sustainable or unsustainable methods in their work, and found that women rely heavily on social connections that are not always associated with ecological sustainability. 'A person's desire not to risk social exchange linkages sometimes counteracts intentions to practice or move toward more sustainable national resource management'.[25] This happens as a result of macro-political changes – the growth of globalised industry and technology, changes in gender roles, increasing reliance on cash instead of barter and greater disparities of wealth – that are changing 'women's work' in these small communities. While traditional home-based enterprises rely on social capital in sustainable ways – fishing, raising local hogs on local crops, farming the *romblon* plant from which they make sleeping mats – changes in the equilibrium of the local economy are leading women to fall back on social capital as a lifeline in ways that become unsustainable. Land is becoming more scarce with the growth of factories and export agriculture, and women exploit the dwindling resources in any way they can. Sharing and joint ownership of land are resulting in over-use and environmental degradation.

Shields *et al.* thus support ecofeminist notions of women's agency and community worth, without relying on the assumption that women must be environmentalists. The study concludes that:

> community sustainability is based in part on the resilience of a community to respond to changes in conditions in the larger environment, and this in turn depends on the resources available to a community: financial and manufactured capital; human capital; natural resource capital; and social capital ... a viable plan for development must address the social relationships embedded within structural constraints.[26]

This kind of integrated analysis demonstrates how women's survival is connected, but not equated, with ecological survival.

The above example shows how far recent ecofeminist studies have gone in exploring women's socialised roles, and how context, not 'nature', brings them closer to environmental issues. But, even when the women–nature connection is seen as socialised, the implication

remains that women will feel close to their environment and work to protect it. A significant new trend in ecofeminism is dismantling the assumption that women's social role will always make them environmentalists.

In addition to the earlier mentioned work by Agarwal and Nyamweru, the attempt to debunk simplistic notions of the woman–nature connection is well represented by a study by Maureen Reed on forestry-related activism among women in Vancouver. Observing that women often engage in work and activism that actively goes *against* environmental interests, Reed was led to study women who act in support of conventional forestry in Northern Vancouver. Remarking that 'these "other" women do not sit easily within current notions about women, activism and environmental protection',[27] she argues for a thorough reformulation of the supposed woman–nature connection based on research of real communities that are usually ignored by feminists. She interviews women who support the timber industry, and concludes that their political action is a product of social and material considerations no different from those faced by 'environmental' women. Her mission is to 'use the concept of embeddedness to illustrate multiplicity, consistencies and contradictions in women's positions and activities'[28] in support of the timber industry. Her research is a much-needed call for theoretical complexity in a field that enjoys relative insulation from counter-evidence, and is a timely reminder that recognition of the multiplicity of indigenous voices is important for both feminist and environmental goals.

Conclusion: A note on intellectual and academic viability
While ecofeminism is cited as the basis for many popular social movements, the theory has faced an uphill battle in the academic sphere. In her book *Ecofeminism as Politics*, Ariel Salleh traces ecofeminism's history within the social sciences, and argues that its insistence on the political power of all disenfranchised groups was not in line with institutionalised social science approaches. However, I would argue that many theories of social power, including feminist, post-colonial and post-modernist theories, have faced similar challenges, and have even had some success in advancing a somewhat similar view of collective action. Undoubtedly, all these theories continue to face difficulty in the social sciences because they have a 'social agenda'. Why has ecofeminism not legitimised itself to

the extent of its related theories? Sturgeon argues that the failure of ecofeminism to be accepted into academic circles cannot be attributed to any particular theoretical content, but rather the lack of rigorous critique within and among ecofeminists, that is in turn exacerbated by the relative conservatism of academic disciplines.[29]

I mention the question of academic legitimacy in order to underline the importance of broad salience and relevance in contemporary ecofeminism. The historical regard for practice as well as theory, for action as well as debate, implicates ecofeminists themselves as vehicles for the legitimisation of their theory in a wide variety of contexts. For ecofeminists to have a broad impact on the way we think about society, ecofeminism must be seen as legitimate in the academy.

In some ways, ecofeminism manifests the same sorts of debates that are raging within all fields of social science: expanding to new territory versus questioning assumptions; creating theoretical cohesion while recognising the integrity of empirical data. But, the particular questions that are raised by ecofeminists are unlike those that characterise other movements and theories, in that they demonstrate a struggle to determine the politically-charged relationships among different voices and interests, both inside and outside the movement. Drawing on this characteristic of ecofeminism, and examining some of the major challenges within the ecofeminist movement, I have tried to show how ecofeminists are defining themselves and their goals with increasing emphasis on cross-cultural analysis.

Current cross-cultural theorists are attempting to redefine ecofeminism as a potentially global movement that will effect political change within the widely varying contexts of communities worldwide. Their ability to achieve meaningful success is contingent on two things: their dedication to the task of focusing on relevance for people who live in all human societies; and the willingness of growing numbers of diversely-situated people to engage in the project, through critique, scholarship, and activism.

SARAH COMBELLICK-BIDNEY *is a PhD student in the Department of Political Science at Indiana University, United States. She studies political theory and comparative politics, with an emphasis on the post-communist sphere. She recently travelled to Mongolia to study the settlement of nomadic communities.*

Notes

[1] Dann, C. (1992). Ecofeminism, women and nature'. In Du Plessis (ed.), *Feminist voices: Women's Studies texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 341. Compare with the work of Aotearoa/New Zealand authors who embrace the term 'ecofeminist', e.g. Hutchings, J.V. (1997). *A Māori ecofeminist model for resource management consultation*, Master of Arts (Applied) Thesis in Environmental Studies, Victoria University of Wellington; Anderton, J.M. (2000). *Towards an ecofeminist praxis within social work pedagogy*, PhD Thesis in Social Work, Victoria University of Wellington. For further discussion of the relevance of ecofeminist ideas in Aotearoa/New Zealand, see Hutchings, J.V. (2005). Mana Wahine me Te Raweke Ira: Māori feminist thought and genetic modification. *Women's Studies Journal*, 19:1, 47–65.

[2] Sturgeon, N. (1997). *Ecofeminist natures: Race, gender, feminist theory and political action*. London: Routledge, 5.

[3] Sturgeon, 1997: 26; Seager, J. (2003). Rachel Carson died of breast cancer: The coming of age of feminist environmentalism. *Signs*, vol. 28, no. 3, 950.

[4] Women and life on earth 1979, quoted in Seager, 948.

[5] Sturgeon: 24.

[6] Seager: 949.

[7] See, among others, (2000). *A western perspective on what it is and why it matters*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield; (1996). *Ecological feminist philosophies*. Indiana: Indiana University Press; Warren, K. (1997). *Ecofeminism: Women, culture, nature* (with Erkal, N.). Indiana University Press; Zimmerman (2004). *Environmental philosophy: From animal rights to radical ecology* (with Caldicott, Sessions, Flaver and Clark). Prentice-Hall.

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[15] Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 99–100.

[16] Gaard, G. (2001). Tools for a cross-cultural feminist ethics: Exploring ethnical contexts and contents in the Makah Whale Hunt, Part I. *Hypatia*, Winter, 2.

[17] Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy,* 99.

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[20] See Sturgeon's Ecofeminist natures and transnational environmental politics. In *Ecofeminism and globalization*; and Mellor, M. (2002). Ecofeminist economics: Women, work, and the environment. *Women and Environments International Magazine,* 30 April, 7.

[21] Sturgeon, 128.

[22] Gaard, G. (2001). Tools for a cross-cultural feminist ethics: Exploring ethnical contexts and contents in the Makah Whale Hunt, Part IV. *Hypatia*, 4.

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[24] Gaard, Part IV, 4.

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[26] Shields, 157.

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[29] Sturgeon, 6.

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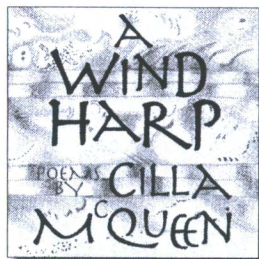
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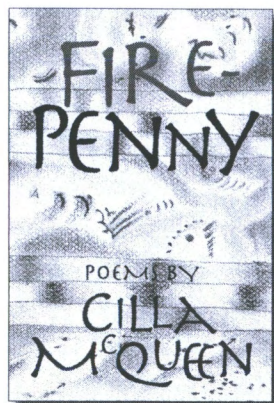
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Contemporary feminist perspectives on activism, globalisation and development: A review essay

THE GLOBAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: ORIGINS, ISSUES AND STRATEGIES
Peggy Antrobus
London and New York: Zed Books, 2004, 204 pages
ISBN 1-84277-017-9 paperback

FEMINIST POLITICS, ACTIVISM AND VISION: LOCAL AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES
Luciana Ricciutelli, Angela Miles, Margaret H. McFadden (eds)
Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc., 2004, 392 pages
ISBN 0-96812-908-0 paperback

FEMINIST FUTURES: RE-IMAGINING WOMEN, CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT
Kum-Kum Bhavnani, John Foran and Priya Kurian (eds)
London and New York: Zed Books, 2003, 309 pages
ISBN 1-84277-029-2 paperback

This is a review essay of three complementary works that share common themes of women's activism, neo-liberalism and global capitalism, and feminist visions for an alternative future. After providing a brief overview of each of the books, I will examine two key themes that recur throughout: the nature of a global women's movement, and alternative strategies for development.

The global women's movement: Origins, issues and strategies provides a brief and accessible introduction to the global women's movement from a macro perspective. Aimed at 'a new generation of activists', it sketches the origins and trajectory of the movement in order to answer the question: 'is there a global women's movement, and what might it contribute, through the overarching social movement for global justice, to finding alternative paths that would make "another world" possible?' (p 1).

The book concentrates on selected key events within the global

arena that have influenced the women's movement, in particular the activities of the United Nations – the Development Decade of the 1960s–70s, International Women's Year 1975, the 1975–85 Decade for Women and the global conferences of the 1990s – and the rise and impact of neo-liberal macro-economic policies for development. Antrobus is well placed to chart the course of this movement. As someone personally involved in many of the events that led to the construction of the women's movement worldwide, Antrobus is open about who she is, where she comes from, and how she came to her current political position. Her chronological narrative of events is interspersed with refreshingly honest personal reflections that describe her own growth as a feminist and activist within the movement.

This book is not a complete history of the global women's movement, but instead provides an overview of its growth, strategies, current challenges and future directions, foregrounding the role and contribution of women from the economic South in global and international forums. At just over 200 pages in length, and characterised by an engaging and reflective writing style, it would make a good introductory text for those undertaking women's studies or development studies, or for those interested in learning more about the global women's movement.

Feminist politics, activism and vision: Local and global challenges brings together a collection of essays from a range of feminist activists and scholars working for change at local, national and global levels worldwide. The volume features case studies from Africa, Bangladesh, India, Israel, Latin America, Norway, Pakistan, Singapore, South Korea and the United States that encompass a range of diverse but clearly-connected issues facing feminists today. In particular, it presents the current context of neo-liberal globalisation, the connections between grassroots activism and global forms of feminist organising, and challenges to feminist practice and vision.

The essays comprise scholarly and policy-oriented analyses, personal accounts and 'think pieces' and the volume concludes with a piece of creative writing by Alda Facio. Entitled 'The empire strikes back but finds feminism invincible', it assumes the perspective of a history professor lecturing on patriarchy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in 'one of the least civilised planets of the universe' (p 373). This essay is simultaneously depressing – because of the matter-of-fact way in which Facio details years of misogyny,

patriarchy and violence against women – and hopeful, in that the feminist revolution triumphs in the end. Facio draws together many of the thematic threads of this volume in her account of the practical and strategic ways in which feminists met their political challenges, highlighting the importance of women's shared experiences, friendship and solidarity, and of valuing those aspects of human life that aren't necessarily measured in economic terms.

Feminist futures: Re-imagining women, culture and development is a volume that represents an effort to promote a 'new paradigm for development studies, one that puts women at its centre, culture on a par with political economy, and keeps a focus on critical practices, pedagogies and movements for social justice' (p 2). This paradigm is based on a Women, Culture and Development (WCD) approach that links feminist studies, cultural studies and development/Third World studies in a new inter-disciplinary framework for analysing and understanding the integration of development in Third World women's lives (p 123). A WCD approach highlights the deficiencies of measuring development in terms of economic growth; demonstrates that a focus on lived experiences can reveal much about women's struggles against inequalities at local and global levels; and asserts that strategies for development work best when political economy and culture 'are seen as operating simultaneously and in synchrony' (p 15).

The editors of this volume cast a wide net when selecting articles that embody a WCD approach, and it features contributions from an impressive variety of fields, disciplines and geographical areas. As befits an inter-disciplinary volume, the style of writing encompasses formal and informal essays, narratives and conversations, personal reflections and autobiographical notes. I found the cluster of essays that use literary texts and cinema to engage with issues relevant to development studies particularly inspiring, as was the uncommon focus on the role of emotions and well-being in the development process.

The volume is divided into three parts – Sexuality and the gendered body; Environment, technology, science; and The cultural politics of representation – which are accompanied by a series of 'visions' articles. While a lot of thought has obviously gone into the structure of the volume, I sometimes failed to see why certain essays were categorised under particular parts. A discussion of the reasons

for these categorisations, either in the introduction to the volume or in introductory chapters preceding each part, would have enhanced this book.

A number of contributors to *Feminist politics, activism and vision* and *Feminist futures* depict strategies of resistance (to domination, oppression, violence – the list goes on) utilised by various women's movements around the world, and their achievements at local, national and global levels. The first theme I want to discuss concerns the kind of changes a global women's movement could bring about. While debates about whether there is, in fact, a global women's movement raise some important issues, here I focus on what kind of role such a movement or network might play in creating a more equitable and socially-just future.

Antrobus (for whom there *is* a global women's movement) aligns it with other social movements that struggle for social justice and work to resist neo-liberal globalisation, but succeeds more in detailing the many challenges and dilemmas it currently faces than in conveying how it contributes to anti-globalisation movements. Jan Jindy Pettman's essay in *Feminist politics, activism and vision* is a good companion to Antrobus's work, providing a more formal interrogation of the same subject matter. Writing of 'transnational feminists' rather than a global women's movement, Pettman convincingly shows how and why transnational feminists are well positioned to theorise, strategise, and mobilise against religious and economic fundamentalisms and gendered globalisation.

In *Feminist politics, activism and vision*, Devaki Jain describes the shortcomings of the global women's movement, including its increasingly conventional functions and its reactionary mode. However, Jain goes on to state that:

> The women's movement is the most effective, possibly the least tarnished, and the most united across divides of political and social forces in the world today. Hence, it is the ideal vehicle to spearhead transformation and poverty eradication (p 71).

To do so, Jain suggests identifying one or two issues affecting poor women around the world that the global women's movement could rally behind:

> The idea is to move from mobilizing as a negotiating agency, to mobilizing as a social force that commands attention by its very presence

and ethics. Unified action always has a better chance of winning than twenty scattered activities (p 72).

A common thread through all of the works is the connection between women's lived experiences – the stuff of daily life – and neo-liberal macro-economic policies. The different authors in these books use vastly different methods and approaches in analysing the links between the local and the global, but the overwhelming message is that capitalist globalisation and development policies, based primarily on economic growth, have not, and will not, improve women's lives. This is not a new concept. What is new, for me, is the emphasis placed on concepts such as care and love, hopes and dreams in seeking alternative models of development.

Arlie Russell Hochschild's article, 'Love and gold' (in *Feminist politics, activism and vision*) is worth discussing at length. Hochschild provides a unique analysis of the connections between women's daily experiences and global capitalism by focusing on an element not normally considered an indicator of development – care. Discussing the movement of women workers from the economic South to the North, she identifies a global care chain:

> ... a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring. A typical global care chain might work something like this: an older daughter from a poor family in a Third World country cares for her siblings (the first link in the chain) while her mother works as a nanny caring for the children of a nanny migrating to a First World country (the second link) who, in turn, cares for the child of a family in a rich country (the final link). Each kind of chain expresses an invisible ecology of care, one care worker depending on another and so on (p 35).

Hochschild elegantly shows how global capitalist forces impact upon care workers in both First and Third World countries. Resources (in this case, love and care) are extracted from the Third World and exported to the First due to economic pressures, resulting in a 'care drain' in families in poorer countries as children grow up without the love of their mothers – 'globalisation's pound of flesh' (p 41). Her argument for a more humane form of development that raises the value of caring work is hard to fault.

Light Carruyo's contribution to *Feminist futures* shows why it is important to 'put what people think about, care about and dream

about first, and work from there' (p 200) in the discourse and practice of development. 'Dreams and process in development theory and practice' should be compulsory reading for development agencies that work on a supply-side model to construct and implement projects for which there may not be demand, based on the assumption that poor communities 'would be thrilled to partake in any project that comes their way' (p 202). Not surprisingly, these projects often fail. This was the case with a greenhouse project in the Dominican Republic that was designed without account being taken of whether or not the community wanted a greenhouse or how it would fit into their lives. Clearly, the NGOs behind this project had a vision for the community, and the community has its own hopes and dreams for the future – what is needed is collaboration between the two, an 'alliance model of development' based on knowing, or listening to, what people place importance on and why (p 204).

Overall, I think these works provide a good overview of contemporary feminist scholarship relating to activism, politics and globalisation. I have learnt that the global women's movement or network is a vibrant one, that can make valuable and relevant contributions to critiques and transformations of the current global conjuncture. While the idea that culture matters is not new to me as a social anthropologist, I am excited by the new directions that a Women, Culture and Development approach can bring to development studies. I thoroughly enjoyed engaging with the diverse theoretical positions held by these authors and my understanding of feminisms and feminist politics has been greatly enriched.

LORENA GIBSON
PhD Candidate
Social Anthropology Programme
School of People, Environment and Planning
Massey University
Palmerston North

Book reviews

The idea that women ask to be raped – that they bring it on themselves somehow – is deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of society. This belief is reflected in the ways in which members of society respond to women who claim they have been raped. *The word of a woman? Police, rape and belief* presents an analysis of several related studies on rape that focus in particular on the factors that inform police responses to female rape complainants; understanding the 'credibility conundrum'; and the experiences of rape complainants themselves. The book aims to focus the 'word of a woman in relation to the crime of rape' (p. 2). By interviewing twelve detectives who deal with rape complaints, analysing police files and interviewing some of the victims of serial rapist Malcolm Rewa, Jan Jordan reveals that women who report rape are often further traumatised by the justice system. The process of being interviewed (some women describe this as being interrogated) and examined for forensic evidence, and then being asked to relive the rape experience in graphic detail whilst in the presence of the rapist in a courtroom, is further victimisation.

The patriarchal legacy of male privilege continues to pervade contemporary thought and practice. Jordan's analysis focuses attention on the way that the dichotomous positioning of man against woman profoundly impacts on a rape complainant's access to justice. Reason, objectivity, autonomy and credibility have been reserved for men, and pitted against the perceived attributes of women, who are allegedly the polar opposite – that is, emotional, subjective, dependent and incredible. This dichotomising of man/woman and truth/lies means that women who make rape claims must prove their credibility in order to be believed. The male voice dominates and women's words count for less.

The 'perfect victim' will present with visible physical injuries and be suitably hysterical, and her assailant will be unknown to her.

Even though this 'perfect' victim is mythical, the stereotypical image of a rape victim seems generally to be affirmed by police practice. Women who deviate from this image are deemed less credible. The appearance of calm and control, evidence of intoxication or drug use, delayed reporting, a history of mental illness, intellectual impairment, and concealment or downplaying of particular aspects of an attack are some of the issues that cause police to question a complainant's credibility. It seems common-sense to me that a woman who is traumatised, shocked, hurt and humiliated will not be the best of storytellers. A police detective agrees with this, telling Jordan that '100 per cent of victims ... give an inconsistent ... version of events ... [because] they've just been put under the most incredible shock and stress, and trauma ... how the hell can they be expected to get everything right?' (p. 144).

While individual police officers were caring and sympathetic, many women described their experiences of having their assault downplayed or of simply being disbelieved. Many women felt themselves to be on trial from the moment they made their complaint. One detective suggested around 80 per cent of rape claims were 'false in one way or another' (Jordan, 2004: 143). This implies that many police officers presume most rape claims are false when the issue of most importance for women is being believed. The police–complainant relationship is seen from the complainant's perspective as fundamental to the justice process, but this relationship is at least partially pre-scripted according to enduring patriarchal beliefs about women.

The issue of false complaints is dealt with compassionately. The refusal to blame women comes from the evidence – very few women allege rape without cause. However, this does sometimes occur and the police involved feel 'burned' and will be more likely to disbelieve the next woman. Officers feel as though the time and energy invested in false claims has been wasted. These women are rarely charged with an offence and it is acknowledged that 'they've already either been through some psychological trauma or problem which has brought then to the station ... in the first place' (Jordan, 2004: 155). Some police seem to recognise that women who do lie about rape do so for a reason.

Jordan devotes a chapter to the victims of serial rapist Malcolm Rewa. These women offer valuable insights into the process of

reporting a rape and going to trial. It is important to bear in mind that, because of the nature of this case and the resultant media profile, these women received what Jordan tentatively calls 'perfect policing' (p. 177). The experiences of the 14 women interviewed were not uniform; however they were all generally satisfied with the response and treatment they received from police. These women largely felt they had at no time been disbelieved. Unlike many women, they were attacked in their homes by an assailant who was unknown to them. They were the 'perfect victims' of a high-profile serial rapist. By accentuating 'perfect policing', the words of these women offer insight into what is lacking in police practice with regard to cases of rape that are less sensational. All women who say they have been raped should receive the basic respect of having their word believed. Jordan says simply that '[t]he kind of treatment these women got was the kind every woman who's been raped should get' (Jordan, 2004: 181).

It seems shocking to me that the first response rape complaints often encounter from the police is disbelief, but I realise that the notion of women as hysterical, vengeful, deceitful and vindictive was planted in the consciousness of humanity a very long time ago. It is probably unrealistic to expect a radical change in attitudes towards women in the police force overnight. *The word of a woman? Police, rape and belief* is topical. The fact that several high-ranking police officers have recently been on trial for rape surely draws attention to the patriarchal and sometimes misogynist culture within the ranks of the police force.

Word of a woman? Police, rape and belief is written in a way that avoids condemnation. Had Jordan chosen to present her findings in such a way that would alienate the police, the potential for reform that her book offers would be undermined.

I have recently read the story of a woman who was raped over thirty years ago in a similar, yet also quite different, jurisdiction. Much in Jordan's book resonates with this woman's account and I am left with the feeling that not much has changed. For a moment, I felt despondent that such gross stereotypes could persist in the police force across time and locations. Yet Jordan's book is so much more hopeful than that. What she offers is a place from which to start the process of cultural change in the police force and in society generally. By allowing rape complainants to speak for themselves,

Jordan privileges the word of women. She firmly locates the actions of the rapist as deviant, rather than focusing on the behaviour of the rape complainants to find evidence of credibility. A real strength of this book is the authentic voice of the women who, consciously or otherwise, contribute to the possibility of greater justice for women who are raped in the future. Their bravery and their will to survive speaks volumes.

RACHAEL ANDREWS
School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work
Massey University

GENDERED PASTS: HISTORICAL ESSAYS IN FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY IN CANADA

Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan and Nancy M. Forestall (eds)

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, reprinted 2003. 291 pages
ISBN 0-8020-8690-X

Gendered Pasts forms one of the most recent additions to the very important Canadian Social History Series published by the University of Toronto Press. Edited by Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan and Nancy Forestall, *Gendered Pasts* offers the reader eleven chapters that explore gender in Canadian history in a variety of contexts: including politics; the church; within households and communities; occupations; a disaster; and the State regulation of morality and sexuality. The chapters are chronological, ranging from the 1820s through to the 1960s. Five authors explicitly explore gender in Ontario, British Columbia is the subject of three chapters, while Nova Scotia is the subject of one. French Canada also appears in the volume. The Canadian Prairies, however, are largely absent.

In the introduction, the editors place the collection within the development of women's and gender history in Canada, noting the international influences and local practices. They note that the collection adds further to the methodological and epistemological debate about the relationship between women's and gender history and, more specifically, about the meaning of the term 'gender'. Rather

than view women and gender as antithetical, the editors claim that the research of 'new' gender history in *Gendered Pasts* illustrates the complexity of gender in historical contexts, and the complex and symbiotic ways in which women's and gender history can interact. Debates over the biological and social basis of gender categories, the use of language and texts as critical sources for recovering gender, the notion of power relations so crucial to women's history, and the study of masculinity, argue the editors, 'have dominated the dialogues among feminists and have made gender history a dynamic and challenging field of study' (p. 2).

Gender is generally understood as 'socially constructed' and all the authors in the collection support this view. It has been through the deconstruction of language and texts that historians have understood the complex ways in which biological difference has been constructed. Cecila Morgan examines the gendered nature of political discourse in Upper Canada in the 1820s and 1830s. Morgan found that political discourse and debates drew upon gendered imagery and symbols in which the characteristics and virtues of manliness were equated with political power. Politicians used feminine characteristics to undermine their opponents, labelling them as over emotional, hysterical and uncontrollable. Politics is revealed to be a very masculine world in which men were the main actors. By focusing on discourse, Morgan has illuminated the intersections between constructions of femininity and masculinity, but to the detriment of female agency and voices.

Crucially, historians of gender note that the term includes women and men. Thus gender is a relational concept. The editors and authors note that gender history has often been invoked as a way to write about women. A number of authors argue that as a relational concept, gender must include research and writing that focuses on the interactions between men and women. Not all authors in the collection succeed in this goal. Instead, some have used this argument as a way to exclude women from the category of gender and focus upon men, particularly those on the margins of Canadian society. Authors in this volume focus on male deviants as gendered subjects: as the perpetrators of sexual crimes in Ontario and British Columbia. We see the representation of gay men in post-War 'scandal sheet' *Hush* as 'swishers'.

The spatial nature of gender and gender relations is a fruitful and interesting theme that is explored in a number of chapters throughout *Gendered Pasts*. As Mary Anne Poutanen points out, the literature

on vagrancy has focused upon men, neglecting to examine the fact that urban spaces were used by women, and not only as prostitutes. Examining the cases of women who appeared before a Justice of the Peace in Montreal between 1810 and 1842, Poutanen found that vagrancy laws targeted women who displayed particular characteristics and behaviours, centred upon being loose, idle, disorderly, inebriated, unemployed and homeless. The meaning of respectability was thus highly gendered, and the State intervened into women's lives, in both public and private spaces, on this basis. In her examination of the Ontario Mothers Allowance, Margaret Little points to the power of the welfare state in the period 1920 to 1940 to regulate single mothers. Eligibility criteria were rigid, and delineated between the deserving (widows and deserted mothers) and undeserving (those women whose husbands were incapacitated and those with illegitimate children). Once on the allowance the State regulated morality by investigating the cleanliness of the home, the education of the children and the social and sexual activities of women. The State was not the only arbiter of power and control; the church also played a significant role in regulating individuals and communities. Lynne Marks examines church discipline in the first sixty years of the nineteenth century in Upper Canada (Ontario) in a context in which men held the formal power. Women were much more vulnerable to church intervention and regulation that their male counterparts, who were more mobile and less accepting of church discipline.

The discursive method has meant a focus on what constitutes femininity and masculinity, but material conditions and experiences have often been absent from the theorising of gender and gender relations. The authors in *Gendered Pasts*, however, bring language and material conditions together with the gendered experience, exposing the complicated and complex ways that femininity and masculinity played out historically in Canada. John Lutz examines the gendered effect of colonisation in one First Nations community in British Columbia. While the literature stresses that First Nations women lost economic and political power through colonisation, Lutz argues that a microhistory approach enables a much more subtle picture of colonisation and its impacts to be visualised. Focusing on the Lekwammen, Lutz concludes that in certain contexts colonisation allowed women to exert greater power than previously. Tracing labour shifts and seasonal patterns of migration up until the 1950s, Lutz

concludes that social position as well as gender and age regulated who benefited and who did not from colonisation, and that during this time men and women were active agents in this process adapting and reconfiguring labour and family relations. The material conditions of life are also linked to gender relations and language in chapters that dwell upon the links between immigrant labour, class relations and labour history. A mining community features, as do Italian immigrants, who formed the workforce of the construction industry in 1960s Toronto.

Workspaces also feature in the collection. The mining community of Timmins in northern Ontario, initially an overwhelmingly male community of bachelors with shared values and culture, gave way to a community of families when the mining company introduced a policy of hiring married men. Forestall found that the move to the family policy blurred the previously rigid line between the household and workplace. Nursing, like mining, was a single gender occupation. McPherson's study of nursing over the twentieth century examines the shifting notions of femininity within this occupation, arguing that the wearing of the uniform meant that women 'performed gender' rather than experienced it at the hospital.

The themes and social groups examined by the authors in the collection reflect the debates within women's and gender history more generally. These chapters do more than this though. Many underline the complexity of the gendered experience and others move beyond the discursive construction of gender, linking it to material conditions within households and communities, noting the economic and political components of living as gendered subjects. A number, however, entrench the debates. While I applaud the rise of masculinity studies and the investigation of male culture, within this volume, and in the context of the debates that point to the relational nature of gender, such studies merely write women out of history. Yet others equate and conflate the study of women with gender history. The volume does succeed in show-casing the diversity of research and writing in Canadian history and, more crucially, it succeeds in revealing the gendered dimensions of the Canadian past, and opens up the field for further research.

ANGELA WANHALLA
*University of Saskatchewan,
Canada*

SHIFTING CENTRES: WOMEN AND MIGRATION IN NEW ZEALAND HISTORY

Lyndon Fraser and Katie Pickles (eds)

Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002. 213 pages
ISBN 1-877276-32-4

The field of migration studies has flourished over recent years and this new contribution, which draws together the diverse experiences of migrant women in New Zealand, offers a valuable addition. In presenting a wide-ranging coverage of women's movements to, and settlement within, New Zealand, the ten individual contributions in this edited collection have sought to 'recover the hidden stories of migrant women by pulling together scattered evidence and reading source materials in a new light' (p.10). Although the experiences of individual women pepper the pages throughout, this does not mean an idiosyncratic focus. The strength of the collection is in the diverse range of aspects of women's migration that receive critical scholarly attention. These include: Maori women in waka traditions; the experiences of women at sea during the migration process; the collective experiences of Irish women migrating to the West Coast of the South Island; single British women during the inter-War period; women refugees from Nazism; single Māori women's migrations to urban areas during the 1940s to 1960s; one woman's migration from Samoa to New Zealand in the 1940s; female Chinese migration; and the experiences of German women migrants of the 1980s and 1990s.

The title of the collection, *Shifting Centres*, provides an insight into the thematic approach that connects the various chapters. As the editors explain, the term 'shifting', which is used colloquially in New Zealand to refer to moving house, is deliberately employed on two levels. First, the term draws attention to the way in which notions of 'home' are reshaped during the migration process; and, secondly, shifting *centres* signals the recentring of women in migration history. *Shifting Centres* also disrupts the depiction of migration as a linear journey from home to permanent settlement and assimilation into New Zealand culture: the related themes of transnationalism and diaspora are clearly evident throughout the collection.

The editors have also deliberately moved beyond the celebratory

narratives of pioneering women and, in doing so, challenge the assumption that women's history of migration is necessarily contextualised within the domain of the colonisers. To this end, Angela Wanhalla's opening chapter, 'Maori women in waka traditions', recasts the romantic and heroic accounts of the Great Fleet she first encountered as a child in the *New Zealand School Journal* through a gendered lens to focus on the significant role of Māori women. In some respects this chapter is reminiscent of *Wahine Toa: Women of Māori myth*[1] although Wanhalla's agenda is much broader. Rather than simply recentring Māori women within the traditions of Māori migration to Aotearoa/New Zealand, Wanhalla summarises the extensive historiography on waka traditions and analyses selected popularisations of these traditions in order to demonstrate how these have been, and continue to be, constructed, contested and remade.

Continuing this process of recentring Māori women in the migration process is Megan Wood's analysis of the rural–urban migration of young, single Māori women in the years during and immediately following World War II. While recognising that there has been some acknowledgement of the radical population shift of Māori migration to urban areas, Megan Wood's starting point is that Māori women's experiences of, and contributions to, post-War urbanisation have been largely obscured. Building on accounts of mainly married Māori women's experiences through histories of the Māori Women's Welfare League, Megan Woods focuses on how discourses of domesticity dominated the drive to encourage single Māori women to cities and towns to meet the growing demands for domestic labour in hotels, institutions and private homes.

Aroha Harris's chapter bears testimony to the fact that this rural to urban shift was not always experienced negatively in terms of dislocation from whanau values and traditional social controls. Aroha Harris relates the experiences of Letty Brown who maintained her links to her East Coast upbringing and traditional values when she migrated to Auckland in the late 1950s. Based on extensive interviews conducted in 1998, this chapter conveys the immediacy of Letty Brown's experiences in a way that grounds some of the more academic narratives in the collection. Even more immediate is the story of Emele-Moa Teo Fairburn, written in the first person by Emele-Moa but authored by her daughter Peggy Fairburn-Dunlop. Born in 1908 in Mulinuu, Samoa, Emele-Moa's story begins with

her recollections of her father and mother and her early life and how everything changed when her father died. It was not until she was in her mid-thirties, and married with five children, that the family migrated to Wellington, motivated by the desire for the children to attend college. The telling of her story is very poignant and captures the complexity of emotions and experiences that accompany the migrant experience.

The chapters that focus on the experiences of women refugees from Nazism, Chinese female migration and the experiences of German women migrating in the 1980s and 1990s make for sobering reading. The reader is confronted with the bald facts of New Zealand's immigration policies of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century, which sought to restrict the entry of 'race aliens' such as Chinese, Indians and Jews. Manying Ip's chapter explodes popular myths associated with Chinese female immigration as she traces the path of Chinese females in New Zealand from exclusion to transnationalism. In offering an analysis of the gendered effects of New Zealand immigration legislation, Ip's chapter not only provides a welcome complement to the predominant focus on the experiences of Chinese males in New Zealand but also serves as a timely reminder of the on-going prejudices and myths associated with Asian migrants more generally.

Despite a policy of deliberate exclusion of Jewish migrants in the 1930s, about 1100 refugees from Central and Eastern Europe, of which about half were women, settled in New Zealand in the years between Hitler's rise to power and the outbreak of the Second World War. Ann Beaglehole's chapter, based on official papers and oral histories of thirty-two former refugees conducted in the mid-1980s, focuses on the accounts of the women and provides fascinating insights into the physical, social and political climate they encountered. There is a stark honesty in their descriptions of what they encountered: bleak hills that were overwhelming and enclosing; poor and dilapidated cities and countryside; and poverty revealing itself in the unkempt and unpainted houses. Differences in lifestyle associated with their downward social mobility, and the different smells, foods and social customs, are juxtaposed with more positive experiences of the kindnesses they experienced. Ann Beaglehole's chapter captures this sense of cultural bewilderment that many of these women encountered.

In contrast with Ann Beaglehole's research, which is not specifically concerned with gender differences in the refugee's experiences, Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich employs gender as both a methodological and an analytical framework. Based on a comprehensive long-term ethnographic field study, comprising participant observation, field diaries, interviews and focus groups with couples, families and single German immigrants, this chapter offers a gendered analysis of the ways in which women and men tell stories about their migration experiences.

The attention to the actual experiences of individual women, and to the social and historical contexts within which these experiences are embedded, which is evident in most of the chapters in this collection, enriches the sound academic scholarship on which the individual contributions are based. Enhanced by numerous photographs and other graphics, this is a very impressive collection, for which the editors should be commended. It is fitting that the royalties from *Shifting Centres* are being donated to the Refugee and Migrant Service to go towards women's programmes.

JENNY COLEMAN
Women's Studies,
Massey University

Notes
[1] Paintings and drawings by Robyn Kahukiwa, text by Patricia Grace, *Wahine Toa: Women of Maori myth*, Viking, 1984.

MAISTRESSE OF MY WIT: MEDIEVAL WOMEN, MODERN SCHOLARS

Louise D'Arcens and Juanita Feros Ruys (eds)

Making the Middle Ages, 7. Turnhout: Brepols, 2004. 384 pages
ISBN 2-503-51165-1

This collection of essays has a new approach designed to take into account debate in the 1990s on the discipline of medieval studies, and to show the extent to which feminist Medievalists have consolidated their position in the field. The project evolved from discussion at a conference in 1997 on the bonds which develop between scholars and the particular Medieval authors they study. Complex and deeply

felt, these bonds are, in fact, partly scholarly, partly imaginative or subjective. Contributors have examined their own practices and stance and, without compromising their academic principles but by loosening a little the constraints of academic discourse, have foregrounded themselves and their experience in relation to an individual Medieval author. Readers are also invited to try and read differently, to respond sympathetically with a new awareness.

The title *Maistresse of my wit* comes from a version of the Prologue of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, where it refers to the author's inspiring muse. The editors admit they have wilfully re-interpreted the expression, making it 'an invocation of female creative influence and enunciative guidance' (p. 1), with inspiration being replaced by a 'dynamic of reciprocity and mutual transformation' (p. 2). The questions are: do Medieval women writers become 'maistresses'? Do they influence present thought and action? Do they lead to re-evaluation of intellectual assumptions and methods of gender analysis?

The subtitle might mislead some potential readers, for the 'Medieval women' in question are writers and scholars whose names and works have endured. The modern scholars are men and women of the twenty-first century, who stand on the shoulders of their predecessors and build on past scholarship and accumulated knowledge.

The volume has an introduction and twelve chapters, one of which contains two essays. The editors, who both contribute essays, and three other contributors belong to Australian universities. Others are from North America, France, Germany, Norway and Great Britain. Their subjects are Western European women from the High Middle Ages to the Early Modern period.

The first section, 'The practice of Medieval studies', begins with the chapter '*Ex epistolis duarum magistraru*', containing the essays 'A woman and her letters: The documentary world of Elizabeth Clere' by Philippa Maddern, and 'Mapping masculine and feminine domains in the Paston letters' by Wendy Harding. The chapter title is ambiguous, for the essays are framed by exchanges between the scholars, initially on the genesis of their project and their consciousness of doing something different, and finally on their discoveries, their respective Australian and European backgrounds and their different perspectives as historian and literary scholar; and concluding with letters they

write, in the manner of Petrarch to Cicero, to Elizabeth Clere and Margaret Paston. Dialogue and pastiche epistles thus reinforce academic discourse, heightening the overall effect.

The next two chapters describe personal itineraries leading to a particular author. In 'Encountering Hildegard: Between apocalypse and the New Age', Constant Mews, an eminent scholar of Peter Abelard and Heloise, recounts how he became aware that populist groups idolised Hildegard of Bingen as a mystic, to the exclusion of her intellectual side. Hildegard's connections with the reformed religious houses revealed to him a different imaginative vision and the diversity of twelfth-century monastic theology. But being, like Heloise, a creative and articulate thinker, Hildegard challenged 'the hegemony of male discourse' (p. 92).

Earl Jeffrey Richards' title 'A path of long study: In search of Christine de Pizan' reflects both Christine de Pizan's experience and the title of one of her works, as well as her allusion to Dante's greeting of Vergil at the beginning of the *Commedia*, and Richards' encounters with her in the course of his education and research. Although she expressed the immediacy and particularity of women's experiences, he perceives that she gave them universal meaning. Reading the texts in their original context, he discovered her knowledge of theology and law by which she transformed French literary culture, just as she transformed her own person by her commitment to learning.

In a copiously-documented essay, 'Her own *maistresse*?: Christine de Pizan the professional amateur', Louise D'Arcens examines the assessment of Christine de Pizan as both a professional writer and an autodidact scholar; an apparent paradox, perhaps inherent also in Medieval studies, the discipline's autodidactic past, sometimes coloured by amateur enthusiasm, seeming at odds with its professionalised present (p. 124). It is suggested that the preoccupation of feminist Medievalists with Christine de Pizan's defeminisation, as depicted in *La Mutacion de Fortune*, conveys their sense of unavoidable *déformation professionnelle*, excluding the personal and passionate in their lives. The long apprenticeship and variety of expertise required of Medievalists resemble Christine de Pizan's self-learning; like her, Antipodean Medievalists also confront particular obstacles and anxieties. The argument is exemplified by the experience of D'Arcens and others.

The first essay of the section 'Empathy, ethics and imagination'

is Nicholas Watson's 'Desire for the Past', reprinted from *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 21 (1999). In light of a controversy in the early 1990s, he discusses the study of the past and the role of feeling in this scholarship, where often the 'otherness' of the Middle Ages prevails. To his surprise, however, his study of Julian of Norwich helped him in the present, notably in composing the article. In an 'Afterword' written for this volume (pp. 185–8), he emphasises the need to relate Medieval studies more closely to the human sciences; although recognised as a legitimate field of academic enquiry, it demands great loyalty from its practitioners.

Diane Watt's 'Critics, communities, compassionate criticism: Learning from *The Book of Margery Kempe*' demonstrates what can be learnt about production of meaning and responsible interpretation from the study of *The Book*. She contends that the main scribe, who evoked in the prologue the notion of charity and defined an intended Christian audience, has a role equivalent to that of an academic critic. *The Book* represents compassionate criticism that is sensitive to the subject matter and author, as well as expressing personal and political commitments. The comparison of two readings of *The Book* by a scholar and a novelist, addressing 'queer' communities, would surely have surprised Margery Kempe, a devout laywoman.

In 'Playing alterity: Heloise, rhetoric, and *memoria*', Juanita Feros Ruys studies the role of empathy and informed imagination in understanding Medieval women, and finds in Heloise's rhetoric, a possible means of overcoming alterity. To demonstrate how *memoria*, empathy and imagination might combine in practice, she has created a delightful, imaginary interview, set in Paris in 1118, between Heloise, who wants to place her son Astralabe in foster care, and a Youth and Community Services Officer. Reasoning is supported by footnote references to Abelard's *Historia*, the Bible and canon law. Here academic scholarship and imaginative writing unite to connect readers to a Medieval past.

In the section 'Medieval women and modern women', Marea Mitchell, in 'Uncanny dialogues: "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" and "*The Book of Margery Kempe*"', has adopted Freud's concept of the uncanny to examine both the uneasy relationship between feminist Medieval scholarship and the ambiguous figure of Margery Kempe, and the coincidence of Virginia Woolf's story 'The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn' (1906), which strangely

pre-figures the chance and sensational discovery in 1934 of the manuscript of *The Book*.

Shawn Madison Krahmer concentrates on the life of a thirteenth-century Flemish Cistercian nun in 'Redemptive suffering: The life of Alice Schaerbeek in a contemporary context'. The author finds in Alice's redemptive suffering a reflection of her own efforts to mediate different parts of her life: marriage; friendships with the religious; and intuition about the truth in Medieval and monastic theology. Afflicted with leprosy and physically isolated, but bound to Christ through suffering, Alice Schaerbeek continued to be an active member of her community.

The third essay is Kari Elisabeth Borresen's 'Religious feminism in the Middle Ages: Birgitta of Sweden'. The controversial theology, expressed in the *Revelaciones* of Birgitta of Sweden, who was canonised in 1391, and her references to the femaleness of God have made her an ambiguous model for modern feminist theologians and one used by the papacy against women. However, the Church Mother's concept of the continuous revelation of divine will is inspiring even if her theology is only partly acceptable.

In the first essay of the final section on 'Women readers', Jacqueline Jenkins, in 'Reading women reading: Feminism, culture and memory', studies reading practices and finds parallels in modern popular culture in reading romances. Firstly, the mystical marriage of St Katherine of Alexandria is contemplated to determine whether there is a cultural memory linking women's memories across the centuries. Then, from the evidence of book ownership, it is shown that women in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries preferred to read devotional literature, in solitude and in support of productive contemplation. *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, a key text, satisfied an inherent desire for the religious life and at the same time contained that desire, enabling women to improve in their secular role as wife and mother.

Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, in 'Virginity always comes twice: Virginity and profession, virginity and romance', has sought precedents in Medieval virginity literature which help address the workplace situation and role of women academics; and she compares these with depictions of virginity in current fiction of the Mills and Boon or Harlequin type. She theorises the figure of a willed 'revirginalised' woman scholar who must 'disavow embodiment' (p. 22) in order to pursue her academic career and avoid the risk of amateurism.

In the spirit of the work, a brief dialogue between the editors would have been an appropriate conclusion. Biographical notes on contributors and an index of proper names complete a generally well-produced book. Occasionally, however, errors of spelling, grammar, expression and translation from French are noticeable. It is hard to do justice to the individual contributions, which create a rich tapestry of ideas on the relationship between feminism and Medieval studies, and on questions of ethics, justice, empathy and alterity. I judge the book will primarily interest Medievalists, but also readers interested in theology, religious studies and women's history and literature. It has great merit in showing a palpable continuum between the Medieval women studied and scholars of today.

GLYNNIS M. CROPP
School of Language Studies
Massey University

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