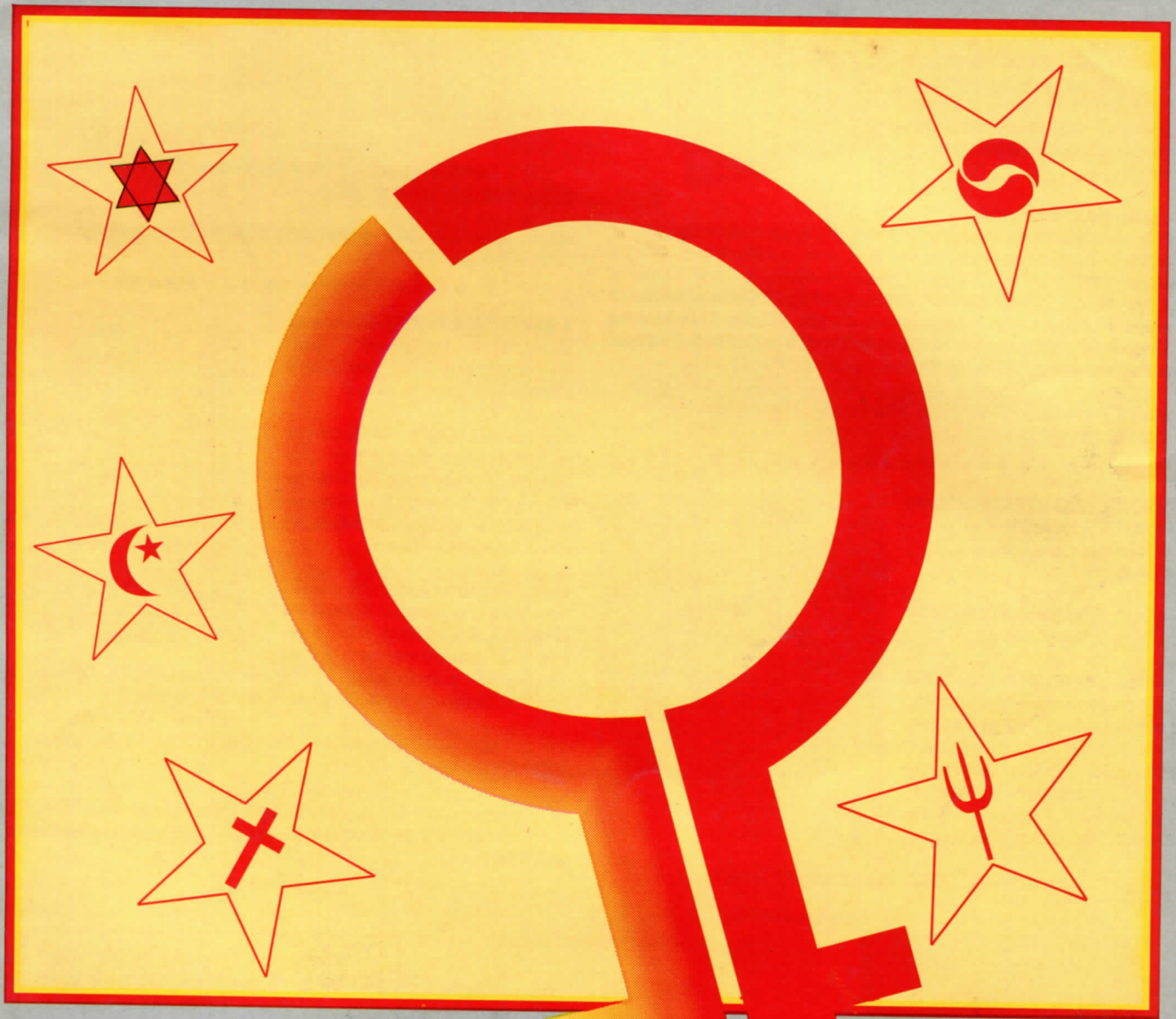


WOMEN *in Action*

4-94

Isis, Manila, Philippines



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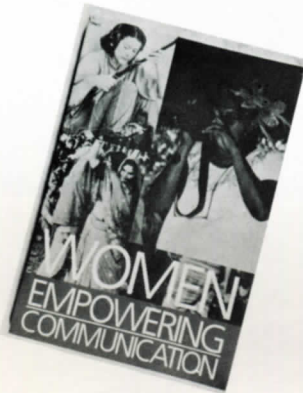
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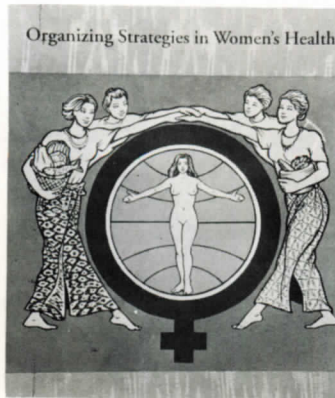
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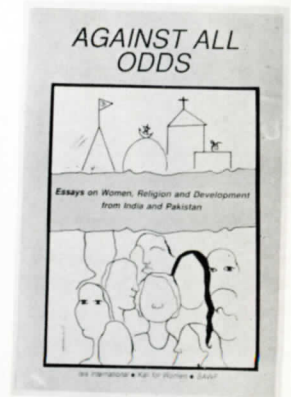
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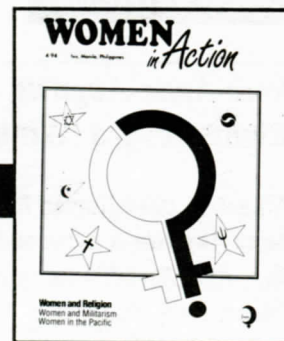
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We would like your written and creative contributions for Women in Action

Future issues of Women In Action will focus on some key issues, i.e., sexuality; women and economic/ technological change; violence against women; feminism in the Asian and Pacific regions; and, we will have an issue on Pacific women's concerns, issues, views, creative writing.

We welcome your articles, analyses, essays, views, updates on any of these topics, or other issues, topics of interest to you; and, we want to feature your creative writing - poems, short stories, essays. As well, let us know about your work, plans, the books or films you loved or hated, what you feel or think that we need to know. While we look forward to a deluge of thoughts, analysis, poems etc we reserve the right to publish.



Rose-Anne Auguste - Reebok Human Rights Award Winner

A Reebok 1994 Human Rights Awards winner is *Rose-Anne Auguste*, a nurse and human rights activist in Haiti. *Rose-Anne* founded the only private clinic in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, that makes health care available to the poor. Located in a slum area of Port-au-Prince, the clinic treats 200-300 people a day, many of whom have been the victims of politically motivated violence.

Woman in Action

'The First Zapatista Uprising was led by a Woman'

'Susanna, a Tzotzil, is angry. They were making fun of her a while ago. The other members of the **Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee (CCRI)** were saying that she was to blame for the first Zapatista Army uprising in Mexico, back in March 1993.

Last year Susanna had the job of making the rounds of dozens of communities, speaking with groups of women to pull their ideas together into the 'Women's Law' proposal. When the CCRI met to vote on the laws Susanna had the job of reading the proposals that brought together the thoughts of thousands of indigenous women. As she began to

read, the assembly began to get more and more restless, comments broke out all around. Susanna didn't flinch and charged ahead, "We want to have the (number of) children we want and can care for. We want the right to have leadership positions in the community. We want the right to have our say and that it be respected. We want the right to study, and even become drivers."



From NACLA, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2 Sept/Oct 1994

The 'Women's Laws' that Susanna had just read meant for the indigenous communities a real revolution. The women leaders were still getting the translations of what Susanna had said (in) their own languages. Almost at the same time the translators finished the companeros began applauding unanimously, the women leaders were singing and the guys were scratching their heads.

This is the story that came out, Susanna now tells me, when someone in the CCRI read a newspaper article that said that the proof that the EZLN wasn't authentically indigenous is that they couldn't have got together to agree to launch their uprising on the first of January. Someone joked that the first uprising wasn't in January, but back in March. It's true: the first uprising of the EZLN was in March of 1993, and it was led by the Zapatista women. They won, with no casualties. That's the way things are around here (Cosas de estas tierras)...."

Source: 'Extract of a letter from *Subcommandante Marcos* to the national newspaper *La Jornada* in Mexico City, January 1994 in *Radical America*, Vol. 25 No 2, June 1994, 1 Summer Street, Somerville, MA 02143-9983, USA.



Photo from *Radical America*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1985

Interview: Hameeda Hossain of ASK or the Ain O Salish Kendra Law and Mediation Center, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Interviewed by *Luz Maria Martinez*, Isis International Communications Program



ASK as it is known by many, is a legal resource center with the objective of creating a critical awareness of civic and human rights in a democratic society. Its' main focus is the rights of the disenfranchised, including workers, minorities, poor women and children, and main programs are legal aid to slum neighborhoods, especially to women and children. Through a counselling and mediation center they help settle disputes and negotiate with conflicting parties. ASK builds people's understanding of legal measures and laws through popular education and through human rights education. The research component of ASK is a forum that studies laws and evaluates the mechanisms of their implementation as they relate to personal rights for women, children and workers.

Q: What is your role in the center?

Hameeda: In 1986 I was one of the founders. We were confronted by the need to provide legal aid to people in poor communities. While we provided assistance to both men and women, we were finding that women were seeking our assistance in a variety of legal matters. I am responsible for the Law and Policy Reform Forum. We analyze legal amendments and legislation and define their impact on women, we then take the important aspects of the laws and translate them in ways that can be read and understood by grassroots women. The center's model is secular and multi-pluralistic. I am also responsible for networking among other organizations and the overseeing of the project. I also write a column for a daily newspaper that

aims to inform readers on laws and their impact.

Q: What are the main areas of focus of the Law and Lobbying Reform Projects?

Hameeda: The concept of the Center is not only legal aid but mobilizing people and providing active social support. We focus on women in the family, laws of equality and the change in customary laws, women as workers, and, we record the oral history of women, their struggles and resistance to inequality and for their rights.

Q: When you started the Center what were the priorities then?

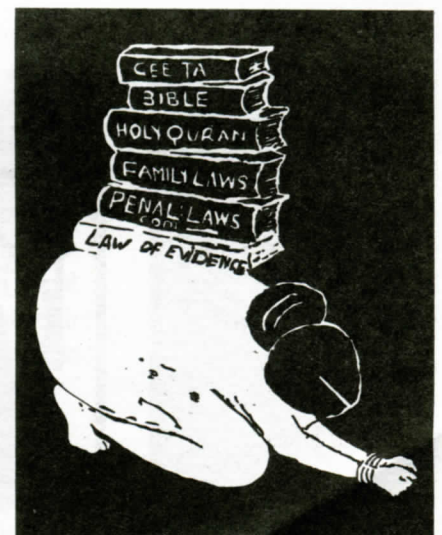
Hameeda: We began working in the slum communities on issues of eviction. As we worked with these communities we realized that there were needs for literacy, so we launched a literacy project for women. As we began to work with the women they began approaching us for advice on legal issues such as

custody problems and other legal issues.

Q: What kind of issues and mobilization projects are you undertaking now?

Hameeda: We are responding to issues that require intervention. For example, there has been a backlash by extremists focusing on women. They are attacking schools and training centers where girls and women are studying and being trained, they believe that the women's place is at home and they should not be educated.

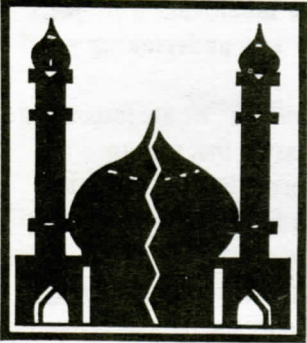
We hear of these cases and we respond in a proactive way of going into the community and providing information and education to counter balance this kind of



From Against All Odds, p. 59



reactionary behavior. The extremists have also focused on launching attacks on the NGOs, they believe that we are converting women into non-Islamic ways of life. The attacks are in particular on women's organizations.



Other current issues are intervening in communities where the village leaders are taking the law into their own hands. Such as women being charged with adultery and being stoned. We have intervened to remove the accused woman from the village.

Q: What happens to a woman when she is removed from her village?



Hameeda: We provide shelter through our network. We are looking at setting up our own shelter to provide the needed intervention for women who have to be removed immediately and given assistance. The women then settle somewhere else where they can work and not be



branded by the village. Even if the women are not physically hurt by the stoning, in such cases they are branded and outcast by the village.

Q: You are a very courageous woman, how did you become involved?

Hameeda: Originally I am from Pakistan. Because of marriage, I moved to Bangladesh 30 years ago. My husband and I were active in the independence movement, in the struggle we were

confronted with the violence against women during the war. We began to organize on this issue and provided training and setting up cooperatives. We then moved to England where I studied for my PhD. in history and then to we moved to the United States for three years before returning to Bangladesh.

Hameeda Hossain is co-publisher of the book **No Better Options**, on women in industry and has published articles in a number of journals. She is the mother of two daughters. When asked if they, too, were feminist, she responded in a matter of fact voice that yes they were. One is a practicing lawyer and the other is active in film-making and living in New York. **ASK** is a human rights and legal aid centre. Address: 26/3 Purana Paltan Line, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. Tel: (880) 2-835851; Fax: (880) 2-833966; Tlx: 642403 ORI BJ P.O. Box 3252. ♀



Illustrations from *Against All Odds* p. 30

Am I Still Married To a Priest?

By *Marianita (Girlie) C. Villariba*, Director Isis International, Manila

"So you are married to Fr. Ed dela Torre!" is the usual reply when people discover my marital status. I kept my name when I got married and so people do not immediately associate me with Ed who is popular in national and international circles as a liberation theologian, a rebel priest (tagged by the military as dangerous during the martial law years, 70s and 80s in the Philippines) and an artist.

After taking stock of my qualities, people then would ask if Fr. Ed is still a priest or an ex-priest. They would pitch their questions in such a way that I would take refuge in a mental balcony. I used a standard line that my marital life was a special agenda. Only very close friends can get me to share the intimate details. But that was in the early 80s when I was struggling with inner fire and starting out on a feminist path.

After twenty-four years of activist involvement, half with the liberation movement, half with the feminist movement, my attitude to the same questions is much more relaxed and open. In fact, it is timely to engage in long conversations with friends and those who care to share insights on marriage, love, spirituality, religion, reincarnation and divine grace.

Why did I marry Ed who is a Catholic priest? I seldom hear this question except from my family. The usual question is: "Why did Fr. Ed marry Girlie?" but people get embarrassed addressing this to me and so they would ask Ed instead.

Theologically, Ed is still very much a priest. That's why my parents were quite relieved

when he asked for their blessings. My parents had always wanted a priest-son as none of my six brothers had joined the fold. So when I presented my parents with a candidate - Ed - in 1986 after he was released from political detention by people power, he was more than what they had dreamed of.

I still remember my mother crying when Ed formally asked my parents if he could marry me. I thought she was afraid of losing me but when she blurted out "Oh Ed! Girlie does not cook, sew clothes, wash or iron, she is not domesticated and will never be. She is used to going wherever she wants to go and I am really embarrassed to tell you this." I was quite entertained! Ed gallantly responded: "I know all that."

My mother offered to take care of all the preparations for the wedding. We suggested a brief civil wedding with just my family because Ed was honest about his own mother being still unsupportive. So the wedding took place soon after with my mother on top of everything, from waking up the government official who would give us the license and fetching the judge. It was half-past midnight on St. Isidro's feast when we signed our marriage license.

Soon after, the coup d'etat started in 1986 and Ed and I had to go overseas. Life abroad had its high and low moments. We lived in London and worked with many Irish and British



Marianita (Girlie) Villariba

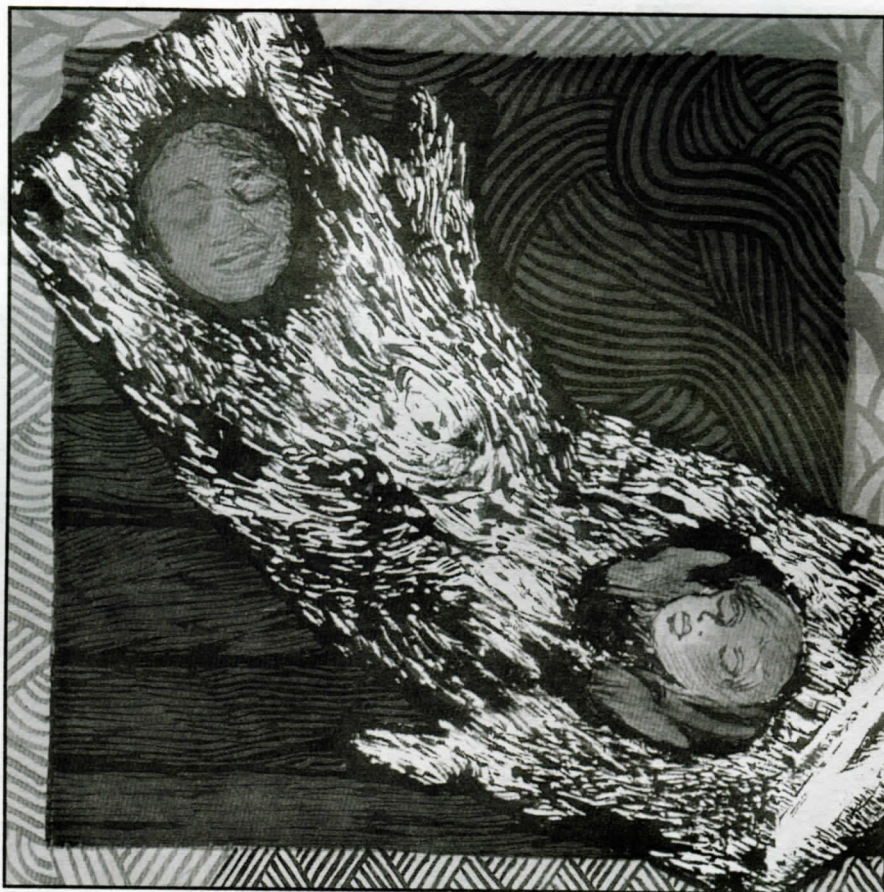
Lynn Lee

solidarity workers. Some of them were priests and nuns fond of theology discussions. Ed kept urging me to join them in their conversations, hoping I would get keen on feminist theology. Sometimes, I would listen but I preferred to read eco-feminism. I was attracted to the spirituality that eco-feminists were writing about. I wondered how my life energies brought me to stages of growth and what links women have with nature.

'I believe that there is a current that provides the spine of life in this world and in other levels'

Sometimes, I would ask Ed if he was still a Catholic and he would smile and respond with *"I am a Filipino Christian in communion with Rome."* Then I would ask again if he was still a priest and in his engaging way he explains *"According to Catholic theology, a priest is a priest even if he ends up in hell."* I also would point out that he does not seem to pray and if he ever does, in what form? One time, I heard him saying that a person who was particularly opportunist will get the karma she deserves. I did not know that he believed in karma. I only know that he does not think about the after-life. Ed lives in the present and finds affinity with the philosophy of the Danish philosopher *Grundtvig* of educating people for this life. I believe that there is a current that provides the spine of life in this world and in other levels, that some form of life exists after our bodies die, and that somehow all our spirit, individually or collectively, lives on by taking other challenges.

Our formative and tempering years have unique and common features. Ed spent over ten years in the seminary, another nine and a half in political detention. I grew up



Original artwork by Edicio dela Torre

in a secular school and spent only a month in detention; the next two decades were spent organizing youth, teachers-educators, and women. I was reared in catechism, discovering the many saints who could intercede for me when I wanted favours from heaven. I became a devotee of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, observing Wednesday afternoon novenas and being grateful that I was consistently on the honor list, attributing my high grades to divine grace and not to my learning curve. I did entertain becoming a Carmelite nun or a Maryknoll sister during my primary years of schooling but lost it when I became attracted to boys, politics and social movements in the early '70s.

I first saw Ed one morning in June 1970 in our family dining room, talking to my father and brother. I was not even aware of his political stance and I casually listened to his lecture that day in the university where my father was Dean of

Liberal Arts. After a short visit, Ed became my spiritual and social guide, leading me to join the Khi Rho Youth organization, a Christian activist organization founded in the late '60s. Having a relationship was not on the agenda. Studying Marxism and Christianity with him was the order of the day. I learned many things during this stage and developed an activist stance on many issues.

My mother and I became embroiled in debates over religious practices and values. I preferred to go to serve-the-people brigades in the barrios on Sundays, but my mother wanted me to attend Sunday Masses. When she noticed that I was no longer praying the rosary with them every night, she became very agitated and we got into heated arguments about sin and grace. I told her that mass poverty in the countryside was a national sin and that our energies were better spent eradicating it rather than praying the sorrowful

mysteries. She and my father found it very painful to see their eldest daughter straying from the Roman Catholic path. I was quite energized with my discovering another path to enlightenment.

Later when martial law was declared in

1972, Ed recommended me to a group which was in charge of underground communications. I saw him only once in 1972 and then we took on separate tasks which led me to the inner circles of the Marxist-led movement for national democracy. I became another person with many names and identities, becoming adept at providing succour to the expanding circles of the movement. I wanted to become a 'red expert' who could 'play the piano with her ten fingers,' so I read the red book of Mao daily and cited quotations every time we held study meetings.

My involvement in the underground resistance movement sharpened my political sense and survival skills but dulled my psychic-sensual self. In the early martial law years (1972) there were trials conducted by the units to ferret out enemy

agents. Many mistakes were made and the unit I was part of lost so many people to the military that they put me under

"I wanted to become a red expert who could play the piano with her ten fingers"

suspension. I was suspected of turning in members of my team. I had to get someone who could vouch for me. I sought Ed but he got arrested himself in late 1973. I had to defend myself and I proved that I could be trusted with difficult tasks in the legal movement, breaking ground with the middle forces. I took graduate courses in a Jesuit university to have the credentials to organize professional people in the academe. I learned new things during this stage.

I became more passionate and open. My relationships with women and men took on a resonance which I did not have when I joined the movement and survived the underground. This particular resonance expressed itself in my being able to read and touch people. I also began to have friends who were feminists, three women

who were my classmates in graduate school. Together with these three women, one Filipina, one British and another

American, I became more aware of gender. We began to talk about our being women and why it was very important to

psychology. The term feminist psychology was not yet clear to me but these friends, taught me how to express myself sensually, sexually and politically. I learned from them attitudes and elements in sexuality, concerns which I would not have shared with my mother nor with comrades.

Also during this stage, I developed a sixth sense. I could listen with my body and hear things in the past. Sometimes, I could even see the immediate future, as if I would accidentally plug into a space where faces and events flow and fuse in one stream. I began to explore new ideas in sexuality, in intuition and sixth sense. These ideas gave my class studies a new dimension which further developed into class and gender questions. I started to describe women as luminous beings and I was fascinated with becoming luminous.

After earning my masteral degree in 1978, Ed and I met again during his Christmas pass (he was given permission by the military to visit his home for a day). We both wanted to renew ties and I started to visit him regularly in the military camp. We realized we were falling in love and started to enjoy each other.

I began showing him an expanding self which people were beginning to notice. My feminist ideas and my luminosity became my gifts to the relationship. I provided Ed with a new set of values that his formative years in the seminary did not give him. For instance, being partners meant organizing our money, time



Isis

Girlie

and resources so I could remain to be me, independent and capable of planning other lives other than what was charted for him by the movement. The leaders in the movement regarded Ed as a valuable propagandist and they charted his path, taking for granted that I would accept to go wherever they bid him to go.

Ever since I got married to Ed, I had to work against the stereotype of the wife assisting the husband with his tasks. I pointed out to the leaders that I had developed my skills in united front work, in education work and in finance work. I persuaded them to look at my political credentials but they were interested only in Ed. So Ed and I agreed to consult each other on what we would be doing together and individually. First were the tasks that we would take and where we would live. The first was negotiable with the movement. The second was decided by events and circumstances.

“I began to think our life would be based on a vow of charity and poverty”

When the Philippine government released Ed in 1980 on the condition that his order, the Society of Divine Word (SVD), send him to Rome for exile, I had to decide about living overseas. I did and we became very excited with travelling and working in international networks. We met many solidarity workers and learned many things about Western Europe. I met the women of **Isis International** in Rome and became friends with *Marilee Karl* and many European feminists. Ed and I were happy with the ambience that Catholic churches and museums provided to our relationship. The Society of Divine Word was not happy with Ed's politics and so he asked for a leave. We made love from Paris to Vienna, from Amsterdam to Stockholm, and were filled with the spirit inside the Vatican Museum. We travelled around Europe staining bedsheets to mark

our organizing activities.

Life with Ed has its quota of problems. One is how to earn and divide the money in such a way that there would be enough for our common needs and specific personal needs. I get anxious about money and I work on getting it but Ed has a very priestly attitude towards money: *“I attract money. It just comes to me.”* It does whenever we need it but it needs some managerial control because it comes and goes faster than church contributions. Ed is very generous and provides families with annual funds without any consideration of their repaying him. When we were living in Europe for the second time in the late eighties, he was supporting around three couples and their families and we were living on a small allowance because the work we got did not provide a salary. Ed became one of the most popular and 'cheapest' Third World theologians in Western Europe. Every event that needed

a South theologian brought him in and the organizations had to pay only for his train or plane ride. They seldom gave him money for his talks. When I gave birth to Ayen, our daughter, we got her clothes and beddings from relatives and friends; many were hand-me-downs because we could not afford them. I began to think that our life would be based on a vow of charity and poverty.

When we were able to return home in 1992, he went fund-raising for programs and still did not take any salary. People have gotten so used to his being generous, of his mind, his time and even the hospitality of our family that they will not take the first step in offering him payment. So I tried convincing him to charge financially for consultations, etc., but I have yet to hear him say or inquire *“I want*

to know how much are your rates.” His standard line is *“I don't ask for money and I don't refuse money.”*

Childcare is another agenda. Ed does not take to children as he does to adults who are interested in politics, economics and theology. Once I asked him why he was not eager to take charge of baby-sitting for friends. He responded: *“Children think differently and I do not have the training to deal with them.”* Ed loved our daughter from the moment she was born (he assisted me in birthing and he personally cut the umbilical cord) yet he finds it very stressful to care for her. It took me and Ayen together three years to train him to be a good father. At this very moment, he has been accompanying her to her pre-school classes and will see her through until she is ready to go by herself. I do claim the credit for having mapped out this path for him.

Our years together have been filled with many discoveries. I have learned to respect the discipline in thinking which Ed developed over the years because I used to be satisfied with swimming in the currents of thoughts, never developing the cerebral rigour and subjecting it to long discourses. Ed began to appreciate my thinking with my body and he was fascinated with my creative centering - using the psychic energies I developed as part of my feminist and spiritual awakening. People ask who is the more spiritual, Ed or I? I think we express it in different levels.

Having a child to rear makes one very conscious of what values to nurture. When Ayen asks *“Why do people die and when they die, what happens to them?”*, I am more open with her. I tell her the story of Ylang-Ylang who dies loving a man and when she is buried, a tree grows and the blossoms remind people of her, breathing with a fragrance that is uniquely hers. I am also active in teaching her to pray, in a form that shapes a positive attitude towards people and nature, encouraging



Lynn Lee

Girlie and daughter Laraine, 1994

her to think well of her life with them. I veer away from promising her heaven and I will leave it to her to understand good and evil. What I do is point out to her the various sources of grace and good karma. Ed has not been as proactive as I am in this area.

Ed and I believe that priests and nuns should really allow themselves to be sensuous because it makes them whole.

We shared this value with many couples who were priests married to ex-nuns, to nuns who were open to relationships and to women attracted to priests. There was a growing community of priests and nuns in the late seventies whose roles became flexible and pluralist. Being involved in social movements, they became more open to friendships, relationships and marriage. Many nuns became feminists and sought

friendships outside of the confines of the school and churches. Many relationships were formalized by the movement with revolutionary weddings.

In this environment, I met many nuns who were finding their way into feminism. One of them was *Sr. Mary John Mananzan* who

“Ed and I believe that priests and nuns should really allow themselves to be sensuous because it makes them whole”

gave me a book on the history of virginity and its value to the Catholic Church. With *Sr. Mary John*, I ventured into the organizing of women with a provocative gender orientation. This friendship with her opened many doors for me. I became more adept at building women’s formations, from resource centers to national networks.

I also became more critical of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church and became supportive of feminist education of women in the religious congregations. I began to see devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help in another context. I prayed in terms of the number of women I reached, supported, counselled and organized rallies with. My earlier practice of observing novenas was transformed in forming networks of sectoral women’s organizations. I still pray up to now, having more female images and spirits in my spiritual bank. When I became very ill, I summoned the help of female principles and goddesses, from the Filipino *Mebuyan*, the Egyptian *Isis* to the Christian *Mother of Perpetual Help*. I also occasionally pray to the force inside mountains, lakes and seas.

I am still influenced by a trinity. I married Ed three times, first in the movement, second in the government and third in church. I have made three journeys, through the Marxist path, the feminist trail, and the spiritual road. Clearly, the tempering elements to my marriage with Ed are my high self-esteem, my own life achievements and my own circles of friends. These trinities have given the relationship a dimension that keeps us learning together and increasing our appetite for living.

When Ayen grows up to be her own woman, I hope she will still find her-priest-father and feminist mother trail-blazing together, carving paths which she will want to explore herself and laughing with us. I also hope she will tell her friends and peers: *“I know why Fr. Ed is still married to Girlie.”*

Note: Ed says that celibacy is a disciplinary policy, not doctrinal and that married priests are still priests, theologically speaking. Celibacy was imposed on priests in the 12th century by the Council of Seville. ♀

Meena Moorthy Shivdas -

'You are always taught that God is perfect'...



Meena Moorthy Shivdas

Q: Concerning religion, how were you raised as a child?

Meena: As you grow up in a Hindu home it is the rituals you see. You get up in the morning and pray, things that your mother did or your grandmother who is more traditional than your mother, like my grandfather, who would get up every morning and pray. You really don't know what they mean until you get older and go to school, I think even as an adult you are still observing these things. Your parents, grandparents and uncles tell you little stories from epics, legends and folklore, you learn to pick up values from the stories, what is good, what is evil. I think it happens in all religions.

Hinduism is a pantheon of Gods who have different powers. The female power as in *Shakti*, which means energy and power, has different forms, e.g., *Kali*, *Lakshmi*, *Parvati*, etc. They embody different kinds of power - wealth, knowledge, harmony etc. *Shakti* is the female power, the power of the Earth Mother. The male power is embodied in *Brahma* the Creator, *Vishnu* the protector and *Shiva* the destroyer. *Shiva* is also known as *Harihara* - the one born of man and woman and possessing both male and female qualities.

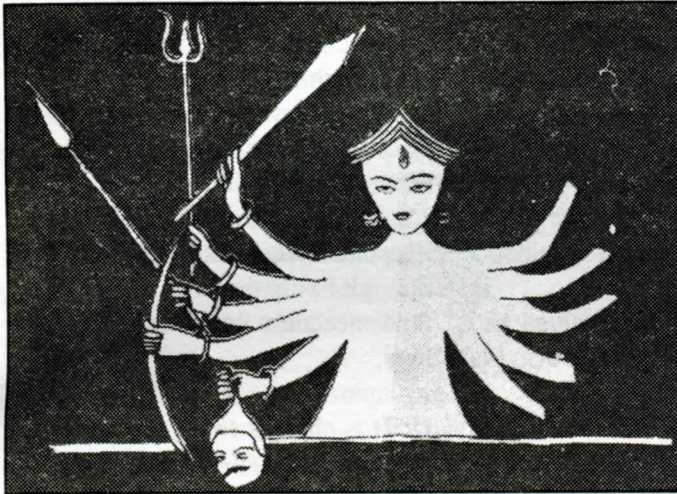
Q: Do you still practice Hinduism?

Meena: Not Hinduism as the way it was practiced in my mother's home. I think that for me it's a time for quiet reflection but

Meena Moorthy Shivdas, brought up in the Hindu religion, is a researcher in the Gender and Development Unit of the Asian and Pacific Development Centre (APDC) in Malaysia. She is currently working on a book that looks at the impact of media in the region. Originally from Bangalore, India, she has lived in Singapore and worked with the women's group **AWARE**. While on a visit to Manila, she shared some of her thoughts on religion, women and media with our interviewer, *Luz Maria Martinez*. Here is what she had to say:

"Hinduism by itself is not really a religion but a way of life. You flow with the tide. If you are comfortable fasting you do it, if you don't feel like it you just don't do it. Hinduism has taught me some very basic values that you go by in life."

"Honesty being a value, being true to yourself. When you are tolerant of others you don't impose your opinions on them, there's a lot of give and take. Those are values that become you after a while, it just stems from your personal values."



Kali, from *Against All Odds* p. 132

I do know that it is based on all the values that I grew up learning. It's a spirituality [from] being exposed to some of life's experiences, being exposed to different cultures and religions and different people's friendships and influence.

I do collect idols. Specifically, of *Ganesh*, the elephant headed god in Indian mythology. The reason why I think I am attracted to him is to me he symbolizes harmony and diversity. He has an elephant's face and a human body, to me that is a human being living with other living things and the imperfection to his body. You are always taught that God is perfect, but he (*Ganesh*) is imperfect, he has a big stomach that is so comforting and one of his tusks is broken because there was a time the moon laughed at him because of his big stomach and he broke his tusk and threw it out of anger. He is God and he could have grown it back but he did not. So imperfection is alright as long as you can live in harmony and with all other living creatures, you can have your bouts with temper tantrums as long as you aren't destructive.

If I had a child I would expose her/him to other religions. If I see a church I enter it and pray one Hail Mary, I would love to enter a mosque but as a woman I am not allowed. I keep all things that are associated with different religions like the prayer wheel, the Buddha heads, they are so peaceful and serene.

of each other and each one practices their own faith, and you do have intermarriages. It's all part of life, no big deal. What [to be] wary [of] now is how fundamentalism is creeping into almost all religions. In a way fundamentalism is destroying things that were built over the years, e.g., this deep sense of tolerance of one another, fundamentalism makes you loose respect for one another's values. What happens with fundamentalism is one ideology is superimposed on everything else, it's like nothing has any value except for what they are saying.

I don't know what perspective they have. I think it's the idea of one religion dominating, one of the perspectives they have is women are below them. That's not how we began in the first place because we have the concept of *Shiva* as *Harihara* the daughter of Hari and Harava, half man half woman. She is always the balance. I don't know, it seems that the fundamentalists have lost that balance of good and evil and male and

Q: Who are the fundamentalists and what perspective do they have?

In India, which has been influenced by many religions throughout history, all religions have been living together tolerant

female, it was always half. To them it's just the male view of saying where women are, where they ought to be. How they devalue the women's contributions and they want to tell her exactly what to do. That is how fundamentalist's view the religion.

Q: Is Hinduism a patriarchal religion?

Meena: It is. It's patriarchal in the sense that in the *Shastras* or the basic texts, the *Vedas*, where you have a set of laws, the lawgiver was a man called *Manud* [so] you have the *Manudharmashastra* which is a set of codes by which you have to live. He did place women on a lower level but that was a man interpreting the laws of how society should have to live and where women should be. It was a man in the ancient times who did it but the basic texts, wherever they came from, placed the genders on a par. That is my reading of it.

Q: But as far as it has been practiced over the years, has it been in a patriarchal setting?

Meena: This patriarchal setting translates itself into many cases of violence against women. As in the dowry system where women are burned or *Sati*, when a man died it was alright for his wife to set herself on fire and burn herself to death because her life had ended because his ended. All these things have been added on in the course of history, I don't think the original text had anything that alluded

to *Sati*. This may have happened during one of the wars, where a soldier died and they did not want to endanger her life so she ended her life but it was added to the daily practices of everyday life.



Lynn Lee

You take for granted without questioning it's origins, how it came about or what was the social context by which it was interpreted? I think the original text treated human life equally, including other life forms as in animals, birds and creatures of the forest and the trees.

Q What are positive aspects in the practice of Hinduism?

Meena: Practicing without any fundamentalist connotations means that a woman is respected in her home, she is seen as a person, as the life giver, her feelings and opinions are taken into account. There is this immense thing of being tolerant of fellow human beings.

Q: Do you think this globalization of media has had an impact on religion and how it views women? In a negative or positive way?

Meena: The globalization of media perpetuates stereotypes and not only in a national context, but now we have STAR TV and ZTV [so] *Ted Turner* decides what everybody sees and *Rupert Murdoch* knows exactly what is happening, all these images get beamed into even the most remote villages in India. It gives rise to new cultures and [images of] how we should be even though ancient Asian texts tell you that women are on a par [with men] - what is being beamed on media is supposedly 'progressive' [but] there are these conflicting messages.

It's double edged really, because in one sense although media shows you that there is a lot of progress for women, that women are allowed to go out and work, in a rural setting that may help her [as she sees] this

as progress that she can go out to work. On the other hand the way media treats women as sex objects, as just literally chattels, suddenly, you have this entire new concept that women are just play things and that is where the trouble begins I guess! Women's work is undervalued and their worth is trivialized.

Consciously or unconsciously people are exuding these images. It's more powerful than these

convoluted texts that have had different interpretations over time. Media is right now - it's graphic.

Q: I am intrigued with your statement about medias' impact on the religious structure.

Meena: Actually, when STAR TV came into India, the fundamentalists turned this into a double edged sword. They said that the reasons they are being fundamentalist, and [saying] everyone [should] go back to the 'good old values' as seen through their eyes, is because of these [media images]. This gives them a certain level of legitimacy, it's a way they turn things to suit themselves, that they have their own agendas is different altogether. The reason they give as to why fundamentalism, especially Hindu fundamentalism, is coming in a big wave, is because there is all this media

portrayal of things which they think are alien and should not be there and so they propose that women go back to the 'traditional' ways of society, where women do not get opportunities and men decide what women will do.

It has different implications, as if somehow the globalization of media and fundamentalism are shaping women's lives.

Q: It is obvious that you have given this concept some thought and that you can see the connections.

Meena: There is a connection. There are advantages when the whole world becomes a global village but there are also disadvantages because our markets are all connected. But if you come from a developing country you lose out so much because the developed countries have set up a system to protect their markets but it's a system that exploits our own. As developing countries we do not have that much bargaining power and indigenous cultures and traditions take a beating because media comes in and destroys that and there are implications for women at every stage.

Q: What impacts do you see media having on the young?

Meena: Because our markets have opened up we are begging for investors to come in, for coke to come in, nevermind that we kicked them out in 1976, the young are caught up in this material thing.



I wonder about the young women growing up - whether even feminism means anything. They even think our anger is irrational. Why are we so angry? They think they are cool and their boyfriends treat them pretty cool so why are we so angry? Despite globalization and the media opening up, I wonder if they are conscious of this on any level, that the world is such a small place.

Q: What about young women and fundamentalism?

What I am being told is that the fundamentalists are trying to reach this age group. They are saying we couldn't control your mothers or older sisters but we can control you. I think this is all part of the brainwashing of the fundamentalists. You may want to speculate on this view because I really have no proof that they are actually reaching out to youth. All I can say is a growing mass of middle class young people are becoming increasingly pro-Hindu and pro-dominant ideology. Fundamentalists also say openly that the Muslim minority will outpopulate the Hindu race. This is statistically impossible, demographers know it so do feminists.



Elephant God Ganesh

personal views

The Rhythm Is Off beat

- a personal view of catholic teachings on contraception
by Marilen J. Dañguilan, MD

"I am convinced that my conscience is correct, even if it conflicts with the moral teachings of the Church."

I am a Catholic. To non-believers and cynics, this statement may mean 'I am sexually repressed' or 'I am always guilty of something'. My Church is perceived as being obsessed with sex and sin. Unfortunately, this obsession has obscured the true meaning and significance of what my Church stands for - social justice and love.

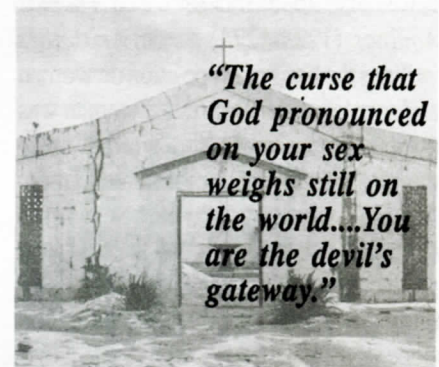
It has supported several causes which strike a harmonious chord in me. I agree when it urges government and international lending institutions to cancel odious loans. I agree when it pushes government to implement a genuine agrarian reform program that gives land to the tillers. I agree when it calls on policymakers to provide more humane housing conditions and just wages for the poor. I agree when it protests against laws like the one on Value Added Tax. I agree with my Church too when it declares that population is not the cause, but an effect of, or that it exacerbates the problems of poverty and underdevelopment.

But when it comes to the issue of contraception, my Church and I differ. After much study, prayer, and reflection, I am convinced that my conscience is correct, even if it conflicts with the moral teachings of the Church. And in inner peace, I cannot but follow my conscience.

I am trying to understand my Church's ban on contraception. I have to go back in time and trace the evolution of its stand. Let

me walk you quickly through its history.1.

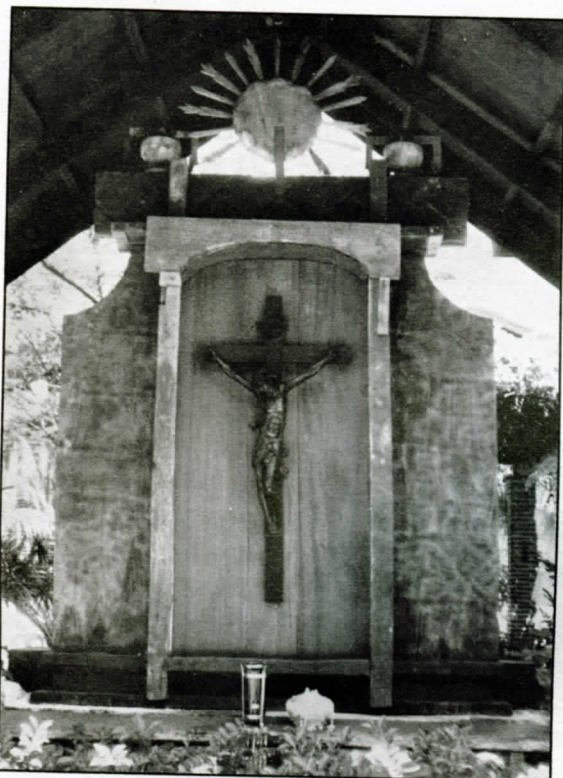
It has been almost 2,000 years since Augustine theologically linked sex, sexual pleasure, and original sin. He asserted that sexual intercourse is inherently tainted and needed to be salvaged by procreation. This was a reaction towards a group which appreciated sexual pleasure as a privilege of marital sex and which believed that unbaptized babies had access to heaven.



Bing Conception/FAIN

At about this time, women were already denigrated. Tertullian, a very influential third-century theologian, considers Eve as the cause of original sin and his judgement on women was harsh and severe: "Do you know that Eve is you? The curse that God pronounced on your sex weighs still on the world....You are the devil's gateway."

It has been close to 900 years since the monk Gratian compiled the first collection of canon law. It declared contraception a



sin, but not a grave one. Then, 90 years later, *Pope Gregory IX* compiled existing authoritative decrees into the universally binding *Decretals*. In the *Decretals*, contraception was condemned as murder.

It was also about this time that *Thomas Aquinas* (1225-1274) made *Aristotle's* writings the basis of his position on women and sex. Aristotle wrote that a woman was a misbegotten male and women were morally inferior and subordinate to men. Aquinas wondered "whether woman should have been made in the first production of things" but resolved this by finding a woman's value in procreation alone.

By this time, the anti-woman bias of the Church was well entrenched. *Odo of Cluny* wrote: "To embrace a woman is to embrace a sack of manure." Several statements of this sort have been uttered to disparage women and their bodies.

It's been 400 years since *Pope Sixtus V* issued the bull *Effraenatam*, Without Restraint, which applied to contraception and abortion the penalties designated for

homicide. He was the same pope who prescribed hanging for adultery in Rome.

In 1880, 37 years after the vulcanization of rubber which led to the discovery of the [modern] condom, *Pope Leo XIII* issued his encyclical on Christian marriage, once more reaffirming that the procreation of children for the Church is noble.

"those wicked parents who seek to remain childless"

It's been 64 years since *Pope Pius XI* issued his encyclical, *Casti Connubii*, Of Chaste Spouses. During this time, the

Anglican bishops held the historic Lambeth Conference in which they decided that artificial contraception was morally licit and permissible. In response, *Pius XI* denounced "those wicked parents who seek to remain childless" or who avoid childbearing "not through virtuous continuance but by frustrating the marriage act." *Pius XI*, however, declared sex lawful at those times when a couple believes conception to be impossible.

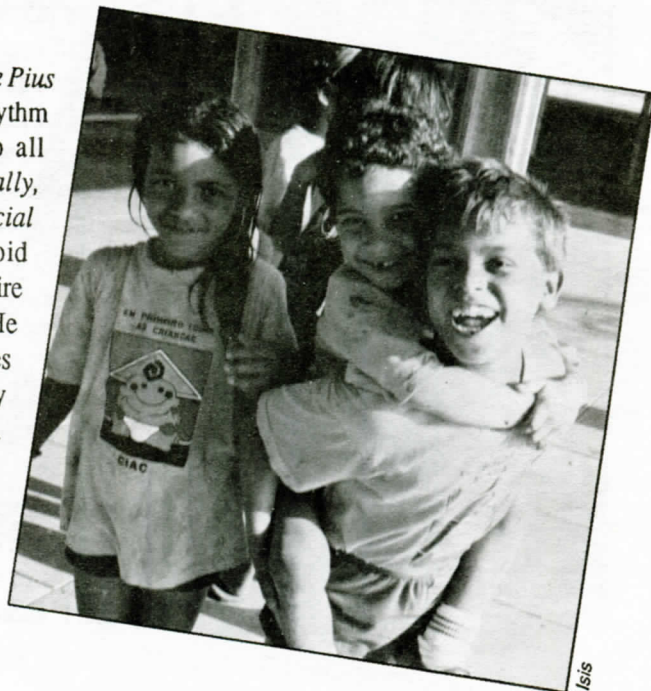
Forty-three years ago, *Pope Pius XII* announced that the rhythm method was available to all couples who for "medically, eugenic, economic, and social indications" wish to avoid procreation, even for the entire duration of the marriage. He warned though that couples shouldn't use this habitually for less than 'grave' reasons.

And 30 years ago, *Pope John the 23rd* called for "the winds of change" to blow. The winds came, for

sure, but they turned into a storm of controversies. And the eye of the storm was *Pope Paul VI's* encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, Of Human Life. *Humanae Vitae* categorically prohibited the use of contraception but made exceptions for rhythm or periodic abstinence.

Church history shows that several factors have contributed to the present Church's position on contraception: wrong notions of biology, such as *Tertullian's* view that the semen contained individuals waiting to be born and ejaculating outside the 'vessel' (woman) murdered the 'seed' individuals; *Aristotle's* view that females are conceived due to a weak seed or the dampness of the south wind); reactions to cultural norms and circumstances at the time; personalities of religious leaders; rival religions; anti-sexual; and sexist attitudes.

'The Church offers no proof, no scriptural texts, and no solid reasoning that lead to the conclusion that every procreative act must be open to new life.'



The Church's stand on contraception therefore may not be divinely ordained as Pope John Paul II wants us to believe. He said: "We are not dealing with a doctrine invented by man." Rather, he continues, it is a teaching "written by the creative hand of God in the nature of the human person." And those who question the doctrine, he declares, may well question "God's holiness". 2.

Today, the Church pushes natural family planning as the only method - not one of the methods - which couples can use. For the Church to say that this is the best for couples, especially for women, patronizes adult decision-making.



Lynn Lee

The Church pursues this anyway with such single-minded intensity at a time when so many women are dying from abortions and pregnancy-related causes. It pushes this line when AIDS is on the rise, when couples have serious reasons for spacing children, and when one birth control method is not sufficient or effective for a human being's entire reproductive life.

The Church's teachings on contraception are untenable. The Church offers no proof, no scriptural texts, and no solid reasoning that lead to the conclusion that every procreative act must be open to new life.3.

It puts undue emphasis on the biological aspects of 'the act' which it perceives as something distinct and isolated from the totality of the human being. It [is] fixated on sex as sinful and of women as the source of sexual temptations and impurity.

It does not take into account the historical context and the evolution of the meaning and purpose of sexuality in marriage as stated in *Gaudium et Spes*: sexual intercourse within marriage is noble and worthy; marital love is a value in itself, apart from procreation.

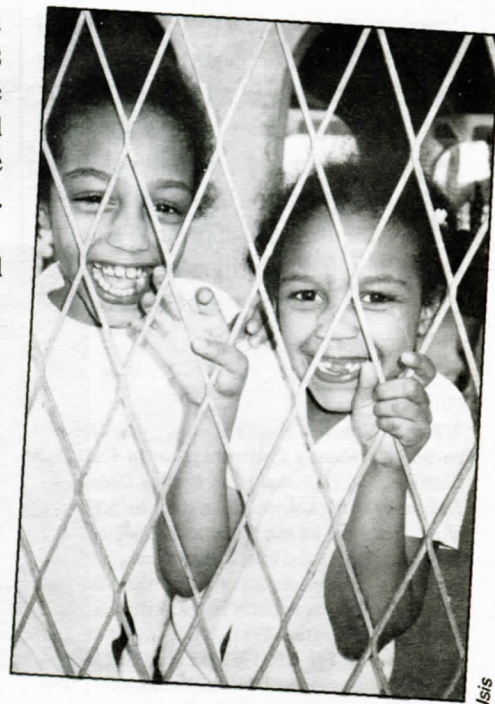
'Why must choice of a birth control method be a basis for salvation or condemnation?'

It also ignores the Vatican II warning on the dangers of prolonged sexual abstinence.

Likewise, it pays no heed to the advice of St. Paul when he wrote "...Where the intimacy of married life is broken off, it is not rare for its faithfulness to be imperiled and its quality of fruitfulness ruined." And it almost pays no respect to the dignity of human beings born into this world without the possibility of being fed and educated decently.

Question such as these have been raised: Does sexual intercourse during the infertile period lead to what the Church calls a 'contraceptive mentality'? Doesn't periodic abstinence constitute a barrier method that separates egg and sperm in time, in much the same way that the pill does?

Is the unitive-procreative connection inseparable? On what basis does the Church declare that separating these two aspects of marriage by way of contraception, is intrinsically evil? Why



Isis

must choice of a birth control method be a basis for salvation or condemnation?

Why does the Church stand alone on contraception, one that has its foundations in natural law, and which therefore should, in theory, correspond to the universal moral experience of humankind?

'one day...the Church may yet declare that sex, and an entire human being's sexuality... is beautiful, creative, erotic, life-giving, and life enhancing... simply a celebration of ourselves.'

Surely, what several Catholics, in good standing, think and feel in their hearts must count for something.

But I have not lost hope. I still believe in my Church. And I know that one day, a century late perhaps, the Church might

'open another window on the world' and call 'the winds of change' to blow. This time, the Church may yet declare that sex, and an entire human being's sexuality comes from God, and is beautiful, creative, erotic, life-giving, and life-enhancing. And it will recognize and appreciate that this is not a desire for licentiousness or sexual laxity but is simply a celebration of ourselves.

Endnotes

1. For the Catholic Church's History, I relied heavily on *Maggie Hume's Contraception in Catholic Doctrine: The Evolution of an Earthly Code*; John T. Noonan Jr. who authored *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1965; and *Ute Ranke-Heinemann's Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*. Penguin Books, 1990. 2. Religious News Service/Washington Post, Nov. 19, 1988 and Commonweal, Feb. 10, 1989, as cited in *Maggie Hume's Contraception in Catholic Doctrine: The Evolution of an Earthly Code*. Washington, D.C.: Catholics for a Free Choice, 1991. 3. *Bernard Haring, Charles Curran and Gregory Baum* level their criticisms against *Humanae Vitae* in *The Catholic Case for Contraception*. London: Arlington Books, 1965.

Marilen J. Dañguilan MD, a Filipina, is an international women's health consultant, a government health policy analyst and a women's health rights activist. She is the author of **Making Choices in Good Faith: A Challenge to the Catholic Church's Teachings on Sexuality and Contraception**, WomanHealth 1993. This paper was presented at the Southeast Asian Regional Consultation of the Independent Commission on Population and Quality of Life, September 1994, Manila. ♀

Is The Pope Catholic?

A new study released by Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) shows that Catholics worldwide disagree with the Vatican's stand on reproductive issues - abortion and contraception - and on social issues such as divorce, a married priesthood and the ordination of women.

Proponents of the institutional position on abortion and contraception often assert that dissent from official teachings is an almost exclusively American phenomenon. However, according to the data collected by CFFC and compiled in the new report, *Catholics and Reproduction: A World View*, disagreement among Catholics with church leaders on questions ranging from abortion to divorce is common worldwide.

Among the report's findings:

- Sixty-one per cent of Polish voters favor a legal right to abortion. Only 10 per cent agree with the hierarchy's position banning abortion completely. Sixty-one per cent of Poles think that the church has too much power, 76 per cent believe it should not interfere in elections, and 70 per cent believe that it should not interfere in government.
- When Ireland voted on the Irish abortion law in 1992, two-thirds of the electorate (66 per cent) disagreed with the Vatican's position against abortion by favoring a change in the constitutional amendment

which banned abortion entirely. Fifty-two per cent of the Irish are also opposed to the Vatican's teaching in opposition to contraception. Among those aged 18-34, the number opposing the church's teaching on contraception is 71 per cent.



Isis

- In Mexico, 88.4 per cent believe that the decision to have an abortion belongs either to the couple or to the woman. Only 7 per cent believe that this decision belongs to others.

- Although 76 per cent of Catholics in Brazil know that the Catholic church prohibits abortion under any circumstances, 40 per cent say that couples should be free to decide for themselves and 51 per cent said that they would not try to convince others not to have an abortion. Seventy-two per cent of Brazillian Catholics believe that it is permissible to use any method of birth control regardless of the Catholic hierarchy's position.

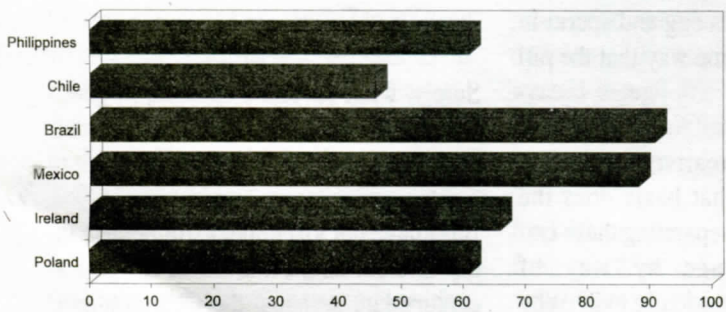
- In Chile, 46 per cent of the population believe that abortion should be either permitted in special cases or available to all women. Seventy-three per cent of Chileans disagree with the church's position against legal divorce, even though it remains illegal in Chile.

- Sixty-one percent of respondents in the Philippines agree that the choice of family planning methods is a personal decision of a married couple with which no one should interfere, and, contrary to the church's total prohibition, 83 per cent agree with the use of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS.

Frances Kissling, President of Catholics for a Free Choice, says, "these surveys prove that the Vatican's views are out of step with the 994 million Catholics they purport to represent throughout the world."

Source: Catholics for a Free Choice, August 3, 1994 Memo, 1436 U Street, N.W., Suite 301, Washington, D.C. 20009-3997, USA. Tel: (202) 986-6093 Fax: (202) 332-7995.

Catholics opposed to official Vatican position on family planning and abortion



Theravada Buddhism and Women Priests in Thailand

by Suwanna Asavaroengchai



Isis



Lynn Lee

Feminist Buddhists claim their right to ordination

Now there is a movement by a group of feminist Buddhists, led by Buddhist scholar *Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh*, to re-establish the bhikkhuni Sangha in Thailand. Although her crusade has sometimes been greeted with scepticism, if not mockery and jeers, she is adamant about the social benefits of a bhikkhuni Sangha, "*First, an opportunity would be given to women to have status in the religion if they wish to follow their faith.*"

Women who now want to forsake worldly matters can become Buddhist nuns, but due to their low status, they are hardly recognised socially or religiously, "*Buddhist nuns are not classified in one of the four groups traditionally comprising Buddhism, there is neither a role model nor a positive image for women who want to practice Buddhism seriously.*" The four groups are bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, laymen and lay women. A bhikkhuni Sangha would not only foster spiritual fulfilment for women but could help cure social ills, *Dr Chatsumarn* claimed.

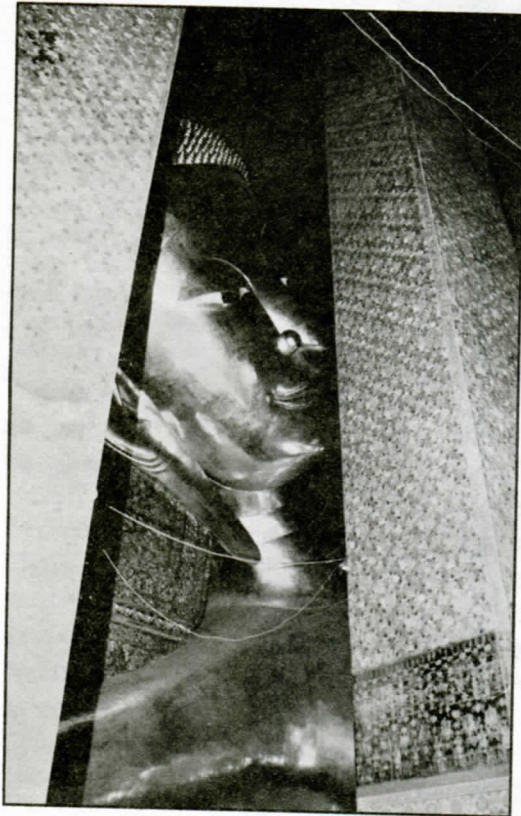
She believes in the theory that the issue of bhikkhunis and that of prostitution are closely related. Unlike women, men can always seek solace in the temple temporarily when their lives hit rock

The gender issue in Thai society has been discussed extensively. Thai women have in recent decades asserted themselves to a great extent to take an equal role in business, politics and society. Yet there is one area where raising the gender issue is still taboo and where equal opportunity is unthinkable, not to mention impractical, and that is the Thai monkhood.

For centuries, men have been raised to believe that the only way to attain enlightenment is to be ordained a monk. Women, on the other hand, have been told, by tradition and by law to accept the fact that they cannot attain such a lofty goal because they cannot be ordained. Looking back through history, the monkhood was available to both sexes as *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*. But the female monkhood has long disappeared from Theravada Buddhism, which is widely followed in Thailand.

bottom. "Those who have failed socially can enter the monkhood as a temporary shelter to recuperate. But that is for men only."

Without a well-established shelter for women, when they are cornered, they often fell forced to enter prostitution. In fact, one study has found similarities between 'women in the whore house' and 'women in the temple'. Many women enter the brothel and the temple with the same goal - to try to return something to their parents as a gesture of gratitude, "For prostitutes, it is material. For nuns, it is merit."



A bhikkhuni Sangha, she believes, would lead women spiritually, guiding them out of ordeals by offering a religious path or simply a temporary shelter in the temple. In fact, the 87 year old bhikkhuni *Vorami*, the first and only Thai bhikkhuni ordained in Taiwan, has helped out some destitute women at Wat Songdharmakalyani Temple, a bhikkhuni temple in Nakhonpathom.

Prejudice from monks

But the crucial problem of establishing a bhikkhuni Sangha is that of gaining the acceptance of monks, said the Ven. *Pra Methi Dhammaporn*, "Bhikkhunis have long disappeared from Theravada Buddhism, so a bhikkhuni's acquired status will be questioned, especially if one insists that bhikkhuni be equal to monks," said the venerable monk, who is the dean of the Graduate Faculty at Maha Chulalongkorn Buddhist University.

While ordination of a new bhikkhuni is unlikely, *Dr. Chatsumarn* said, the ordination of Thai bhikkhunis by Taiwanese bhikkhunis in the Mahayana tradition, which has maintained the

tradition, could be practical. She cited a historical study on Buddhism which indicates that Indian bhikkhunis had ordained Sri Lankan bhikkhunis, who, in turn, had ordained Chinese bhikkhunis. Thus, the ordination lineage had been maintained.

Yet, if the sacred ritual is practiced differently by Mahayana bhikkhunis in Thailand, it is unlikely to be recognised by the local Sangha, warned *Pra Methi*. To have the local Sangha recognise a bhikkhuni, she has to be ordained under the Theravadin tradition. The Sangha Supreme Council must also consider whether the Vinaya, the code of monastic discipline, would allow the ordination of bhikkhuni.

"We have passages in the Vinaya which have not been interpreted. However, it can't be assumed that the interpretation would result in permission for the ordination of bhikkhuni," said *Pra Methi*. If the Vinaya allows the ordination of women, the recognition by bhikkhus will naturally follow.

So far, however, there has not been enough public demand for bhikkhuni ordination to have the Sangha interpret the Vinaya. The revival of bhikkhuni, he insisted, was the ideal of a small group of academics, "Even the more liberal Western Buddhist monks, such as the venerable *Pra Sumedho*, the American monk who believes in the equal status of women, don't ordain bhikkhunis."

Instead of establishing the bhikkhuni Sangha, which may create conflicts about its legal status, *Pra Methi* proposed that one step be taken at a time. Giving more dhamma education to nuns and improving their status should be the first priority. He said that "Nuns should be given proper education to be able to contribute to society, the same way Catholic nuns do." In this way, women will gradually gain enough support to give them higher status in the Buddhist hierarchy.

But according to *Dr. Chatsumarn*, the community of nuns (*mae ji*) has been so long neglected that it cannot function properly as a religious organisation for social development. Neglected by both society and the local Sangha, a lot of nuns find it hard to improve themselves because there is very little religious education for nuns. Many find themselves doing chores for monks. At the same

time, seventy per cent of nuns said in a recent survey that they did not have a strong religious commitment. Many admitted that they became nuns to seek refuge or to hide from their worldly failures.

Differences of opinion amongst Buddhist nuns

Dr. Chatsumarn further explained, "Nuns (*mae ji*) have tried in vain to register and seek education. In national reports on Buddhist temples submitted to His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch, there is not even one mention of nuns."

Leading Buddhist nun, *Mae ji Sansanee Sthirasut* agreed; "Thai society doesn't fully accept the existence of females in the religion. Being a nun is even worse." Whether women's status should be improved in Buddhism is for those in the secular world to decide, she mused. For her, religious status does not matter, "We are not interested in status, what people call us or whether they accept us. We know what we are doing. That's enough."

Her priority, she said, is to look into herself, to learn more about herself and to realise her religious path and whether it leads in the right direction. "I am not against any movement to improve the status of women in religion. It is good that *Archaan* (professor) *Chatsumarn* has tried to push for more recognition of women. But that is a secular matter," she said.

Unlike conventional nuns, *Mae ji Sansanee* has been recognised for her contribution to society and women's causes. She runs *Sathienthammasathan* as a women's shelter to instill in women morality and spiritual virtues.

Prejudice against women underlies the debate

Prof. Dr. Prawase Wasi, a social critic and Buddhist scholar, agreed with *Dr. Chatsumarn* that there are plenty of destitute women who could be helped by women in religion, "But it will be too late if we have to wait for the establishment of a *bhikkhuni Sangha*. I think we should have institutions to support and educate women spiritually and socially. A religious institution

would be ideal," he said. He felt that a campaign to revive *bhikkhuni* would raise a lot of conflicts. "When one demands something unconventional in this society, he or she is treated as a weirdo. The campaign would be treated as a joke."

Dr. Chatsumarn acknowledged the strong mood of disapproval. "What I've been asking for is an opportunity to be ordained into the monkhood. But whenever we demand something unconventional, we are treated as if we are making the demand out of 'kiles' (defilement). If the Lord Buddha entered the monkhood to attain enlightenment, so it is implied that life under monkhood is more suitable for enlightenment. Why can't women follow the same path if they have the inclination?"

Dr. Chatsumarn has gradually built up her movement for *bhikkhunis* by organizing three-day retreats for the past three years. Women can study dhamma, meditation and asceticism, similar to living in a monastery. "We are looking for qualified women to spearhead *bhikkhuni* ordination. For the right candidate, ordination can be carried out right away, either in Taiwan or Los Angeles." She stressed that the *bhikkhuni Sangha* should not threaten male monks because they are not supposed to be hierarchical.



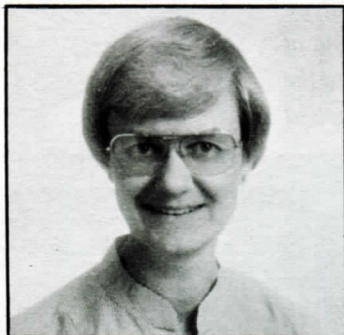
From *Servants of the Buddha*

Even though the local *Sangha* may not accept the future *bhikkhuni* community, *Dr. Chatsumarn* was optimistic. "It's good that the monks will not pay much attention to us. That way, we can nurture our *bhikkhunis* without interference. We are not seeking equal status, we only want a chance to devote our lives to Buddhism and society."

Source: Newsletter on International Buddhist Women's Activities, Vol. 10 No. 4 (NO. 40), July-September 1994. ♀

A Century Later: Women And The Church

by Helen Graham, M.M.



Sr. Helen Graham

**'I do not believe
that any man
ever saw or talked
with God...'
Elizabeth Cady Stanton**

'The canon law, the Scriptures, the creeds and codes and church discipline of the leading religions bear the impress of fallible man, and not of our ideal first cause, "the Spirit o' all Good," that set the universe of matter and mind in motion, and by immutable law holds the land, the sea, the planets, revolving round the great centre of light and heat, each in its own elliptic, with millions of stars in harmony all singing together, the glory of creation forever and ever.' Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1895)1.

'I ask no favors for my sex. All I ask our brethren is, that they will take their feet from off our necks....' Sarah Grimké (1838)2.

Aside from being the year of the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995 is also the centenary commemoration of **The Woman's Bible**, a project initiated by *Elizabeth Cady Stanton* as a result of her experience in the nineteenth century anti-

slavery and women's suffrage movements in the United States. *Cady Stanton* was active at the first Women's Rights Convention held in New York in 1848. In the **Declaration of Sentiments**, which she wrote for the convention, she stated that the history of humankind is "a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having [as] its direct object the

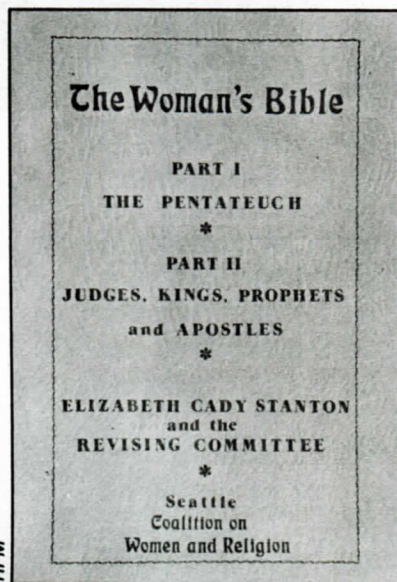
establishment of an absolute tyranny over her."3.

It was because she found that anti-women texts of church law and legislation and the Bible were being quoted by clergymen, statesmen, lawyers, and the press, and were even being internationalized by women, that *Cady Stanton* proposed to a committee of women that they take a deeper look at women's position in the Testaments. "If the Bible teaches the equality of Woman," she wrote, "why does the church refuse to ordain women to preach the gospel, to fill the offices of deacons and elders, and to administer the Sacraments, or to admit them as delegates to the Synods, General Assemblies and Conferences of the different denominations?"4.

In her introduction to **The Woman's Bible**, *Cady Stanton* offered a brief summary of the Bible's position on woman:

*"The Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital questions of the hour, she was commanded to ask her husband at home."*5.

Not unexpectedly, along with some appreciation and encouragement, she



RPM

experienced strong opposition to her project. Even the Woman's Rights movement disavowed the book.⁶ *Cady Stanton* was not, however, the first woman to have serious problems with the biblical texts. In her book, **The Creation of Feminist Consciousness**, the feminist historian *Gerda Lerner* has documented the persistent efforts on the part of women over many centuries, to counter prevailing interpretations of core biblical texts by patriarchal authorities who used them to define, what they considered to be, the proper roles for women in society and to justify women's subordination.

A major cause of the growing constriction of women's functions in the Christian church, which began in the second century and continues on into our present time, was the adoption of a dualistic anthropology, which divided reality into two separate and opposing halves, assigning a higher value to one member of the pair, i.e., humanity/nature, man/woman, and God/world. This hierarchical dualism, first articulated in ancient Greek philosophy, was raised to the level of divinely revealed truth in church teaching down through the ages. Isolated women throughout the centuries have been uneasy with this pattern of distortion, but were not yet able to clearly articulate an alternative vision until the second half of this century. The project of *Elizabeth Cady Stanton* was a significant forerunner of contemporary feminism among church women (and some men).

The commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the publication of **The Woman's Bible**, therefore, affords us an occasion to reflect on and assess the journey of women to achieve their rightful place in the churches in the last one hundred years. While it is true that women are ordained in some Protestant confessions, including, most recently, the women ordained to the priesthood in the Anglican communion, women are still very far from achieving equality in the churches. It was only half a century ago that women of the Roman Catholic communion in the United States gained access to formal theological education. In 1943 Holy Cross

Sister Madeleva Wolff inaugurated the first doctoral program in theology for women at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana. Nine years later, in 1952, *Pope Pius XII* authorized women to receive degrees in theology.

The issue of women's ordination to the priesthood has been a major issue for women in the Roman Catholic church since the early 1970s. Rome responded to women's demands in 1976 with a document reiterating the argument that it was not church practice to ordain women, and

added that since the priest acts 'in the person of Christ' women cannot be sacramental signs of Christ since they are not men.⁷ With this additional (offensive and theologically dubious) element in the argument, it became clear that the real issue is not ordination, or priesthood, but a much more fundamental question: Are women indeed created in the image and likeness of God as the Bible says (Genesis 1:27)? Or are women predestined by their physiology to be forever incapable of representing Christ? These are deeply theological questions.

More recently women (and men) have been 'definitely' barred from even discussing the possibility of women's ordination by the apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, in which "in order that all doubt may be removed," *Pope John Paul II* declared "that the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitely held by all the church's faithful."⁸



MRS. ELIZABETH CADY STANTON.
Honorary President of National-American Woman Suffrage Association.
Elizabeth Cady Stanton

As one woman has commented, the papal letter can be viewed:

*"as an indicator that the Vatican is threatened by women's leadership in the church. Intransigence on this issue is part of the institutional church's pattern of intransigence on all major sexual issues. It is an indication that at the highest level of international church leadership the full humanity of women is still not taken seriously."*⁹.


Again, it is clear that the real issue is not ordination but the recognition of women's full humanity.



In the one hundred years since *The Woman's Bible*, a vast number of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant women have completed doctoral studies in Theology and Scripture, and are contributing significantly to raising the consciousness of women (and men) on the issue of the marginalization and subordination of women in the churches and in society. The long history in the church of the devaluation of women on the basis of their gender will not be easily overcome¹⁰, but there is hope in the growing awareness of Christian

(and Jewish)11 women (and men) around the globe who will not abandon the struggle until women take their rightful place in church (synagogue) and society.

Endnotes

1. Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the 'Introduction' to *The Woman's Bible* (Ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, New York, European Publishing Company, 1895, 12,13.
2. Sarah Moore Grimke, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women, Addressed to Mary Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society*, Boston, Isaac Knapp, 1838, 10, as cited by Lerner, *ibid*, 162.
3. 'Editor's Preface' to *The Woman's Bible*, vi.
4. *ibid*, 9.
5. *ibid*.
6. See Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, New York/Oxford, Oxford University press, 1993, 164.
7. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declaration *Inter Insigniores* on the question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood, Oct. 15, 1976: AAS 69, 1977, 98-116.
8. *Catholic New Times*, 26 June 1994, 8. The complete text is also available in *The National Catholic Reporter*, June 17, 1994, 7. The letter was issued on May 22, 1994.
9. Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ in the *National Catholic Reporter*, June 17, 1994, 5.
10. The devaluation of women on the basis of gender finds its biblical support in such passages as 1 Cor 11:3-10, 14:33b-36; Eph 5:22-6:9; and 1 Tim 2:8-15 among others.
11. While the concern of this brief article is with women in the Christian churches, it is interesting to observe that there is a parallel movement among Jewish women, and that there are even stirrings among Muslim women as well. See for example, Jewish feminist Judith Plaskow's *Standing Again At Sinai: Judaism From a Feminist Perspective*, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990; *Sisters in Islam, Are Women & Men Equal Before Allah? and Are Muslim Men Allowed to Beat Their Wives?* Malaysia: United Selangor Press Sdn Bhd, 1991; and, Riffat Hassan, 'Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam', in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, ed. Paula M. Cooley, William R. Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991, 39-64. 



Arguments Used Against The Ordination of Women

by *Dulcie Abraham*

This is an excerpt from an article by *Dulcie Abraham* on women and priesthood in the Anglican church in Malaysia.

Traditional arguments against women becoming priests

Basically there are three main identifiable levels or planes of argument against the ordination of women which continue to be given prominence.

At the **first level** are what are regarded as theological and scriptural arguments against including women in the priesthood. One such perspective is that of Christ as the 'icon' of God as essentially a male 'imageo dei'. Only a male therefore, according to this argument, can truly represent Christ as a priest. It is for this reason it is argued, Christ chose only male apostles. This, by and large, is the Roman Catholic and Anglo Catholic stance. The more fundamentalistic viewpoint is that the case against women priests is scriptural. And those passages in the Epistles which apparently pronounce against women teaching in Church or teaching men etc. are quoted to support this view.

There has been opposition from a strong minority on grounds that the ordination of women will divide the Anglican Communion. There are in fact bishops and clergy actively campaigning for such division because of their belief, conscience or principles.



From *Against All Odds* p.117

A related argument is that the ordination of women will set up yet another barrier between the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church. Many clergy and laity are sincerely concerned about what they see as a 'setback' in ecumenical relations with Rome.

Apart from these theological or scriptural reasons there are several others that may be termed **second-level** questions that are raised by those who would consider themselves as reasonable and fair-minded persons: can women actually take on all the tasks and responsibilities of priests? Can they serve alone in remote and isolated areas? Or in large urban parishes? Can they counsel men? Why when there is so much else that can be done by women who wish to serve in the Church, must women wish to be priests as well? Why do women want to have the same roles as men when God has made them

different and intended them for different roles?

The **third level** or plane of argument is frequently put forward by men and women who would again consider themselves reasonable and well informed persons: if women are allowed into the priesthood, will it happen that men will no longer find this calling attractive, and fewer and fewer men will want to become priests? Why are women trying to enter a male preserve? Is it power that women are after? When women become powerful

and claim equality with men, will this lead to the breakdown of family life? and so on.

The struggle against injustice

In Malaysia, women in all walks of life enter into the struggle for the upliftment of their sisters - in factories, on rubber and palm oil estates, in the forests of East Malaysia as well as in the cities; the struggle against the abuse, violence and oppression of women has begun and goes bravely forward. The struggle of women to be given their rightful place in the Church in Malaysia

is only part of this wider struggle. Young women who have given their entire lives for the service of the Church are being humiliated, neglected, discriminated against and denied their rights within the structures of the Church. Arbitrary decisions by male clergy and church organisations govern the fate of women in the Church.

A new model

It needs to be stated that for many women today the role of priest, as some male leaders have shaped it is not in itself attractive.... there is so much assumption of authority and power that bears no semblance whatsoever to the Christ image of humility and servanthood, and it is this priestly role that women must capture. The entry of women to the priesthood will indeed bring it to a 'lower' level. Only then can it be renewed and refined and begin to be again what it was meant to be. Perhaps this is what women can and will, with God's grace, do for the ordained ministry.

Source: **Suara Wanitakristian, Malaysian Women in Ministry and Theology**, August 1994, MWMT, c/- 26 Jalan University, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. ♀



Iyalorisha and Deacons, women and priesthood in the Caribbean

In Trinidad and Tobago, *Molly Ahye*, a 62 year old mother of three and grandmother of ten, was installed as the new high priestess of the *Opa Orisha (Shango)* of Trinidad and Tobago, at an historic ceremony on June 8. Her official title is *Iyalorisha*. Orisha is a Yoruba religious culture in which different divinities, or powers called Orisha, are worshipped. A researcher of African traditions, *Ahye* holds a Master of Arts degree in the performing arts from the American University, Washington, D.C. and is now a doctoral candidate at New York University, in dance in higher education.

Barbados' Anglican community embraced a new era in its 170 year old history with the ordination of the country's first female deacons on July 25 1994. Witnessed by a congregation of several hundred, *Sonia Hinds*, 34, and *Beverley Sealey*, 31, solemnly accepted the charge of deacons.

The investiture which took place during a two and a half hour ceremony at St. Michael's Cathedral, was attended by *Governor General Dame Nita Barrow* and other dignitaries. Close friends from Codrington College, England, where they both earned degrees in theology, *Sonia* and *Beverley* decided to seek ordination together.

Barbados voted for female ordination in 1980. Despite this, the Province of the West Indies, of which the island is a member, moved only a few years ago to sanction ordination to the diaconate but has fallen short of the two-thirds majority required for admission to the priesthood. Jamaica is the only other Caribbean country to ordain women as deacons.

Just three weeks earlier, the Church of England announced the loss of 139 clergymen since the ordination of women priests this year.

Source: CAFRA News,
Vol. 8 No. 3, July-
September 1994.

pacific view

Pacific Women : Asserting Spirituality

by *Lisa Meo*

Lisa Meo is the Coordinator of Weavers a sub group of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) which promotes theological education for women. Amongst other qualifications, *Lisa* has a Master's of Theology degree from the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji. Her thesis focused on the role of the church in the plight of the exploited garment workers in Fiji, she is a member and leader in the Methodist church in Fiji. She wrote the following article for the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) Women's Consultation, held in Costa Rica in early December 1994, the meeting was a North/South Dialogue on violence and women's spirituality, we have excerpted some sections from her paper.

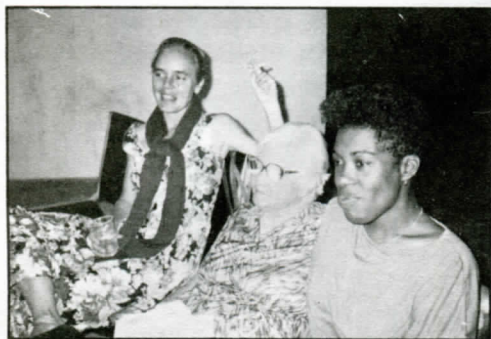
'As Pacific women, we are at a birthing process and beginning to feel our way....'

Pacific Women's Theology

I want to begin this section with the following quotation:

'All human beings are created in God's image and deserve mutual respect and protection. God intends that all human

beings enjoy a full life free from abuse and injustice. Sexual and physical harassment, abuse and exploitation are sinful, violating both persons and mutuality within community. They arise from unequal power relationships, usually based on age, gender, and/or position of authority (The United Church of Canada, 1993).



Isis

The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools [SPATS] adopted the word 'Weavers' as the name of a new committee mandated to focus on promoting theological education for women. 'Weaving' is a Pacific women's activity but it also involves the whole community. Beginning with the selection of leaves of a plant and ending when the last strand is tied away. So the journey towards theological education for women is a weaving process.

Weavers, the Pacific women 'doing theology', attempts to enlighten both men and women to assert their equal responsibility and partnership as God's people, and to promote justice, peace, freedom and equality. Through numerous efforts of awareness training and empowerment, both women and men will recognise each other's gifts and partnership to enrich life in God's world. As Pacific women, we are at a birthing process and beginning to feel our way and survey the world around us [Kanongata'a, 1992].

Weavers are beginning to explore contextually relevant themes, women are encouraged to share their own stories, songs and dances in relation to their faith journey. Emerging themes arising through dialogue and discussion will be formulated and developed for further theological reflection. Other themes that need immediate discussion are; women's identity, women's place in ministry, women's spirituality, gospel and culture in relation to women and so on.

The option for Pacific women is to involve or engage in theological education because theological education will enlighten women to discover their own identity as free and gifted people of God. More importantly, it is the task of the church to promote all human beings, both male and female as equal in the sight of God, discrimination of any kind and violence against women are contrary to the Gospel message. As Christians, we are challenged to seek and find ways to bring about transformation in our different island societies where everyone will live in fairness and justice.

Pacific Women's Spirituality

The manifestation of Pacific women's spirituality is evident in their conversations, stories, songs, dances, commitment, worship and other activities they perform, God's name can be heard or mentioned in normal conversations spontaneously. Normally, a prayer is a regular item at the beginning or at the end of any gathering. Christian spirituality interweaves with the cultures of the different islands in the Pacific [Tippet, 1975]. Sometimes, one cannot differentiate between culture and Christianity. People seem to think that to acknowledge God in a form of a short devotion or a prayer in any ceremonial or cultural occasion is cultural rather than Christian.

Basically, spirituality is defined as the awareness of God's presence in one's life or in our midst....Spirituality moves, shapes and frees oneself. Christian spirituality can be described as God working in and through all things that shape and move one to take action. It is a relationship between one's inner self and the Divine that transcends the person's life. The challenge for the Island churches is to search for relevant types of spiritual formation education that will bring about transformation, especially in attitudes towards women.

The Church

The church is the conscience of the society, and today the society needs a conscience (Kevin Barr, 1990). Unfortunately, the church does not perform it's role well as the conscience of society. Instead, it perpetuates or condones some forms of violence against women. For example, in most churches in the Pacific, decision-making is still male dominated, women's gifts and potential tend to be ignored. Recently, a few theological schools accepted women students [but] women's ordination is a controversial issue to many of the Island churches. Churches should promote human dignity, equal treatment, justice, and unity. If the society treated women differently the church should make a difference by unconditionally accepting everyone with love.



The liberating power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the early missionaries to many islands in the Pacific changed the status of women and elevated them to some degree. Women's education was encouraged by those early missionaries and most abusive practices against them were discouraged. Other oppressive institutions, as earlier mentioned, remain in existence as obstacles to women's endeavors in recognizing their human rights as children of the loving God. ♀

Bibliography : Barr, Kevin, *Poverty in Fiji*, Suva: Fiji Forum for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, 1990. Kanongata'a, Keiti Ann, 'A Pacific Women's Theology of Birthing and Liberation'. *Pacific Journal of Theology* 11, No. 7 (1992):3-11.



From *Against All Odds* p. iv

Religion, secularism, and organizing women workers

By *Mirai Chatterjee*

Mirai Chatterjee is a full-time member of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Ahmedabad, India.

We have excerpted from her article, *Religion, secularism, and organizing women workers* from the book *Against All Odds: Essays on Women, Religion and Development from India and Pakistan*, Eds. *Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon and Nighat Said Khan*, published by Kali for Women, SAWF and Isis International, 1993.

Organizing self-employed women around economic issues has been our main focus for several years now. In the course of our work, we have recognized and accepted the important role religion plays in women's lives, but have been more concerned with their struggles for social and economic justice. However, with the rise of communalism, and its distorted interpretation of religion, we are facing serious challenges to our work. Not only are self-employed women's economic gains being threatened, but also our very survival as a union of poor women, regardless of caste, creed or religion, is at stake. This has prompted us to further analyse and understand the role of religion in women's lives, particularly in the context of rising communalism.

Belief, questioning and protest

Our day-to-day experience of working with poor women has led us to appreciate and respect the part religion plays in their lives. Whatever it be, our members draw tremendous strength and inspiration from their faith, the strength they need to continue to struggle both at home and at work. For even those who have begun to

believe in themselves and the importance of collective action, religion remains integral.

At the same time, increasing consciousness of the injustices they face has led SEWA members to question some aspects of religion, religious practice and the role of male clergy in all faiths. Anti-women practices in the guise of religious beliefs have been openly challenged. Several Muslim women members of SEWA have formed an independent support group, **Mahila Talak Pedit Sangh**. Apart from assisting divorced women to work and earn, the Sangh has taken up the issue of maintenance, child custody and adoption for divorced Muslim women and supported efforts to obtain rights for Muslim women. Working within the framework of Islam and the Koran, members have been attempting to offer a new interpretation of the scriptures which hitherto have been used to justify the denial of rights to women. SEWA members strongly condemned the tragic death of Roop Kanwar through sati in Deorala village of Rajasthan in 1987. At the community level

we have challenged unjust attitudes and behaviour towards women, passed off as 'religious traditions'.



Action challenging religious practices can only be taken where we have a strong base of constructive activities like the union, co-operatives, health and child care, and a large membership. Further, in terms of our goal of organising self-employed women, attacking or debunking religion in toto would have had disastrous consequences, given its importance in women's lives.

Intead, at SEWA we accept and respect the role of religion and faith in our society and try to inculcate the idea of 'Sarvadharm', the peaceful co-existence of all religious currents among us.

Communalism, organizing and poor women

We are faced with an increasingly difficult situation, with the current rise of

communalism, all kinds of reactionary beliefs are being peddled in the name of religion. How does communalism affect poor women?

One thing that is immediately obvious is the blatant misuse of religion by communalists. Playing on people's faith and through a narrow, selective interpretation of religious texts, communalists have already created enough havoc. There are so many examples of the misery that their dangerous rhetoric and activities have caused. In 1986, during Janmashtami celebrations *Shambhu Maharaj* of the Hindu Suraksha Samiti urged Hindus to take to the streets in protest as the government prevented his proposed procession.

"Babas sent by Shambhu Maharaj came to our area", said Lilaben Arjanbhai, who sews old cement bags for a living. "They said Lord Krishna has been insulted and as Hindus, we should remember our dhrama and take out a procession." These irresponsible exhortations came only two months after the terrible communal violence which rocked Ahmedabad following the Rathyatra procession in 1986. Today the situation has, if anything, worsened. Religious leaders are making fiery speeches against one or the other community, these self-styled leaders are spreading fear and hatred among people who once lived together in mohallas and chaals across the country.

Rhetoric and misuse of religious sentiments aside, communalism is yet another negative force in poor women's already difficult lives. For example, for those lucky enough to survive communal violence, there is the loss of their homes, tools of trade, small business and valuable daily wages. Long periods of violence take a tremendous toll on the economic well-being of the city, and poor, self-employed



women workers are the worst hit. For one thing, there is no question of selling vegetables and fruits from baskets in markets, or of pulling handcarts or rolling bidis. With curfew everywhere, women neither reach their workplaces nor deliver to merchants the finished products made at home - bidis, readymade garments, incense sticks and there is no way of receiving fresh supplies of raw materials.

Sometimes, workers manage to deliver finished goods to their employers but later, when curfew is lifted, they are told by the merchants that all records of goods received and even the goods themselves were destroyed in the violence, so how can they possibly be paid?

In some areas which suffer regularly during communal violence, merchants, contractors and others refuse to give women any work. In 1985, 1986 and 1991 our area was constantly under curfew. *"Our homes and few belongings were reduced to ashes. I am a readymade garment worker and have been sewing for Kanubhai of Revdi Bazaar for ten years. Now he says he simply will not give me any work as the cloth he gave me for sewing got burned with my house and sewing machine. None of the readymade garment merchants are giving us work here. How should we eat?"* asks Mehmooda, an

active member of SEWA.

In addition to the loss of daily wages, both during and after the communal violence, many self-employed women lose their tools of trade, sewing machines, pushcarts, charkhas and small stocks of raw material and finished goods are either looted or burnt to a cinder. This year too, as before, even though the government announced compensation for destroyed goods, many self-employed women could not avail of this because of lack of 'proof', a prerequisite for compensation from the government. Thus home-based workers and other self-employed women are forced deeper into the vicious cycle of indebtedness, further pauperisation and marginalisation.

Communalism and women's unity

Communalism also has a divisive effect on women's unity. At SEWA we emphasise the commonalities of our experiences and struggles, bringing women of all religious affiliations under one roof. But communal violence which brings bitterness and mistrust in its wake works towards unravelling our efforts. Women who were marching through the streets together, demanding justice for all, are suddenly segregated in refugee camps. It would be impossible, under such circumstances, to expect women to be impervious to the atmosphere of fear, mistrust and divisiveness.



From *Against All Odds* p.183

Although our unity is seriously challenged by the communal divide, years of struggling and sharing our everyday joys and sorrows are not so easy to erase. "In the midst of the violence, we met our Muslim sisters and brothers in Sarkhej" explained Chandaben Pappubhai, an old clothes vendor, SEWA stalwart and expert orator. "As I told all the people at the joint meeting of the city's trade unions, it is always the poor and self-employed of all communities who suffer the most. And self-employed women are the worst affected, being the poorest of workers. There are people in this city who want to divide us, to keep us down. But we will fight back together."

What women like Chandaben have also begun to understand is that the same forces who spread the communal poison also disseminate vicious anti-women propaganda. Not long after the communal violence of 1986, Hindu communalists distributed a booklet expounding 'Satyavad' or 'Theory of Truth'. In this they advocated that women return to the home and give up their jobs in favour of 'unemployed men'! To do otherwise would be to be 'a witch, a fallen woman and an insult to womanhood.'

"You have always told us to be strong and united", shouted Zarina, [a Muslim SEWA member] a normally shy and soft-spoken readymade garments worker. "Where is your unity now? We struggle the whole year, come for meetings which stress unity and peace, and yet we end up as 'guests' of these refugee camps every year." Similar sentiments were expressed by Narmadaben, a bidi worker in a refugee camp for Hindu residents not far from Zarina's camp. For SEWA and its 30,000 members who have grown to believe that there will be a better tomorrow, such periods of communal violence are times of reckoning.

"We worry about each other, our families and how to remain strong and united. It is not easy. Many of us who try to preserve



From Against All Odds p.112

our linkages as women workers are chided, taunted and isolated. 'Whose side are you on?' they ask, goading and provoking us. When trouble broke out at Raikhad, some of us tried to form a women's committee of both communities to work for peace. My husband thought it was a good idea but my relatives didn't. Still, I kept meeting with the other women, and our peace committee did manage to ease some tension. We women understand. It is we who have to bear the brunt of this madness", said Niruben, a SEWA organiser. Similarly, Muslim women who are a part of the Talak Pidit Sangh recognise that the same community 'leaders' who urge them to defend Islam and shun other communities, strenuously worked to prevent women from attaining their basic rights. "It is these same people who oppose our coming out of our homes and our right to maintenance and child custody. Where are they now? Are they helping Khairunissa, Husnabanu, Zarina and all the others who have been left by their husbands to fend for themselves?" asks Rahima, a SEWA organiser and secretary of the Sangh.

SEWA's role

The rising communal wave, its exploitation of religious feelings and allegiances and its destructive impact underscore the need to examine our views on religion and secularism and to develop a new understanding of these from a feminist perspective. We will have to take

the leadership in initiating actions for peace and justice for all.

We have found that unity is built when a group of women begin to collectively perceive a common need or interest. For example, organising bidi workers, regardless of caste or religion, but around the issue of bonus or identity cards slowly creates unity among them. Common bonds forged thus are then not so easily broken even in the face of great provocation.

We need to start organising against communalism from our very neighbourhoods, be they middle class or working class. The commonalities in our religious traditions and origins need to be explored from a feminist perspective and we should identify the contributions to religion by women and those of religious women to society.

We should support secular movements for a common civil code but as feminists scrutinise them for their approaches to our problems, and, we should protect the movement for a common code from cooption by communalists.

If the number of articles, papers and discussions are any indication, feminists are increasingly concerned about the role of religion, communalism and secularism in women's struggles. It is up to us to take the lead, respecting the faith dimension in women's lives and the strength it gives, and yet collectively challenging religious and communal forces that continue to obstruct our movement for justice and equality.

Notes: 1. Vibhuti Patel and Sujata Gothoskar, 'The Story of the Bombay Riots in the Words of Muslim Women', Manushi, No.29 July-August 1985; Ammu Joseph, Jyoti Punwani, Charu Shahane, Kalpana Sharma, 'Impact of Ahmedabad Disturbances on Women', Economic and Political Weekly, October 12, 1985; 'Why This Slow Murder' a SEWA report on the effects of communal violence in Ahmedabad, Manushi, No.33, March-April 1986. 2. Ibid. 3. Chinmay Patel, 'Streedharm' in Satyavad, p.16. Ahmedabad Bhavani printers, 1986. ☉

Women NGOs Statement on Culture and Religion

This oral statement on Culture and Religion was delivered on the 8th of June 1994 to the Second ESCAP Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference that met to discuss the Draft Plan of Action for the region for the World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in 1995.

The statement was made by womens groups including Isis International Manila to express their 'deep concern that the ESCAP Draft Plan of Action failed to address the issue of culture and religion.'

We reaffirm the statement in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of June 1993 which stresses the importance of working towards the elimination of all forms of sexual harassment, exploitation and trafficking in women, the elimination of gender bias in the administration of justice and the eradication of any conflicts which may arise between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism.

We reiterate human rights and freedoms particularly of women, which are guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women and other international human rights instruments.

We wish to emphasise that universal rights standards are rooted in many cultures and religions of our people. However, we wish to draw a distinction between institutionalised religion, perpetuated by the state, religious institutions and religion in people's movements.

Religious movements to be empowering must adhere to principles of non-violation of human rights. While we advocate multiculturalism, all cultural and religious practices, which deviate from universally accepted human rights including women's rights must not be tolerated.

Culture and religion have been used systematically to violate women's fundamental human rights and their access to power and equality. Women's rights are increasingly threatened and violated by militant assertions of religious and ethnic identity, in normal and in crisis situations.

We are concerned by the use of religion by governments in the region and by political forces wanting to gain political and cultural control that had pitted state against people and communities against each other and is played out intensely against women.

We hold our governments responsible for the failure to accord protection to women and children in crisis situations.

We call on our governments:

- 1** To ensure that the cultural, religious and ideological diversity of all communities is given expression in media and education in ways that do not include or violate the rights of women and minority communities.
- 2** To ensure that the army, police bureaucrats and other state apparatus provide effective safeguards to minorities.
- 3** To ensure the 'Asian values or culture, religion and traditions' do not violate the rights of women and other repressed communities. While cultural and religious specificities may impact on universal standards, they cannot be used as a pretext to justify violations of rights of women, or be used as an excuse for non-ratification or making of reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.'

Source: **Forum News**, Vol. 7 No. 2, August 1994, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, 9th Floor, APDC Building, Persiaran Duta, P.O. Box 12224, 50770 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Tel: (603) 2550648; Fax: (603) 2541371.

“By Not Being Fully Aware... Western Feminists were... contributing to the Growth of Religious Fundamentalism in the Third World”

by Dr. Vandana Shiva and Mira Shiva

*The extract below is from a paper titled **Was Cairo a Step Forward for Third World Women?** The paper was written following the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, September 1994.*

[At the International Conference on Population and Development], while Western feminists falsely believed that the battle was between women and the church, they were engaging vicariously in a war between two patriarchies - the demographic establishment and the religious establishment. By not being fully aware of how the Northern women's movement is being used by the patriarchal establishment, Western feminists were actually contributing to the growth of religious fundamentalism in the Third World.

Instead of pointing out that it is women who are taking care of children, and holding family and community together in a period of social breakdown, women's groups contributed to a discourse that allowed 'women's rights' to be seen as antithetical to the rights of children and women's freedom as based on neglect of family.

However, in reality, it is women who are protecting children and carrying family responsibility. Today, more than one-third of the house-holds in Africa, Latin America and the developed world are female headed; in Norway the figure is 38% and in Asia 14%. Even where women are not the sole family supporters, they are primary supporters in terms of work and energy spent of providing sustenance to the family.

By ignoring the social, economic and family responsibilities that Third World women carry, the exclusive focus on 'sexual and reproductive rights' is disempowering, not empowering, for Third World women because it makes women appear socially irresponsible. As the social crisis grows, people will have to find ways of holding society together. In real life, it is women who have shown leadership in these matters. Wherever women have been active and articulate in rebuilding community and society, fundamentalists have been silenced.

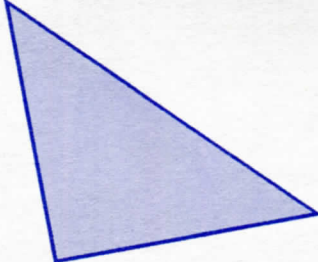
However, the Cairo Conference was dominated by Northern women obsessed with individual sexual freedom, indifferent to society and to other freedoms. They, therefore, failed to highlight how women carry a disproportionate share of social responsibility and thus, created a stereotype of women's rights as implying social irresponsibility. The vacuum created in the domain of social responsibility, we know by experience, gets filled by the emergence of religious fundamentalists who create new restrictions on women for the cause of maintaining 'family values' and social norms. Western feminists, thus, unintentionally create a new space and power for the religious fundamentalists while shrinking the space within their societies. The politics of Cairo therefore, rendered women's multiple social and economic roles invisible, reduced women to their biology and put the entire burden of family planning on women. These are gains for patriarchy, not for women.

Source: **Third World Resurgence**, No. 50, October 1994, Third World Network, 228 Macalister Road, 10400 Penang, Malaysia.



Poetry

Reviews



Resource
Center
Update

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Family Portrait

Grandmother sits by the window
Bent low upon her patterns
In cross-stitch.
A few more, she says,
And another piece
Completed.

Mama comes home
From school.
She sits to catch
Her breath, then rises,
Sets the table, murmuring
About a faculty strike.

Papa slips in quietly.
He's late again.
A friend's birthday, he explains,
He couldn't refuse a drink.
Men never refuse
A drink, he says.

My brother drops by
With some of his friends.
He says it's cold outside
He needs his jacket.
We're thankful he drops by
Even if only for his jacket.

Me, I'm turning ten next month
Grandmother is teaching me
To cross-stitch.
But I always end up
Breaking her needles.
She says I'm a curse to womanhood.

Mama is teaching me to cook.
I'll need it when I marry, she says.
Ah, she doesn't know
Papa has told me I'm crazy
Because I told him
I'll never marry.

My brother, he's okay.
Sometimes, I think he doesn't know me.
But I guess he does
'Cause he told me he'll kill me
If he ever catches me
Riding his motorbike again.

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Absence

And so my night is fed to eager mosquitoes
As my ears feign deafness
To the thunderous tick of your absence.

I pray tomorrow I shall wake
To find your tears upon the grass
Where I stood to say goodbye.

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Mother-Weaver (for Marj)

Fingers deft
Interlacing
Warp against weft
(Dreams against being)
Weaving patterns
On the mat
Where your children
Lay at night
Conjuring
Patterns of their own.

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Symmetry

Homeward she walks,
Windblown feet in worn-out slippers
Sculpting footfalls on the sand
That echo forty years of tramping
Upon that very same shore.

She sees a package of uneaten burgers
Abandoned by carefree picknickers.
She picks it up, unfazed
By the big bundle of unsold kangkong
Balancing upon her gray hair.

A few steps behind
An eight-year old girl trails,
Playful and amused
As she sinks her bare feet
Into her lola's footprints.

Hungry after a day at the market,
She sees a broken shell
And bends to pick it up
As the big bundle of unsold kangkong
Falls from her small, dark head.

(Lola means grandmother)

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Riza (Richie) Faith C. Ybanez is Chair of the Manila-based feminist
organisation Kalayaan. She is a researcher and law student.

Vaine Rasmussen

A SIMPLE MISTAKE

When a life together
enters a lull
What does one do?

Have a drink?
Take a lover?
Praise the Lord?

Or is the answer
In you and me.
Just that
others take
first place
over us
and it's custom
not to say
'No!'

Vaine Rasmussen

UNBROKEN VOWS

Did you mean it
When we said 'in sickness and in health'
It's hard to tell
with the silence growing longer
and nights lone and cold.

Did you mean it
When you said 'I do'
It's hard to tell
with a smashed lip
and bruised soul

or

Did you believe me
when I said 'till death us do part'
if you did
then you're the sucker.

Vaine Rasmussen

Vaine Rasmussen is a consultant economist in rural development with the South Pacific Commission, she is from the Cook Islands.

THREE WOMANIST LITANIES

Imani-Sheila Newsome

These poetic reflections were created to be read by African-American women as an alternative to prayers or convening invocations. I feel it is important to hear our own mouths, the power to make the sacred space. In order to make the sacred, we must understand the nature of the divine as revealed in the historical action and voices of our mothers. The eternal spirit called God, Goddess, Mover, Catalyst recalls to our limbs and lips the songs, moans, and steps of the 'old mothers'.

My litanies reflect words, visions, and activities common, I hope, to many African-American women. They are designed to be read in groups large and small. Parts can be designated to women in order to replicate the familiar 'Call and Response' pattern of vocalization familiar in African-American Christian worship.

Litany I

When our mothers met in this circle
They told stories of spirits and lovers long gone
Their daughters, sisters, friends
They sang

Where we stand lightning strikes
When we move hope is born
How we live - spirit proves

On the rolling sea in a hell dressed
darkness and fear our mothers sat.
The past a ghost with haunting cry
The future a moaning voice colored by despair
They sang

Repeat chant

When told that Divine life depended on southern dirt
watered by our red blood,
When tears watered cotton, cane and leaf.
Girls with heavy breasts did not believe, but
They sang

Repeat chant

Wishing, Wishing turned with deliberate speed
to freedoms sighs and sweetened liberty
snatched from crushing fist
hiding love, storing it for another time
A people sang

Repeat chant

Now we women framed in modern prose
Our own text written by our own hand
We rehearse our own salvation for
our children and our lives
We teach all to sing

Repeat chant

LITANY

Litany II for Kitchen Table Talk

ALL WOMEN:

Come, woman, sit at this table
There are things, most needed
Speak of those gone and those to come
Healing, laughter and tears

WOMAN #1

Snap beans in a bowl echo the
breaking of a thousand hearts
Place your hands in the bowl and help me

WOMAN #2

Tell me a story now, with the
dishes gone and pot hung
There is plenty of time

WOMAN #3

Against the noise of a barking dog
an old man's snore or a woman's sigh
whisper your secrets here
Where they cannot be desecrated

ALL WOMEN

Come, woman, sit at this table
There are things, most needed
Speak of those gone and those to come
Healing, laughter and tears

WOMAN #4

If we meet like this, will our
hunger, like fire under
a griddle, make us hot to the touch...

WOMAN #5

So that the water of destruction
and pain will skip across our
sore backs

WOMAN #6

Come, woman, rest at this table
There are things most needed
Let's speak of those gone
and those to come
Healing, laughter and tears

ALL WOMEN

Keep me company while I stir this pot
to keep life in me moving
to keep life in me moving
to keep Spirit in me flowing
to keep ALL in us growing
Come, woman, talk at this table
There are truths most needed
Let's speak of those gone and those to come
Healing, laughter and tears

L I T A N Y

Litany III

One Woman

When and where we enter
all our sister come
a cloud of witnesses
singing our name

One Woman

How many times can I tell you
this story?
Familiar phrases strung together
like cheap beads scattered
before we know their beauty.

All Women

When and where we enter
all our sisters come
a cloud of witnesses
singing our name.

Three Women

They say "We've come this far
by faith."
When we come forward
it is not just faith that
propels us forward
it is the echoes of prayers
of whitedress women and
Sunday School teachers.

Two women

And if there is a wall
a fire around me I
can call on that
praying/singing
place it in my mouth
and from the womb of my spirit
comes healing for my
daughters

One woman

and my sons

Four women

Walking on water or
sand or shattered
hearts
God is with us
Running forward to mercy
We can carry others along

Two women

The Spirit leading
through storm
and wind
through empty myths
and secret sin.

All women

For when and where we enter
our sisters and
brothers
our sons and daughters
our neighbors
our repentant now knowing
enemies
all come
singing our names
in praise of God.

Source: Three Womanist Litanies, WTC Newsletter,
December 1993, Women's Theological Center,
P.O. Box 1200, Boston, MA 02117-1200, USA.

Forbidden Fruit, Women Write the Erotic,
Tina Cuyugan (Ed.), Anvil Publishing, Inc.,
 Manila, 1992.

Kung Ibig Mo, Love Poetry by Women,
Marjorie M. Evasco and *Benilda S. Santos*,
 Anvil Publishing, Inc., Manila, 1993.

Reviewed by *Annette Hug*



RPM

Love and the erotic are domains of male verbosity in literature, film and poetry, while they belong to a sphere of life associated

with women. In the last three years, women writers in the Philippines collectively claimed their public voice on these themes. The result is two anthologies, one containing love-poems *Kung Ibig Mo*, the other incorporating texts in prose. Both collections contain contributions in both English and Tagalog, reflecting the bilinguality of the contributors.

The contributors to *Forbidden Fruit* work from the assumption that "true liberty" can only be achieved when "Everywoman is allowed to express herself and live life to her fullest capacity." *Margarita Go Singco Holmes* writes in the Foreword:

"The point is not that the works in this collection are 'true-to-life-accounts', but that they communicate and touch other women by reworking life in the realm of the imagination, celebrating and dignifying sex, love and eroticism."

Editor *Marjorie Evasco* (*Kung Ibig Mo*) uses the phrase "languaging desire" to capture their project. She encourages women to "open spaces in the mind-heart-body where everything is possible."

Both publications have the air of newness, of trying something for the first time. This air is refreshing for any reader who knows the feeling of stepping on new ground in excitement. It seems to me that the writers (most of whom contributed to both anthologies) felt more at home with the love-theme than with the erotic. *Marjorie Evasco* writes in her introduction to *Kung Ibig Mo* that love is a "notoriously elusive" theme. This elusiveness allows the writers to incorporate many different areas of intensity that make up a woman's life. Hence the poems make clear that women finding their own words are in the process of creating new understandings of emotional involvement with the world and with men. (There is a lamentable absence of outspokenly lesbian texts.)

In contrast, the theme of erotica doesn't seem to provide the opportunity for a similar opening. Reading *Forbidden Fruit* is not like a harvest of

ripened images of joy, the reader has to look for those texts that go beyond a timid, sometimes awkward examination of the terrain.

Thought provoking are the poems that reflect indirectly on the way sex is usually discussed. *Benilda S. Santos*, hints in her poem 'Lullaby' (Cuyugan) at common ingredients to the physical surrounding of the act, lists limbs that participate and rips the theme from any mythical haze:

*"behind the door
 on table on floor
 over and over
 ever and ever
 more"*

Nerissa S. Balce's poem 'Pizza and Pretense' depicts a heterosexual couple eating pizza at the nearby parlour after sex, freshly cleaned and scrubbed. The last part goes:

"There is a lipstick smudge on your left shirt sleeve. There is a pink mark on my nape. I feel the folds of fat on my belly while I sit and imagine the taste of melted cheese on crust. I study your

BOOK REVIEWS

hands now on the table,
properly clasped the way
we pray at Mass."

Balce brings together different facets of urban life. Sex is an ordinary thing for many people, it often happens and is not always special. Still, it is somehow at odds with the catholic culture, and the fast food atmosphere of the pizza parlour adds a spur of irony, or is it the tickling impulse to giggle like a teenager at these every day incongruencies?

The celebratory concept of **Forbidden Fruit** evades any mention of power in relationships, it clearly avoids the language of sexual politics. The limitations of this concept become clear in the short story **Oil** written by *Maria Elena Paterno*. The author describes a massage scene after a tennis match mainly through the lens of the male tennis player. The masseuse is a blind woman employed by the club. *Paterno*,

a woman writer, expresses the sensual enjoyment but it is a man's enjoyment, the woman's blindness seems to be a literary device to focus on the touching sensation. I didn't find convincing the assertion that the described encounter was a mutually stimulating and satisfying experience. While reading, louder and louder I heard the voices telling me about a recent feminist campaign in Manila to close those many massage-parlours functioning as brothels. Images came to my mind of blind people in this city of neglect and I thought of the life-story of a blind masseuse I read which told a story of want and struggle to be respected as a human being.

This is where the framework of celebrating sexuality, be it in the realm of imagination, is not only limiting but blind to the fact that sexuality is a major field of male power over women. *Paterno's* story glosses

over the problematic of the industry behind many massage services, the attitudes to visually impaired people, and, she uses her literary craft to make up a male centered fantasy that could well serve as an advertisement for a massage parlour catering to 'sensitive men'. Celebration is great but I prefer to discern more clearly what exactly it is that we celebrate.

Both anthologies certainly show how large, rich and manifold is the circle of women writers in the Philippines. Reading **Kung Ibig Mo** is a journey back to the pains of separation, to a criticism of left male's attitudes to their not so 'political' wives, to satirical smiles at avant garde filmmakers, to a first time in a women's disco, and so on and so forth.

Two poems by *Marjorie Evasco* won this reviewer's heart. Instead of giving my comments, they are reprinted here in full:

MOULTING TIME

My serpentine heart wills
in perfect stillness
to grow warm colors back.

I do not eat or sleep.

In time I shall slither
from the dark to sun new skin,
leaving cast-off scales;
my eyes, bright and vulnerable
in the naked light.

Marjorie Evasco

LOONS

Wild sounds fill this sanctuary.
Late autumn birds drift in pairs
Towards new waters in warm places.
We hold what we hear and see
And shiver in quick remembrance
Our broken affinities with wings.

Marjorie Evasco



Lynn Lee

Annette Hug has just completed her masters degree with a thesis on **Romantic Love: A Feminist Study of Change** (in the Philippines).

Both books reviewed are available from
Anvil Publishing, Inc.,
3rd Fl. Rudgen II Bldg.,
17 Shaw Blvd., Pasig,
Metro Manila, Philippines.
Tel. Nos. 631-7048/633-6136

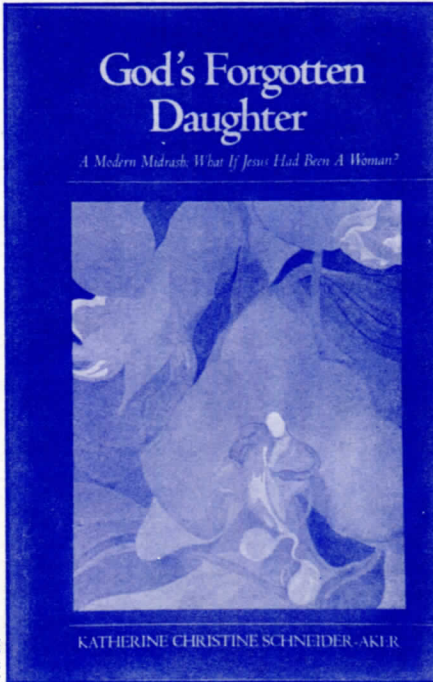
BOOK REVIEWS

God's Forgotten Daughter, A Modern Midrash: What if Jesus Had Been a Woman?

By: *Katherine Christine Schneider-Aker*

Lura Media, California, 1992.

Reviewed by *Luz Maria Martinez*, Isis International Communications Program



"I was the oldest. Our mother always told the story the same way: "D'vorah, you were born first, and then Jesus."

D'vorah, the twin sister of Jesus, is the narrator of the stories in *God's Forgotten Daughter*.

'Midrash', the author tells us, is the Hebrew term for interpreting and reinterpreting biblical texts. Over the centuries the 'midrashes' or stories have

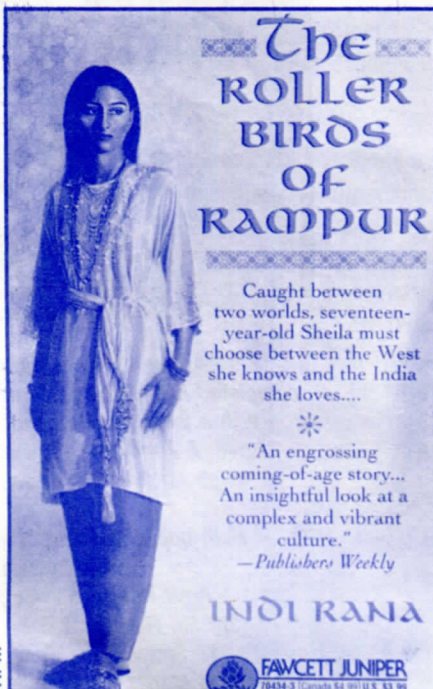
expanded and been enriched by each storyteller, taking on new meanings depending on the lens of the religion and the story teller.

God's Forgotten Daughter is a 'midrash' which is women focussed and feminist. D'vorah who is Jesus's older twin sister (only by a few minutes) is an intelligent, compassionate woman who possesses the same healing powers as Jesus and is in fact his close partner in his healings and preachings.

Because of the times, the culture and patriarchy prevents

her from ministering to all, so among the women she parallels Jesus teachings, wanderings, organizing and healing. In fact she is baptized along with Jesus and is deemed a preacher.

D'vorah not only prophesises but speaks out against the patriarchal system that allows so many abuses to happen to women. The women share with her their pains and joys and D'vorah brings their stories to Jesus. For example, the grief of a mother who buries her dead baby girl after being raped by the father, the story of the mother who calls her to bless



The Roller Bird or Neelkanth "is a big bird with turquoise and ultramarine colored wings and brown gray on top. It seems to roll as it flies; large and generally dull when resting, but sometimes brilliantly colored, sudden...and noisy".

Picking up a copy of this book, I secretly hoped that it was not one of those 'boy-meets-girl-and-just-the-usual-things-happen' stories. I was at a book fair and wanted books that are more relevant to my pre-adolescent daughter than her very American romance collection. Reading this book made me sorry for my initial hesitation; I ended up reading it ahead of my daughter and scheduled adult books.

The main character is Sheila Mehta who grew up in England after being born in India, she and her sister Rachna are both adolescents. Their father is a doctor who believes that there will be more opportunities for him and his family in England than staying in India, their mother works as a geography teacher. Both parents may be considered liberal in the sense that although they still possess Indian decor, film, music and

The Roller Birds of Rampur

by *Indi Rana*. Ballantine Books, New York, 1993.

Reviewed by *Mylene Soto-Sol Cruz*, Isis International Resource Center and Information Program

BOOK REVIEWS

her son who has been beaten by her husband and who carries the immense guilt of being too terrified by him to intervene, she brings to him the countless stories of the women who are abandoned, broken and in pain.

D'vorah tells us about the strengths of her mother, Mary, who like all women from that era had several children and despite her workload was active with women in the community. She tells us about the wives of the apostles who bore children and shared in the ministry work of their husbands. We learn about Mary Magdalene who, contrary to Roman Catholic stories, is not a prostitute but a strong and independent woman with the gift of natural healing and is respected by all who knew Jesus as his 'companion'.

D'vorah lives to a ripe old age and is saddened and fearful that the stories of the women who lived, worked and suffered

would get lost. She is already beginning to hear some of the stories in such a way that it only credits the men but forgets the women. She wonders if the stories will be lost, such as the story of Tamar who was repeatedly raped by soldiers, and who not only recovered but went on to protect other women against rape, or the story of Rebecca, Mary, two Martha's and countless other women who had conviction and commitment and worked tirelessly among the poor and the ill, just as the men did, and in some cases even more.

Katherine Schneider-Aker's story telling is not only crisp and enjoyable, but provides the central character with such depth and 'voice' that I almost heard and saw the scenes unfold before me.

I have always wondered about the women in the religious pictures which shows them

kneeling in front of the cross, looking up at Jesus, watching him die. I have wondered who they were? What were they thinking and feeling? Thanks to Ms. *Schneider-Akers* the image will no longer be one of women just grieving but of real women who have a place in the bible.

Katherine Schneider-Aker, according to the book jacket, is a poet, freelance writer, educator and activist who devotes her life to helping women rediscover their voices and their power in a variety of ways. A member of the **Wild Women Writers**, a writers collective, and the **International Women's Writing Guild**, she is currently working on a feminist/woman's re-telling of the Arthurian legends, a series of essays on depression in women, and an occasional newsletter. ♀



Luz M. Martinez, who was raised as a Catholic, continues to believe in a God but is intrigued by the inconsistencies.

food in the house, they have accepted the thought that their daughters should grow up responsible for their lives. This includes the option to choose whom to marry, if they ever do so. This is rather unique because most of their Indian friends in England still strictly follow their customs and traditions.

Mr. and Mrs. Mehta are raising Sheila and Rachna in a country with a totally different culture from their own. The sisters both have white friends and friends of color, with the children, it seems like one's color does not matter much. Sheila has an English boyfriend, Jimmy, but he avoids her after his mother reacts strongly to the idea that her son's girlfriend is a young

woman of color. Upon hearing this, her friend Sunaina's family decided to return to India because they do not want their daughter to be like Sheila who is thinking of getting married for love. For them the best would still be an arranged marriage with dowry.

These experiences deeply affected Sheila's life. Nightmares about the incident with Jimmy's mother and Sunaina's rage at her for being forced back to India because of 'Sheila's' behavior haunt and depress her more. All this contributes to her psychological and emotional dilemma. An identity crisis arises and questions such as who she really is, where does she belong, what does she want,

begin to disturb her. As a result, psychosomatic symptoms creep in, the doctor advises her to rest and Sheila decides to go to her grandparents' farm in India for a vacation, with the desire to seek answers to her questions.

In India she perceives widespread poverty and underdevelopment that are exacerbated by religious beliefs, the caste system and corruption in government. For example, the 'chamars' or leatherworkers have to remain 'untouchable' because they earn a living from processing the hides of cows, which is considered 'polluted' work. A police inspector has to earn grease money to augment his income and pays commission to a superior who also does the

same at a magnified scale.

Sheila was reunited with her relatives, some of whom have changed or remain constant with time, such as her radical and non-conformist cousin Tinkoo and his friends; Inder Uncle and Bumpy who rely on agriculture, and the raj and his family who persist in living in the royal shadow of the past. There are characters such as Bijili and other bandits who continue to seek redress for offenses committed against them but at the expense of innocent people whom they kill.

Munnia, her childhood friend epitomizes the fate of many females in India. As a female child, a marriage has to be arranged for her before she

The Roller . . .

reaches 15 years of age, her parents give her and the dowry away to a husband. This custom signifies the start of the husband's dominion over the young wife. At first, Sheila envies Munnia and even considered her lucky. Unlike her, Munnia does not have to deal with the complexities of acquiring education, nursing a career and determining what she wants from life, Munnia's fate rests solely on her husband and their traditions. Sheila ponders

these experiences and her resoluteness as a young woman surfaces. This will be very evident in what she does with her life when she returns to England.

All these occurrences and the conversations with her grandparents made her comprehend that no matter what society's expectations are she still has her own identity. In this case, she is an Indian because that was where she was born and she loves her heritage, and, she is an English girl

because she already adopted this country as home.

Finishing this book, I really admired the author, *Indi Rana*, for shedding light on topics like karma, dharma, Hinduism, racism, adolescence in different cultures and the caste system from a young adult's point of view and language. I returned to the bookshop eager to find the other titles on 'teens in other cultures' which are actually books for grown ups too. Adolescent books such as this one are highly

recommended for uncovering facades and differing perspectives and thus help in raising critical thinkers. ♀



Mylene Soto-Sol Cruz

RPM

Of Dorcas and Violet and Nettie and Celie - of Alice and Toni, a personal reflection on the works of two outstanding women writers, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

by Mavic Cabrera-Balleza, Isis International Communications Program.



Lynn Lee

Mavic Cabrera-Balleza

All Saints Day is something we look forward to in the Philippines but not for the solemnity of the occasion (on the contrary, it has become more and more festive), nor anything about the costume parties and the spooky trick or treat games. Rather, it's the long weekend that goes with it.

Looking forward to a restful but productive weekend, I borrowed an *Alice Walker* and a *Toni Morrison* book from the Isis Resource Center. Embarrassing as it may be for one who is said to be or who claims to be an 'active'

feminist, it was the first time that I was going to read these two Pulitzer prize winners Toni also won a Nobel!

The journey through *Alice Walker's The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* was far more exciting and fascinating than I had expected. While the former revolves around an African-American woman's (Celie) struggle against a patriarchal and feudal society's set norms, the latter reveals the cruel reality of female genital mutilation and why and how it is translated from misogyny. Now I think all the raves about this 'woman writer who can stand proudly beside *Faulkner*' were an understatement.

My reading of *Toni Morrison's Jazz* and *Sula* laid bare the normally unimaginable capacity of women to love and hate at the same time. Violet's character in *Jazz* showed how women can hate each other so much that one will be able to harm a

dead woman - she went to Dorcas' funeral and slashed her face. Dorcas is Violet's husband's lover. *Sula*, on the other hand, revealed the intertwined lives of remarkably strong and aggressive women.

Reflecting on this 'serious reading', I need to thank these two great writers. They allowed me to look into the lives of African-American women. I can see a bit of myself in each of the characters, and in the events and circumstances they write about are bits and pieces of my own life. Reading these books gave me the chance to see the lives of women we know, as some of the experiences they talk about are experiences women all over the world go through.

Alice's writing is like rich, intricate weaving - it is as colorful and beautiful as it is enlightening, poignant and moving. Whereas *Toni's* works may be likened to the wrong side of an elaborate embroidery,

you get a feel of the color and texture as you go through the process of untangling the threads that make up the story. These stories show that writing about our lives is an important way of sharing our tears, laughter and hope with other women. As Nettie told Celie in *The Color Purple*, "all things look brighter because I have a loving soul to share them with."

To *Alice* and *Toni* - many thanks for showing me that it is all right to be so mad and to be so in love, at times. I look forward to meeting more Sulas, Dorcas and Violets as I am anticipating an encounter with other Celies, Netties and Tashis.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

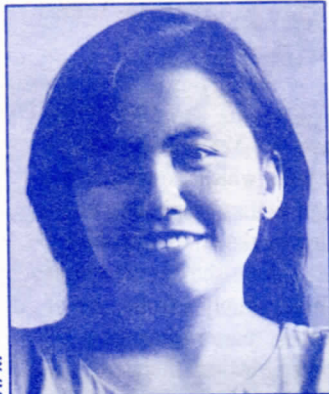


Alice Walker from Ms., June 1988

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

SULA by Toni Morrison

A personal reflection by *Elvie Colobong*,
Isis International Operations Program.



Elvie Colobong

Among the different characters and their stories in *Sula*, I like best the story of Sula and that of her grandmother, Eva.

Sula is strong and aggressive, the kind of woman who does what she thinks is right and what she feels will make her happy. She never cares what others might say or think of her but is determined to get what she wants in life no matter what the consequences.

She is a woman capable of loving and caring, free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed and no desire to command attention or compliments. But her mother's remarks of not liking her sent her away and made her different. Sula never gave herself the chance to understand other people and for them to do the same to her. She let hatred rule her life, she didn't fight it.

Life is precious and beautiful, especially when shared with others. Whenever I experience failure or frustrations, I always say to myself that there are better things ahead of me, even

if it does not always work that way. I am not a religious person who goes to mass every Sunday or attends the holy days of obligations but I still believe that there is someone up there who is watching and guiding us.

For various reasons, people in her community believed that Sula was evil and the cause of their misfortunes. First, because when Sula returned after being absent for 10 years (she was away in college), she was accompanied by a plague of robins, which for them was a sign of bad luck. Second, her return reminded them of her watching her mother burn to death. Third, they believed that she slept with white men and this for them is an unforgivable thing—the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuses. It's 'dirt' that cannot be washed away. For them, all unions between white men and black women are rape and for a black woman to be willing is literally unthinkable. There were other things, such as a man choking to death when he saw her, and a big sty affecting a woman's eye after seeing her. So, they laid broomsticks across their doors at night and sprinkled salt on porch steps.

Sula ignored all these and the people did nothing to harm her. They felt that evil must be avoided and precautions taken to protect themselves and they let it run its course. But what's interesting is that this negative side of her brought changes in the community. The peoples conviction of Sula's evil changed them in many ways.

They protected and loved one another and their children, began to cherish their husbands and wives, repaired their homes and in general banded together against the 'devil' in their midst, the changes were shortlived, lasting only up to Sula's death, but she never acknowledged any of this.

Eva's character as a woman and a mother is both admirable and frightening. She is *admirable* for raising her children alone and devoting her whole life to them because this is not easy to do, she sacrificed a lot and never even had the time to show her children how much she loved them. When she had the opportunity, her daughter didn't have the chance to know or feel it. It happened when she tried to save her daughter from burning by throwing herself out of the window hoping to fall on her daughter and put out the fire that was consuming her, but she fell 12 feet away from her, her daughter died.

She is also admirable for her ability to control her emotions. When her husband, who left her for another woman, dropped by she was very civil to him until he left. The natural reaction in this kind of situation would be to shout at the person, harm him physically or even kill him. I have tried so many times to control my temper/ anger/ emotions but not once have I succeeded. I can't do it that's why I admire people who can.

She is *frightening* for her ability to kill her drug addicted son by burning him. It's frightening because if she can do it to her son whom she loved very much, how much more to other people. As a mother, I can imagine and feel the pain it



caused her. Before she did it, she held him closely and rocked him like a baby. As a mother, I understand her motive in killing her son—to save him from further destruction but I believe that we have no right to take the life of any person whoever she/he is.

All the other women in the story have stereotyped roles except for Hannah, Sula's mother but her character seems unrealistic to me. She is described as a woman who refused to live without the attentions of a man and she had a steady sequence of lovers. But since there was no place in their crowded house for private and spontaneous lovemaking, Hannah would take the man down to the cellar, into the pantry and stand up against the shelves filled with canned goods. She could break up a marriage before it could even become one, she would make love to the new groom and wash his wife's dishes all in an afternoon. All she wanted was some touching everyday and she made no demands, Hannah's life taught Sula that men are always available. Sula is an interesting character but I wouldn't dream of living her life.

Beyond Gender

- Elena Poinatowska

By *Elvira Hernandez Carballido* for Isis Internacional-Santiago Chile

Elena Poinatowska is an institution in Mexico. Of Polish origin she has spent her entire life in Mexico and therefore, feels totally Mexican. Her books have been translated into different languages and her newest book, *Tinisima*, a historical novel on the life of the famous Italian photographer and revolutionary, *Tina Modotti*, has already received raves, and criticisms as well, thanks to her passion and courage that imprints all that she undertakes and writes about. (At our request) the Mexican journalist *Elvira Hernandez Carballido* spoke to her. Here is what she has to say.

"Men can be bad no matter if they are foreigners or Mexicans. They are one in the same. They all beat [women]. They are like the lion when in pursuit of a conquest, they fawn, lick the female and seek her out. But once he has her in his claws he is aggressive and mauls her. That's the way men are...That's why I have never liked the idea of the hunt. It's better to be alone and do without than have to put up with a husband. I personally don't need men, nor do I like them, as matter of fact they irritate me, even if they are not even near me."

This is a fragment of our interview with the author of

Hasta no Verte Jesus Mio, the book which is considered a major literary inspiration as stated by the critic, *Ermilio Areu Gomez*-she has created in a frolic, simply a frolic, one of the most masterful works in modern Mexican literature.

Since publishing her first book, in 1954, she has gained notoriety and wide recognition. Few were the women who published in those days, that is why she receives with great pride the new generation of women writers. She recognizes that in the last decades (80's and 90's) "women have returned to the calling that has always belonged to them; to

write, and this is not due to the feminist movement but to those women who each day dedicate themselves to working for themselves, who think of their professional desires and who struggle with great intensity to accomplish them."

A passionate act

For her, writing is more like an act of passion and uncertainty that represents all the possibilities "of documenting the country", she does not believe that there are any writers who are in a specified manner feminine. "I love women very much, I feel a great sense of sisterhood



Elena Poinatowska

towards women and that is why women always form main characters in my books but not because of that can you call it feminine literature, or writing that is exclusive for each sex."

"Women's writing is not feminine literature, it's a diverse kind of literature, with commitment to those without protection." She cites her conference of the Women Writers Congress as an example; "The actual literature of women comes out of the great flow of literature of the oppressed, those without land, the poor, the ones with no voice".

With great firmness she affirms and reaffirms, without any doubt in her response, that there is no such thing as a feminine only writer, but "I do believe that women have the ability to develop certain themes that men have not learned how to shape in their works with the same success. Furthermore, I do not believe that the gender is what inspires writers, it is the individual, human disposition."

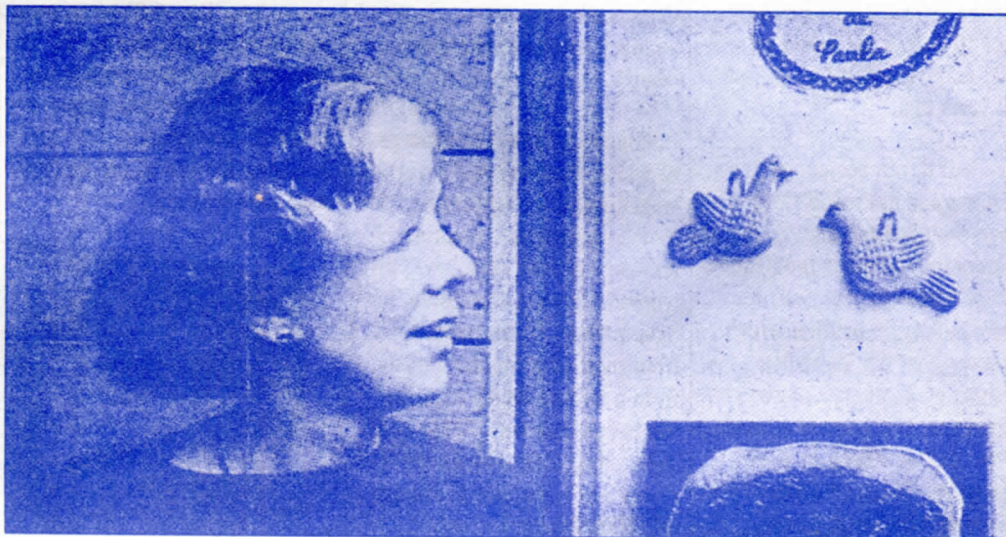
She adds that "even though literature by women is reaping splendid moments, it is still part of the voice of the oppressed, the minorities and the enormous silent majority. What would have become of us with out Sappho, or Virginia Woolf, or Simone Weil in our trail, and with us is Marguerite Yourcenar, Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Sontag and Sylvia Plath. If in Latin America Juana Ines de la Cruz covers three centuries of silence, behind her others surfaced such as, Gabriela Mistral, Victoria Ocampo, Maria Luisa Bombal, Teresa de Parra and our own, Rosario

Castellanos".

In the past few years we also have names and books written by women worth noting, Poinatowska mentions Silvia Molina, Angeles Mastretta, Maria Luis Puga, Alicia Trueba, Rosa Nissan, Barbara Jacobs, Laura Esquivel, among many others. Such is her pride that she has not hesitated to write the prologues, book covers, or comments on the works of these women. For example in *Like Water for Chocolate* she says:

for *Chocolate*, a novel that dishes out monthly recipes, loves, and household remedies has never been seen in the valley of tears of Mexican literature, because even the men are criers, except Jorge Ibarugentita, all take themselves terribly serious and sweat beads of solemnity."

"I began to read it in a bad frame of mind, the heavy manuscript of more that 200 pages weighing down my knees. After page 15 time just flew and after completing it, I was blessing Laura Esquivel, I



Elena Poinatowska

"As women we tend to write about sadness and be solemn. In part, Jose Joaquin Blanco was correct when he said that Rosario Castellanos was handkerchief poetry. We are numbed by nostalgia, stiffened by memories, overtaken by the everyday routine that covers all with it's gray powder. We could never state that one of the literary characteristics of Angelina Muniz, Elena Garro, Ines Arredondo, Julieta Campos is happiness."

"But a book such as *Like Water*

covered her with kisses, I wanted to know her (the character in the book), marry her, weep tears of happiness over the finely chopped onions, enjoy the aroma of her cooking, know the innermost part her life recipes, chop spices, peel garlic and wash chilies."

Source: Story and photos from *Mujeres en Accion*, 2-3/94 Isis International, Chile, Casilla 2067, Correo Central, Santiago, Chile. Translated by Luz Maria Martinez, Isis International Manila.

A different feel: Maria Luisa Bemberg

By Sarah Gristwood

Argentinian filmmaker, *Maria Luisa Bemberg* came late to film-making but has never been afraid to stick her neck out.

There aren't that many avowedly feminist directors making artistically successful films for a general audience. And there aren't many of them who have a grandchild for each picture. *Maria Luisa Bemberg* was 50 before the world of film-making opened up to her 20 years ago.

The half dozen acclaimed features she has made since have each boasted an extraordinary female protagonist in conflict with her surroundings; a conflict which goes beyond the immediate context of *Bemberg's* native Argentina. Her latest *We Don't Want To Talk About It*, is no exception. "*Charlotte stands for all of us who are different*," *Bemberg* says.

In fact the real protagonist of *We Don't Want To Talk About It* is not Charlotte but her mother Donna Leonor - a woman whose pride is shattered when her daughter is born (in the film's harsh term) "a dwarf". Leonor's reaction, in the small town Argentina of 50 years ago, is to impose a wall of silence as the film takes on the poetic, Felliniesque tone of a fable.

"It's my most risky film," *Bemberg* says. "It was only when I had finished it I realised

it is my most personal one, too. In choosing to do a fable I needed the complicity of the audience: if they don't believe in it, they'll walk. But I don't want any of that psychoanalytical stuff."

Marcello Mastroianni plays the cultivated older man who falls passionately in love with the tiny Charlotte. But in the end Charlotte's eyes are set on a stranger, more independent, destiny.

In allegorical terms (a concept of which *Bemberg* has never been afraid), the repressive mother represents Argentina - and anyway, she says, women often are repressive, having learnt domination from their own mother, and from a culture which kept the status quo that way. "*This suffocating little town is the essence of what human beings are. Charlotte is the only person there who's not a dwarf. And her decision at the end feeds something in me.*"

"What interests me is that, through her denial, the mother creates her own hell. A devouring, devoted mother - I see so many of them, especially in very Catholic countries." *Bemberg* has made explicit the parallels between the parent's role and that of the director on set, and there was an element of the good mother in her treatment of the first-time actress who played Charlotte.

"If you are trying to get close to art, it's very connected with ethics. She couldn't step out of her character when she went home at night, so I was obsessed by taking care of her. She was surrounded by love and respect."

"Mastroianni said he understood how his character could fall in love with her. She is anybody who follows their own inner voices," says *Bemberg*, acknowledging it was late in life before she was able to follow her own.

"You don't know what hell it's been for women of my generation, how difficult to trust your own voices," she says. *Bemberg* was raised on a large estancia. Her brief marriage gave her four children. Realising the life of an upper class wife was not

autobiographical," says *Bemberg*, whose own liberation was slowed by asphyxiating effects of her privileged life.

Her second script was another eye-opener - a man torn between a traditional wife and an independent mistress. She decided to direct the next film herself: "No man can understand what is happening with the new awareness of women," she said then.

But the script for *Senora De Nadie*, the story of a woman who leaves her husband and discovers that Mrs. Nobody is Somebody in her own right, was censored by the regime as threatening to family life, and filmed only in 1982. After *Canilla* and *Miss Mary* came *I The Worst Of All*, story of the 16th century nun-poet *Juana Inez de la Cruz*.

"She demanded the right to exist, the right to be a poet, an anarchist, an artist. She refused to be manoeuvred by her surroundings. In the final analysis the theme common to all my films is that of freedom, even

though it's not deliberately so."

All her films have been hits in Argentina, and hailed abroad. But *Bemberg* only wishes there were more of them. "Instead of six films I could have had 25, if it had all happened earlier. But it's over. No point in bitching. Now my obsession is to make one or two more movies while I still can."

Source: *Everywoman*, August 1994, Freepost, London N1 8BR, U.K. Photo from *Mujeres en Accion*, Isis International-Santiago, 2-3/94.



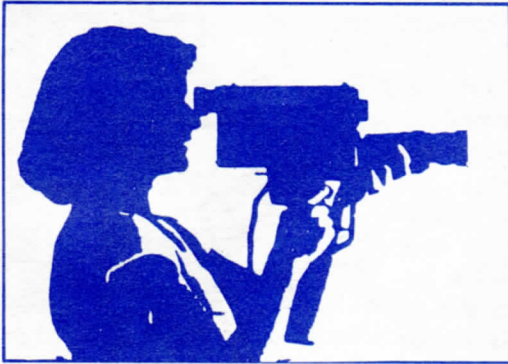
Maria Luisa Bemberg

enough, she co-founded a feminist group before the advent of the military regime effectively closed all such activity down.

She entered film for ideological reasons; to propose a different image of women on screen. The first film she scripted - *A Woman's Story* (1972) - was the tale of a rich and anguished wife which caused a furore among macho husbands in the audience. "Very

Sexism in Fantasyland - A Feminist Looks at Hollywood

By Kathleen Vickery



A criticism of the movie industry is that traditionally it has been a masculine profession that very few women have access to but the North American **Kathy Maio** is one who has. Her strong and assertive column published in the feminist newspaper **Sojourner** from Boston, inspired **Kathleen Vickery** to interview her for the **Mujeres en Accion** publication of Isis International, Santiago, Chile.

Kathy Maio confesses herself to be a film buff, it is difficult for her to reject any film as being totally bad, even though she does not miss the opportunity to inform and comment on what could be called 'women's films', in other words, independent productions made by women. Generally her columns are reserved for films selected from the current showings of Hollywood movies made for the masses.

"The real challenge in being a feminist looking at the film industry is not only to accept and praise the positive elements, but to make the effort in distinguishing between the bad and the distortions, the negative elements and the hatred directed towards women in films. You cannot allow yourself to be seduced by a film and accept all that it reflects,

one must question some of the things."

With regard to the relationship between Hollywood's films and women, **Maio** considers that there have been significant changes over the past 20 years from the 60's when the ideal woman was represented by the happy and complacent **Doris Day**.

"Gradually we began to notice the impact of feminism in the 70's with films like *Alice doesn't live here anymore*. Towards the end of the decade, there was a certain sense of hope. It was not only the women's movement that impacted on Hollywood but also the entire social movement of the time. The film *Norma Rae*, still stands out as a great film of a woman's struggle, it's an especially positive example because it's the story of one woman who takes possession of her own life, learns to trust herself, to recognize her own strength and use it, not only to better her life and family, but an entire community."

A Backlash?

However, towards the end of the 80's the women portrayed as successful in films were women characterized by their own individualistic ambition

and heartlessness. **Maio** compares films of the 70's like *How to Eliminate your Boss*, in which women workers struggle against a particular situation and oppression by men, to the recent formula used in stories like *Working Girls* where the women compete savagely among themselves for work positions and the desirable males.

Could one conclude that the impact feminism has had on Hollywood in the past years has been to provoke a backlash [as seen in] the treatment of women in films?

"Not completely" states **Maio**, even though she does attribute a particular formula to this sort of reaction:

"I call these films the women from hell or the basic instinct fantasies with equal opportunities, *Fatal Attraction* was the first successful film of this kind, the most financially successful film of that kind. Some people have asked me how can I critique these films, because the women in these films are portrayed as strong characters, and yes they are, but they are absolutely destructive, they want to destroy the man, life, corporations, families, everything and at the end they must be punished or better yet, killed. Why should I like these films? Unfortunately, the stories that contrast these images are few. One has the impression that for every step forward, the industry takes two

back."

She adds, "On the other hand we have seen some very emotional and controversial films, like *Thelma and Louise* and *the Piano*. These films make people think and debate. This is what we want from the arts, to incite thoughts. It's alright if not all the feminists are in agreement with the interpretations. I see in the controversy proof of success and value in both films."

Very Few Women Producers and Directors

Very few women producers and directors have the opportunity to surge ahead in the film industry, while the financing and distribution of independent films confronts enormous difficulties.

"The studios", observes **Maio**, "are getting larger and larger, because they are being bought out by conglomerates that are larger each time. The industry that now produces the hardware, in other words the television equipment, the videos, are buying those that produce the software, in this case, films. The Sony Corporation is an example.

On the one hand, many independent studios are being bought out by other larger independent studios, such as **Disney** who has bought **Miramax**, the independent studio that distributed the film *the Piano* by **Jane Campion**."

Sexism . . .

"On the other hand, the majority of women actually working in Hollywood do what they have to do to work, so they generally are not producing things that we need. The most successful female film director at this time is Penny Marshall. She has directed some very interesting works, including the important film starring Geena Davis, *A League of Our Own*, which had a successful run with the North American audience. But her last film is the comedy with Danny De Vito, *The Renaissance Man*, evidently she tried a typical product that did not contribute anything special."

"However, some women including big name stars like

Meryl Streep and Michelle Pfeiffer, are showing signs of becoming more conscious and radical, denouncing publicly discrimination and speaking of changes they would like to see. I praise their efforts to make these changes from within, as well as praise the efforts of the independent film women who try to produce films that are a reaction against Hollywood and allow us to see real alternative films."

"Nowadays," says Meryl Streep, "not only are we paid less, we are blamed for the results of a fiasco, whereas our male companions are left unscathed by a failure". Of the same opinion is Sharon Stone, the leading lady of Sylvester Stallone in *The Specialist* for which he received 12 million dollars

whereas Sharon received only five.

"Since this industry started, it has been ruled by men", declared Jodie Foster recently when informed that Schwarzenegger charges 15 million per film, "and he is not required to perform but only to sell himself as a commodity. Michael Keaton received the same amount for *Batman III*. If anyone of us demanded such fees, we would immediately be blacklisted".

Nevertheless some actresses are demanding different roles which question set feminine images. They are engaged in a real search to give value to their profession as well as to honor real women.



Source: *Mujeres en Accion* 2-3/94, Isis International, Santiago, Chile. From the article 'A Feminist Looks at Hollywood', translated by Luz Maria Martinez, Isis International-Manila and 'The Divas Speak Out', translated by Mylene Soto-Sol Cruz Isis International-Manila. Illustrations from *Women's Journal*, No. 1, 1984, Isis International.

Q: Women like you and I are in our 40s and 60s, how are you holding out?

Isabel: I am enduring it much better. We are helping each other, we are happy, we gather to meditate, exchange books, look for answers to old questions, share experiences.... Menopause is a wonderful thing! We are now more secure, freer, and can begin new lives.

Q: And how do they put up with us?

Isabel: You would have to ask the others.... I find that I am not so difficult and not so hard to live with and the same can be said for the majority of the women that I know. But, of course, I can be wickedly vain.

Q: A few months ago the United States and the world at large was moved by the live television telecast of the hearings on the case against the Latina who cut off her husband's penis, what are your thoughts on this?

Isabel: I ask myself why did she cut off the most insignificant part of his anatomy. This

A glimpse of Isabel Allende

by Patricia Verdugo



guy raped and beat her, sexism and evilness are not contained in this small appendage. She should have cut off his head. Millions of women in the world now are having their genitals mutilated or their vaginas stitched in initiation rites....In more civilized countries the breasts are being sliced for silicone implants or the faces are being cut to remove the wrinkles.

Everywhere magazines or pornographic videos can be bought where there are pictures of women being tortured or mutilated to excite the men. There are countless films of the same. Maltreatment of women is so common it goes unnoticed. But, oh, if you touch a man's penis! The police flew out with lanterns onto the freeway in search of his penis. They would most likely have not troubled themselves so much if they were in search of a woman's head.

Source: *Story and photo from Mujeres en Accion*, 2-3/94 Isis International, Chile, Casilla 2067, Correo Central, Santiago, Chile. Translated by Mylene Soto-Sol Cruz, Isis International, Manila, Resource Center and Information Program.

RESOURCE CENTER UPDATE

Welcome to our Isis International Resource Center,

In this section of **Women In Action** we update you on the resources acquired by our Resource Center and introduce you to some books, journals, videos, etc. that we think are of interest and use. We welcome your suggestions for additions to our multimedia collection, and we also welcome donations to our collection.

We want to increase our collection of Pacific materials and resources (print and other media) and welcome any materials and suggestions you have. It is possible to have an exchange arrangement for print materials.

Our collection includes books, conference proceedings, workshop/seminar reports, journals, information packs, training modules, theses, other unpublished materials, creative writing and videos.

The Resource Center may provide information through mail and E-mail and can provide photocopies of non-copyright publications upon request.

RCIP Program



Rhona Bautista



Mylene Soto-Sol Cruz



Mayang Taldo

Rituals, Clicks, Ideas & Puns

It is said that 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'. That makes women smarter because we can do both simultaneously.

We challenge you to scan your three-pound universe, make a wild guess, refer to your encyclopedia and seek the tutorial services of your children to answer this all-about-women trivia. Aside from answering the questions, you have to find the words

or phrases inside the box and circle them. Mind you, this is tricky because you will find some of the answers horizontally, vertically, diagonally and in reverse. But don't feel bad if you don't know all of the answers. What counts most is having fun and learning new things (and you can always say 'ah, yes, it just slipped my mind').

BEWARE! We are making this a regular part of this section. Contributions and suggestions are welcome. **SO, HAVE FUNNNNNN!!!**

T	O	N	I	M	I	S	O	G	Y	N	I	S	T	K	M
H	A	B	O	R	T	I	O	N	W	L	S	O	T	E	Y
E	P	L	U	Z	N	E	L	O	O	Y	I	J	E	C	L
D	A	C	K	L	A	U	M	O	O	N	S	O	C	O	E
I	T	A	L	I	C	E	A	Y	E	N	A	U	W	P	N
A	M	Y	T	A	N	N	E	T	T	I	K	R	A	E	E
L	M	A	Y	A	N	G	E	U	B	W	E	N	F	N	A
E	D	O	N	N	A	C	B	O	X	A	A	E	L	H	B
C	Y	N	T	T	I	A	H	O	S	R	N	R	E	A	P
T	I	T	T	A	M	P	K	R	U	Z	U	T	S	G	R
I	R	O	S	I	O	D	K	S	A	T	I	R	L	E	E
C	R	A	I	M	H	M	A	V	I	C	A	U	E	N	S
O	B	N	O	I	T	U	L	O	V	E	R	T	Y	E	S
F	U	H	G	I	R	L	I	E	E	D	U	H	B	U	G
S	U	S	A	N	A	E	L	V	I	E	R	H	O	N	A
E	I	S	R	B	E	I	J	I	N	G	S	A	L	I	N
X	I	S	M	E	N	I	E	T	S	A	I	R	O	L	G

CLUES:

1. Widow-burning practice in India.
2. The only remaining feminist print shop in North America, opened in 1970 and closed recently.
3. The most hated word by anti-choice activists.
4. Which Indian Goddess is also known as the *Dark Mother*?
5. Started the Russian Revolution with the cry: 'Bread and Roses'?
6. Who said: 'But ain't I a woman'?
7. Egyptian goddess of fertility and wisdom.
8. A Chinese American woman who wrote *Joy Luck Club* and *Kitchen God's Wife*.
9. The meaning of the Greek word *GAIA*.
10. What do you call a womanhater?
11. One of the oldest libraries and archives housing a large collection on women, founded in 1926 in London.
12. Stated by a noted American feminist: "the definition of woman's work is shitwork".
13. A state of being possessed by U.S. President Joseph McCarthy's ghost when seeing gays and lesbians.
14. One of Tracy Chapman's songs telling of racism and 'a major upheaval'.
15. A contemporary female peasant revolutionary leader in Mexico.
16. The place where The World Summit on Social Development will be held in March 1995.
17. *Shulamit Firestone's* milestone book published in 1970.
18. Concept of discrimination that is based on gender or sex.
19. City where the Fourth World Conference on Women will be held in September 1995.
20. What precedes the World Trade Organization?

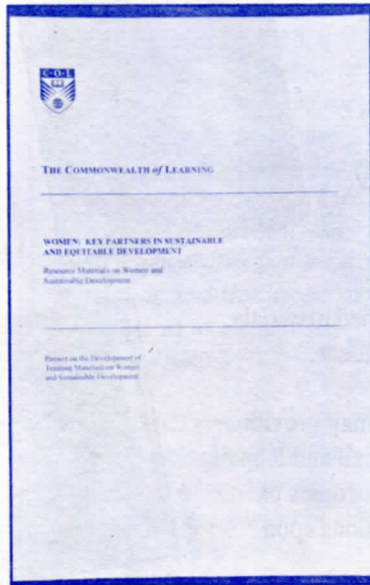
Answers: 1. Sati (Suttee) 2. Press Gang 3. Abortion 4. Kail 5. Women 6. Soljourner Truth 7. Isis 8. Amy Tan 9. Earth 10. Misogynist 11. Fawcett 12. Gloria Steinem 13. Homophobia 14. Talkin' bout a revolution 15. Susana 16. Copenhagen 17. The Dialectic of Sex 18. Sexism 19. Beijing 20. GATT

From our Isis Shelves...

Vyas, Anju and Madhu Mudgal. **The girl child in India: a bibliographic compendium.** New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1992. 205 p. Record No.: CUL 01823.00

This bibliography attempts to provide an overview of the literature on the issues relating to the girl child, and points to some dark areas as well. The information in over 2000 bibliographical entries contained in the work has been taken from about 50 secondary sources, 225 periodicals and newspapers, about 650 research theses, research papers from over 60 conferences, and a number of books and monographs.

Spread over 12 chapters, the entries are arranged broadly under Situational Analysis, Social Attitudes, Family and Socialization, Health, Nutrition and Physical Growth, Education, Child Marriage, Crimes against the Girl Child, Delinquency and Institutional



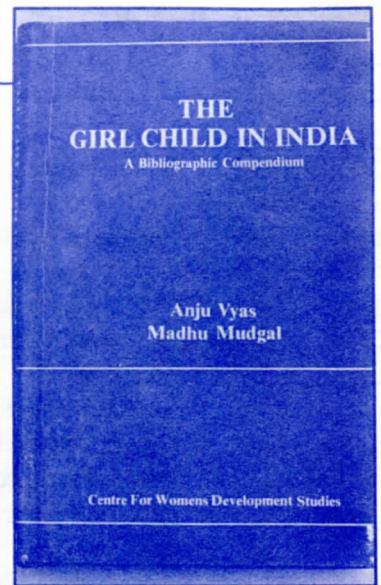
ized Care, Work and Employment, Media, Programs and Policies, Audio-Visual Materials. Includes indexes, and appendices of conferences, secondary reference sources, names of periodicals and newspapers indexed, library collections visited and organizations working on the Girl Child.

Available from: Centre for Women's Development Studies, 25, Bahi Vir Singh Marg, New Delhi - 110001

The Commonwealth of Learning. **Women: key partners in sustainable and equitable development: resource materials on women and sustainable development.** Canada: The Commonwealth of Learning, 1994. 113 p. Record No.: DEV 01825.00

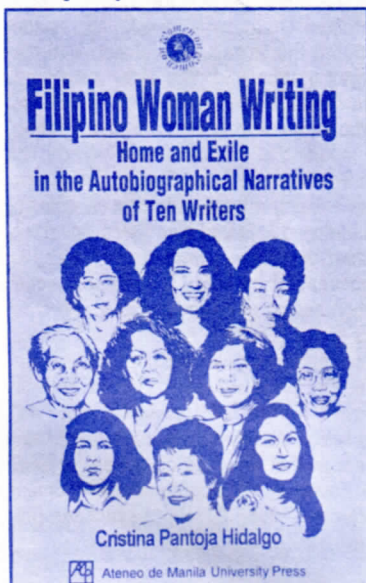
The 15 case studies describe the importance of women's empowerment in sustainable and environmental development. This report consists of three parts. Part I is Success Stories, which contains a wealth of information of probative value on gender roles in environmental management, especially with regard to: women's leadership; effective community participation; and institutional innovation relating to project design and implementation.

Part II is the Users Guide which includes worksheets/matrices intended to enable trainers, trainees and other users of these resources to identify the gender and environment linkages by sector in specific settings, and with regard to



specific environmental problems. Part III is Appendices which provide additional information on the success stories from all Commonwealth countries, with details on the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the presenters and organizations around the world working on gender and environment issues. It also includes nomination forms showing the types of questions elicited from the success story nominees and documents on women and environment.

Available from: The Commonwealth of Learning, #1700-777 Dunsmuir Street, Box 10428, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V7Y 1K4 Tel.: 604 660 4675 Fax: 604 660 7472



Hidalgo, Cristina Pantoja. **Filipino woman writing: home and exile in the autobiographical narratives of ten writers.** Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994. 168 p. Record No.: LIT 01863.00

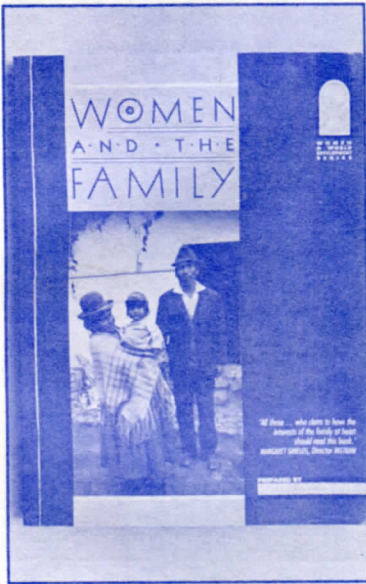
A compilation of selected works by Filipino women writers. Creating the term

autobiographical narratives, and using home and exile as metaphors, the author analyzes some of the works of Paula Carolina Malay, Maria Luna Lopez, Estrella Alfon, Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil, Kerima Polotan Tuvera, Barbara Gonzales, Cecilia Manguerra-Brainard, Sylvia Mayuga, Rosario Garcellano and Gilda Cordero-Fernando. She shows how these writings manifest

what they undergo as women, as writers, and as Filipino women writing in English. She also shows the ways in which these writers handled common concerns of women such as selfhood and identity, marriage, career and motherhood.

Available from: Ateneo de Manila University Press, Bellarmine Hall, Katipunan Avenue, Loyola Hts., Q.C.

RESOURCE CENTER UPDATE



O'Connell, Helen. **Women and the family.** London: Zed Books, 1994. 140 p. Record No.: FAM 01844.00

The family impacts upon every aspect of women's lives: early education and socialization, sexuality, and the ways in which they learn their roles as wives, mothers and carers. In recent years, the changing nature of the family has sparked considerable debate and

controversy. This book takes a comprehensive look at family structures worldwide and women's roles within them, particularly in the context of women's increasing challenge to men's power in the family. It also considers the factors underlying the rising divorce rate now affecting families in the North and South.

The book explores the contradictions for women that are inherent in the family. For many it is a place of security and support, but conversely it may be an instrument of oppression, subordination and brutality. Finally, it examines the internal and external influences on the family and women's place within it, and the role of the state in providing support for families.

Available from: Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF UK or 165 First Avenue Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey 07716, USA

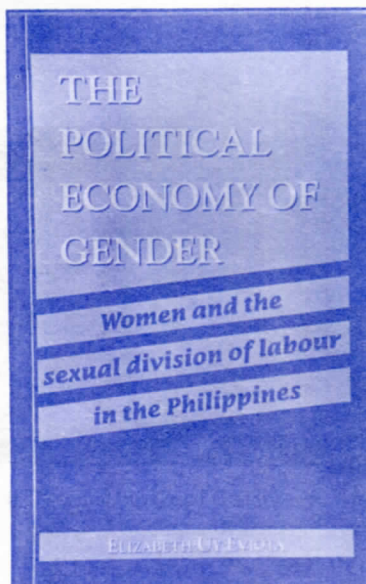
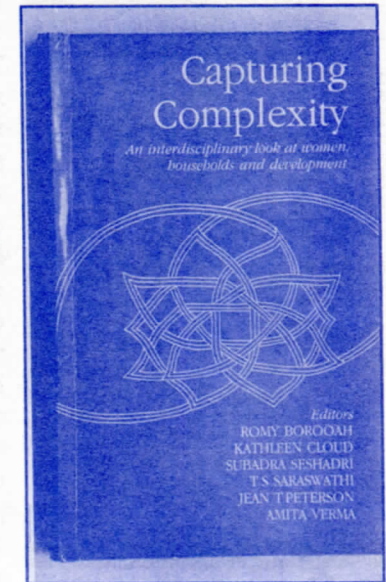
Capturing complexity: an interdisciplinary look at women, households and development. Edited by Romy Borooah and others. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994. 342 p. Record No.: ECO 01822.00

While there is a considerable and growing body of literature concerning the role of women in social and economic development, appropriate research methods have yet to be developed to fully encompass the multiple dimensions of women's productive and reproductive activities as individuals and as members of households. This important volume is a major step in improving the quality and quantity of data on women.

The book focuses on three central arguments: a) that special research methods are needed for obtaining information on women; b) that

household-level studies can capture the complexity of factors that affect individual behavior and choice; and c) that such information is critical to the formulation of more efficient programs and policies.

Available from: Sage Publications India Pty Ltd, M-32 Greater Kailash Market I, New Delhi 110 048



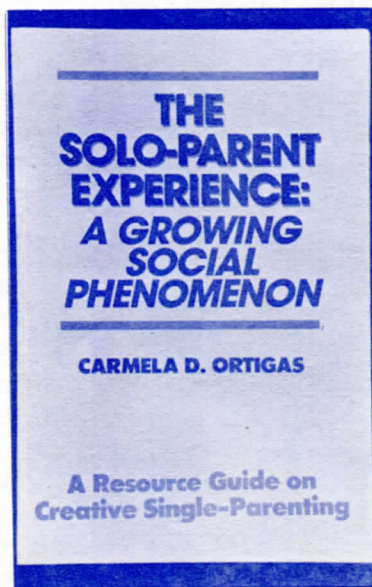
Ewiota, Elizabeth Uy. **The political economy of gender: women and the sexual division of labour in the Philippines.** London: Zed Books, 1992. 212p. Record No.: ECO 01721.00 B

The book explores the intersection between gender ideology and the sexual

division of labour in the Philippines. It looks at the sexual division of labour across diverse aspects of social life and within town and country, family and state, forms of property, exchange, trade and technology. The author shows how gender relations are interlinked with Spanish and U.S. colonization to the present day. She criticizes the information on women

found in historical accounts and official documents, and attempts to correct this by bringing in the concept of gender relations.

Available from: Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF UK or 165 First Avenue Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey 07716, USA or from (Reprint) Institute of Women's Studies, St. Scholastica's College, L. Guinto, Malate, Manila, Philippines



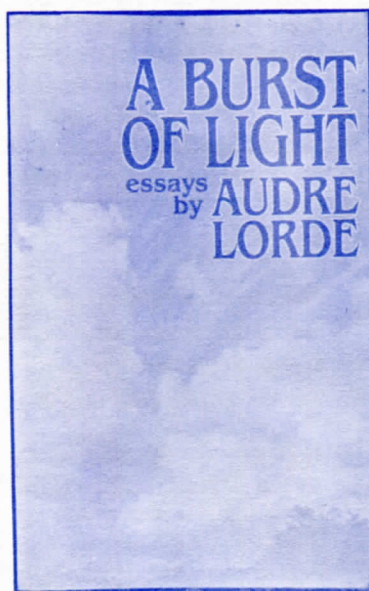
Ortigas, Carmela D. *The solo-parent experience: a growing social phenomenon. A resource guide on creative single-parenting.* Manila: Office of Research and Publications, Ateneo de Manila University, 1991. 105 p.

Record No.: FAM 01868.00

The book highlights the major stressors affecting of solo-parents: surviving the pain of loss and separation, raising small and adolescent children independently of a spouse, confronting social acceptance and pressures, dealing with economic realities on a reduced income. Moreover, the author, a professional psychologist, offers solo-parents insightful and practical guidelines for coping with, and creative strategies for counteracting,

the adverse effects of these stressors, thus enabling them to effectively manage their single-parent families.

Available from: Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City, Tel.: (632) 998721-25 Fax: (632) 9216159



Lorde, Audre. *A burst of light.* New York: Firebrand Books, 1988. 134 p. Record No.: SEX 01707.00

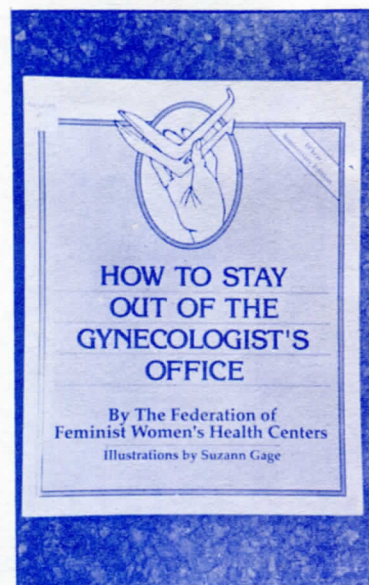
Audre Lorde's strength and signifying words continue to contribute to a deepened feminist vision. Black poet, lesbian, mother, and fighter for freedom, she used her life -- both the joy and the pain -- as material for her own transformation, and for the readers. Her essays are about sadomasochism, black women organizing across sexualities, apartheid, lesbian parenting and cancer. Winner of a 1989 Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award.

Available from: Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, New York 14850

Federation of Feminist Women's Health Centers. **How to stay out of the Gynecologist's office.** Edited by Carol Downer and others. California: Women to Women Publications, 1981. 136 p. Record No.: HEA 01738.00

Presents information about common health problems based on the authors experiences in Self-Help and in providing well-woman care in women-controlled clinics. However, every woman's health situation is unique, and the reader is urged to consider not only the information as presented herein, but also the opinion of health care professionals, and most importantly, her own experiences and feelings.

The book emphasizes that most women who visits a gynecologist's office are well women, and that most problems are minor and better dealt with

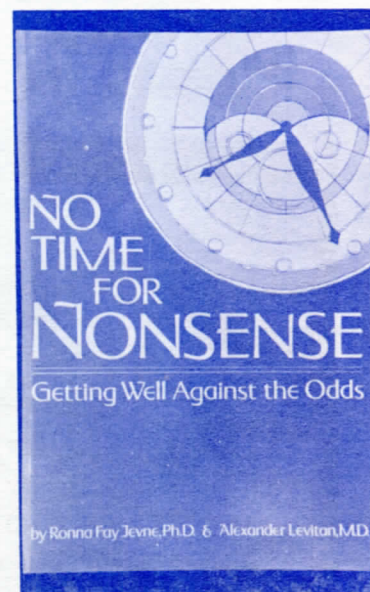


using natural methods and prevention. However, sometimes true illness is present. If a symptom persists, or if a woman notices anything beyond the descriptions or scope of this book, she should not hesitate to seek professional care.

Available from: Women to Women Publication, Suite 1105, 1680 North Vine Street, Hollywood, California 90028

Jevne, Ronna Fay and Alexander Levitan. **No time for nonsense: getting well against the odds.** California: California: LuraMedia. 1989, 211 p.

A self-help manual for the seriously-ill whether physical or emotional. It teaches sick people how to learn to live with their illness. It discusses the most common problems that people with a chronic or life-threatening illness run into, including practical difficulties. It gives ideas about skills and attitudes which patients use and that have promoted their sense of health and well-being.

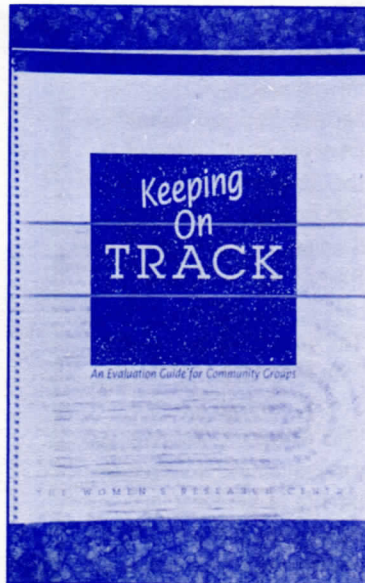


Available from: LuraMedia, 7060 Miramar Road, Suite 104, San Diego, CA 92121

RESOURCE CENTER UPDATE

Ellis, Diana and others.
Keeping on track: an evaluation guide for community groups.
Vancouver BC: Women's Research Centre, 1990. 77 p. Record No.: SOC 01824.00

This guide outlines a method of evaluation that has been developed especially for a range of non-profit community groups with a social change orientation. It pays particular attention to the needs of AIDS community service organizations. This will be useful to community groups as well as funders. It describes a method that meets the standard criteria for evaluation. Includes appendices on background materials, data



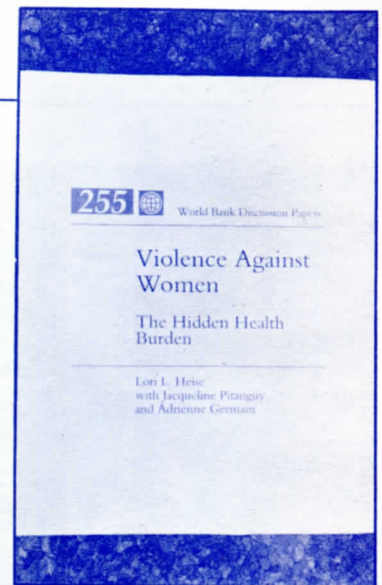
gathering tools, and samples of evaluations.

Available from: Women's Research Centre, #101-2245 West Broadway, Vancouver BC, Canada V6K 2E4

Heise, Lori L. and others.
Violence against women: the hidden health burden.
Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1994. 72 p. Record No.: VAW 01896.00

This paper draws together existing data on the dimensions of violence against women worldwide and reviews available literature on the health consequences of abuse. It also explores the relationship between violence and other pressing issues, such as maternal mortality, health care utilization, child survival, AIDS preventions, and socioeconomic development.

To assist policymakers in addressing this issue, the paper explores interventions in primary prevention, justice system reform, health care response, programs to assist victims, and treatment and reeducation programs for perpetrators. It argues that any strategy to combat violence



must attack the root causes of the problem in addition to treating its symptoms. This means challenging the social attitudes and beliefs that undergird men's violence and renegotiating the meaning of gender and sexuality and the balance of power between women and men at all levels of society. [If only they'd stop SAP's which cause women so much hardship.]

Available from: The World Bank, Headquarters, 1818 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20433, U.S.A. Tel. (202) 477-1234 Fax: (202) 477-6391

TO OUR READERS:

Just to give you an idea of what we cradle in our racks, here's a descriptive list of some of the journals that we regularly receive.



Agenda About Women and Gender

29 Ecumenical Centre Trust, 20 Andrews St., Durban, 4001, South Africa. 'As a feminist project, is committed to giving women a forum, a voice and skills to articulate their needs and interests towards transforming unequal gender relations in South Africa.' This quarterly journal 'aims to question and challenge current understanding of gender relations and how these are practised.'

Sister Namibia

P.O. Box 40092, Windhoek, Namibia. 'A newsjournal by,

for and about women' which is published bimonthly. It was started by Sister Collective which 'is committed to the elimination of sexism, racism and homophobia.' They also want 'to challenge structures, myths and stereotypes that are oppressive to women.' Sister Collective also maintains a women's library in Windhoek.

SPEAK: Putting Women First

P.O. Box 556, Johannesburg 2000, South Africa. A monthly magazine which speaks bravely about the rights and welfare of women not only in Africa but in other parts of the globe.

RESOURCE CENTER UPDATE



The Asian Church Woman
91-175 Shin Soo Dong, Mapo-Ku, Seoul 121, Korea. A quarterly news bulletin that gives opportunity in experience-sharing as one 'grows and struggles in her everyday life toward betterment in Christ. It also seeks to make links and network with those who are concerned with women's role,

status and participation in the just and peaceful society.' It also views women's rights as integral to human rights.

Friends of Women Newsletter

1379/30 Soi Praditchai, Phahonyothin Rd., Samsen-nai Bangkok 10400. A biannual publication of the Friends of Women Foundation. Their objectives are to share experience and information about the situation of Thai women and to inform their supporters about FOW's activities.

Human Rights Forum

Rm. 508 FMSG Building, #9 Balet Drive, Quezon City, Philippines 1112, tel. 721 34 82 Fax. 7217814. A semi-annual publication of the Philippine Human Rights Information Center, PhilRights, a service institution of the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), it is the main data and research center of PAHRA. Each issue attempts

to carry an article on women's rights. Critical contributions are invited at the above address. PhilRights has slide presentations and video documentaries.

Manushi

C/202 Lajpat Nagar 1, New Delhi-110024, India. A bimonthly 'journal about women and society.' It carries articles on how women in South Asian countries are affected by its laws, beliefs and practices. This journal relies solely on subscriptions and contributions and does not accept advertisements or grants for support.

Women's News Digest

444-446 Nathan Road, 8A, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Published quarterly by the Association for the Advancement of Feminism. 'Each issue contains reports on women's issues and women's movement in Hong Kong and selection of newspaper clippings on women in Hong Kong and China.'

From AUSTRALIA & THE PACIFIC



Australian Feminist Studies
Research Centre for Women's Studies, University of Adelaide, South Australia 5005. Comes out semi-annually. It publishes 'material in the fields of Women's Studies and feminist scholarship' which also includes 'critique based within mainstream academic disciplines, and research and discussion that transcends the conventional boundaries between academic disciplines.'

Broadsheet

P.O. Box 56-147, Auckland, New Zealand. Published quarterly by the Womanfile Collective and covers a wide range of interesting and timely feminist topics. Now on its twenty-second year.

Womanspeak

P.O. Box 103 Spit Junction NSW, Australia 2088. A quarterly magazine that features feminist issues raised by Australian and New Zealand women.

RESOURCE CENTER UPDATE

Canadian Women's Studies

212 Founders College, York University 4700 Keele Street, North York, Ontario, M3J 1P3, Canada. 'A feminist quarterly which was founded with the goal of making current writing and research on a wide variety of feminist topics accessible to the largest possible community of women.' Now in its 15th year of publishing English and French contributions 'that deal with issues pertaining to the lives of women of colour, Aboriginal women, immigrant women, working class women, lesbians and other marginalized women.'

Fireweed

P.O. Box 279, Station B, Toronto, Canada, M5T 2W2. A feminist quarterly of writing, politics, art and culture. 'Fireweed, a hardy perennial so called because it is the first growth to reappear in fire-scarred areas; a troublesome weed which spreads like wildfire invading clearings, bombsites, wasteland and other disturbed areas.'

Kinesis

#301 - 1720 Grant Street, Vancouver, BC V5L 2Y6, Canada. A tabloid size newspaper published ten times a year by the Vancouver Status of Women. Its aims 'are to be a non-sectarian feminist voice for women and to work actively for social change, specifically combatting sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and imperialism.'

MS. Magazine

P.O. Box 57132, Boulder, CO 80322-7132 U.S.A. A 'no-advertising, editorially free' and having an international focus. It relies mainly on readers subscriptions for it to come up with feminist (mind you, all shades!) articles. For 22 years, women of color have been very well represented in this bimonthly publication. It is the only magazine which tunes to its readers with 6 pages of letters to the editor per issue.

From NORTH AMERICA



Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society

The University of Chicago Press, Journals Division, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, IL 60637. Comes out four times a year. It has 'played a remarkable role in the scholarly study of women in culture and society.'

From LATIN AMERICA and the CARIBBEAN



CAFRA News

P.O. Bag 442, Tunapuna, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies. A quarterly newsletter by the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action. It is 'committed to understanding the relationship between the oppression of women and other forms of oppression in the society, and working actively for change.'

Mujer/Fempres

Casilla 16-637, Santiago 9, Chile. Red de comunicacion alternativa de la mujer. (Women's alternative

communication network) It is a monthly magazine for feminists in the Spanish language.

NACLA: Report on the Americas

#475 Riverside Drive, Suite 454, New York, NY 10115. A bimonthly publication by the North American Congress on Latin America, Inc. (NACLA). NACLA is an independent non-profit organization founded in 1966 to research the political economy of the Americas.

IS THE U.N. WORTH IT?

By Luz Maria Martinez, Isis International Manila Communications Program

From October 8-11, 1994, on behalf of Isis International-Manila, I attended my first day of the **Regional Lobby Training for Asian and Pacific Women's NGOs.**

Gathered at this event were women from the Asian and Pacific regions. There was a physician and child development

specialist from Vietnam, a Japanese advocate for the rights of migrant workers in Japan, a human rights worker from Cambodia, an activist with the indigenous peoples in Thailand, a women's rights activist from Bangladesh, a worker from a church network in Pakistan, Filipinas from Hong Kong's migrant workers organizations, an activist from a Mongolian women's organization, a Sri Lankan student from the United Kingdom and several Filipinas from women's organizations in the Philippines.

We were brought together by the Asian Women's Human Rights Council (AWHRC) and the Asia-Pacific Women's Action Network (APWAN), this was the second seminar they have conducted.

For many of us this was the first time to try to get an understanding of the maze, jargon and mystique that surrounds the United Nations structure. Most importantly, it was the chance to see if this huge bureaucracy was worth taking on in promoting our particular issues. In addition, we had a concrete purpose, the **Asia-Pacific Ministerial Meeting on Social Development**, a preparatory meeting for the UN Social Summit to be held in



Isis

Copenhagen on March 6-12, 1995, was to be held in Manila the following week. This would give us the opportunity to put into practice what we had learned.

Experienced Lobbyists

The training gathered experienced lobbyists based in the Philippines and Malaysia to share with us their experience and expertise.

We began with **Evelyn Hong** who presented the challenges of the Social Summit and in particular spoke about the impact Structural Adjustment Programs have on developing countries economies and delivery of social programs.

Dan O'Donnel provided the overview of the U.N. treaties and declarations, enforcement options and possible outcomes. For example, we learned that the *Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* is a treaty so it's up to each country to implement according to local culture and religious codes. A declaration, while not legally binding can become binding, such as the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, which is now part of international law. Covenants are legally binding, such as the

Lynn Lee



Luz M. Martinez

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Monitoring Compliance Bodies consist of the Human Rights Committee, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (also includes monitoring the trafficking of women), Committee on all Forms of Racial Discrimination, Committee Against Torture and the Committee on Rights of the Child.

Enforcement for violations are: moral and political pressure, quasi-judicial opinions, inter-state complaints, international courts and holding individuals responsible for intentional crimes.



ISIS

The Hands on Process

After getting an understanding of the UN structure and system, we moved on to the actual lobbying process. The following was the main rule: **'Know the issues and know your objectives.'**

In lobbying, what you are bringing to the United Nations is the information they don't have and/or providing expertise they otherwise do not possess. The procedure and processes one uses to impart this information and expertise form the creative force in lobbying. For example, information can be presented through visuals, demonstrations, studies, use of the media, panel discussions, academic meetings and one on one interactions with the

delegates who are allies and those you want to influence.

According to *Inez Fernandez*, the main thing to keep in mind is what she called the **Four F's**. One must be **flexible, friendly**, at times **furious** and must act fast. In creating a major impact, *Nelia Sancho*, recommends that the **planning** for a strategy at the Conference be done early. **Participate** in the preparatory conferences as a way to know the agenda and continue fine tuning your plan. **Network** with other NGOs who share the same agenda. **Fundraise** for the activity and make sure the **timing** of your activities are in the time frame of the Conference.

But, is it all worth it?

Is all this work worth it? Was a spoken sentiment but *Aurora de Dios*, who has been on the Philippine government side as a delegate, stated that NGOs can have a strong impact on government officials. Governments, according to her, always operate on a gut level on issues that affect their country and do not always possess the knowledge and expertise NGOs have. Patience is a virtue when working on issues at the international level, impact is felt over time and not all at once.

However, she cautioned that gains made at the international level do not mean much if they are not followed up at the local and national levels, these levels of government must be pushed if they are not moving.

After a few days of training we began our trial runs by preparing our issues for the first lobbying assignment at the Ministerial Meeting.

The Issues

The group established the list of issues they wanted addressed: **migration, children's issues, health, education, indigenous peoples, comfort women, women as consumers and shelter**. On each issue a short position paper was developed and the expectation was to have them read to the delegates at the Summit meeting.

D' Day

With our knowledge, documents, papers and pencils in hand, we merged ourselves with other NGOs and began our quest to lobby government delegates on issues we wanted addressed.

How did we fare? In a general sense maybe not bad but for the issues raised by the members of the lobby training, the following is a summary.

Preventive health and sanitation was not made as a strong statement in the Social Summit Ministerial final document, **alternative education programs** for women was not included, **shelter for women with special needs** did not make it, **host countries to acknowledge the nationality of children born to migrant workers** was not even discussed among the delegates, **recognition of the needs of indigenous women** was not discussed, **comfort women** were not discussed and the area of **women as consumers** was not discussed. The issue of **Structural Adjustment Programs** was very weakly addressed in the final document.

In Hindsight

While it was apparent that many of the issues would get side-tracked, I felt that some of the responsibility was to be placed on us as NGOs and as providers of information. First of all, the women's issues were not organized as a block among the NGOs, the materials distributed did not show unity and strength. The lobbying strategy among the NGOs was not clearly articulated or disseminated among the participants, especially among the members of the lobby training group.

That's not to say that this Ministerial Meeting for the Social Summit did not represent progress for women. There are enough issues on the Agenda and commitments from governments that NGOs, especially women's groups, can hold States accountable for. But just as *Ms. De Dios* had pointed out, gains made at the international level do not mean much if they are not followed up at the national and local levels. ♀

THE UN, DOES IT MATTER TO PACIFIC WOMEN?



In this section on the Pacific, we feature two interviews, one with *Tauga Vulaono* President of the Fiji National Council of Women and the other with *Vaine Wichman* economist and consultant to the South Pacific Commission. They discuss the impact on women, especially in the Pacific, of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, of women's involvement in UN processes, and future prospects with regard to the two forthcoming UN Conferences, the Social Summit in March in Copenhagen and the World Conference on Women in September in Beijing.

Tauga Vulaono

'On the road to Beijing'

Some background to all the meetings....The first World Conference on Women took place in Mexico at the start of the UN Decade for Women in 1975. The emphasis at this meeting was on Women in Development. However, at the end-of-decade conference on women in Nairobi in 1985, assessments showed that little progress had been achieved for women with this emphasis on WID, women's concerns were segregated from the mainstream and progress had, in fact, deteriorated as far back as 1965.

The Nairobi Conference and the Forward-Looking Strategies (FLS) for the Advancement of Women then shifted the emphasis from WID to the 'mainstreaming' approach, to include women in all spheres of decision-making and development.

Q: How much has been achieved in terms of the Pacific Platform for Action and the Jakarta Declaration for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific?

Tauga: If we go back a little... when we had the meeting for NGOs in Manila in 1983, all the NGOs agreed that nothing much had been achieved....because the Nairobi Platform for Action was something that not many women identified with. In that they were either not given the opportunity to look at the Nairobi FLS or very little follow-up occurred. But by this, I don't mean to say that nothing was achieved between Nairobi and now.

For instance, here in Fiji, although we were not looking at the Nairobi FLS, we were still able to convince the government of the need for a ministry or department for

women. So, although the actual FLS was not followed on paper, different countries had been doing their work and had achieved quite a lot. In Fiji, the FNCW did not discuss the FLS after 1975. The Council went under after 1987, during the Coup, a Ministry was created in the Coup's aftermath (but) we cannot say whether it was something that was being followed through from the FLS. I think this is also true of the other Pacific island countries. We agree that the document was tucked away somewhere after Nairobi and we just went about doing the things we considered important.

Q: The Pacific put together a united Platform for Action which was tabled at Jakarta. Could you discuss the contents of this Pacific Platform?

Tauga: The paper talks about 13 key areas of concern to Pacific women, namely, health, education and training, economic empowerment, agriculture and fishing, legal and human rights, shared decision-making, environment, culture and the family, mechanisms to promote the advancement of women, violence, peace and justice, poverty and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Q: Do you think the Jakarta Declaration mainstreams women's concerns adequately enough in preparation for Beijing?

Tauga: The Pacific delegation present in Jakarta felt that we had strengthened the Declaration because we had adopted our own Platform, the Pacific Platform for Action. Our delegates also worked hard to ensure that our Platform was attached to the Jakarta Declaration as part of that

document.

Q: How will the two documents facilitate the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies in the region?

Tauga: The ministries of the small island countries have taken back their papers and because NGOs played a big part in the compiling of these papers, we will definitely be working together with governments to action the 13 areas of critical concern to Pacific women which were identified in Noumea and endorsed in Jakarta.

[At the Jakarta conference] *Taufa Vakatale*, the Fiji ministerial representative, was chosen by the Pacific ministers to present the official statement of behalf of the



Pacific. Many of those present, including the Pacific delegates, were surprised to hear her talking about very political issues such as the nuclear free Pacific, Bougainville and indigenous peoples' rights....

Q: At Nairobi, evidence points to a clear ideological division between the concerns of women from first, second and third world countries. Those from the first world wanted Equality, while the second world countries, like the Russian bloc, asked for Peace, and the emphasis from third world countries focused on Development - hence the

themes Equality, Development and Peace.

What, in your opinion, will the themes be for the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing and where do you think the split, if any, will occur this time - along ideological or geographical lines?

Tauga: The themes are going to be the same: Equality, Development and Peace, because of the Forward-Looking Strategies. I think that as far as the split is concerned, it will probably be a geographical, rather than an ideological one because many people are looking at all the themes as a whole and this is reflected in the Pacific Platform for Action and the Jakarta Declaration. But we will be divided geographically in the sense that we are emphasising certain things which differ from other regions, such as the

problem of poverty and its definition.

Q: What are your hopes for women of the region after Beijing?

Tauga: I hope that the issues that have been brought up as specific to the Pacific will be addressed by women in the region. Eventually one of the most important things that we need to work on is information dissemination to all women, at all levels, to ensure that women are aware of these documents and what they mean. We cannot have a repetition of the FLS, which failed because it was not discussed at any level. It should be the task for women at all levels, those who have had any input into the Platform for Action for the Pacific or the Jakarta meeting to disseminate information now and after Beijing. To me, it is their role and duty to call women together and share ideas with them and address the issues which they



consider important. I am keen that women take this paper and make everybody understand. This paper is not just a women's paper. The issues are Pacific issues - for all people.

Source: Pacific Mainstreaming News, Vol. 2 No. 2, August 1994, UNIFEM Pacific Mainstreaming Project, c/o UNDP, Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji. Tel: (679)301-178 Fax: (679) 301-654.

Vaine Wichman - Pacific Economist talks about the UN Social Summit and the future of Pacific Island Countries.

Interviewed by Luz Maria Martinez, Isis International Communications Program

Vaine Wichman a representative to the October 1994 Ministerial preparatory meeting for the UN Social Summit held in Manila, is an economist on rural development issues from the South Pacific Commission (SPC), located in New Caledonia. In preparing for the Social Summit, she has been providing governments of Pacific Island Countries (PICs) with data, support and input into the documents and is a general advisor to governments in the Pacific.

The South Pacific Commission (SPC) represents 22 Island governments and was

earmarked to undertake coordination activities for the Pacific Island Countries for the UN Social Summit. With this responsibility the SPC is providing technical and financial support to other island governments. The SPC provided technical support to PICs at the ESCAP Ministerial meeting.

For Vaine, in the Manila Declaration of the preparatory Social Summit meeting, the Pacific Islands made three major gains. Firstly, the inclusion of a statement that the Pacific continues to receive 'preferential treatment' despite the free

trade agreements being made at the international level. According to Vaine, "The liberalizing of international trade agreements will have an adverse effect on the Islands but the Islands are not a threat to the international market, so we asked that we continue to be given preference in our exportation of products, GATT recognized this disadvantage and included a clause to protect the Islands through continuing the same 'preferential treatment'."

The second gain was the inclusion of Marine sustainability. This "...recognizes that women are also part of the fishing industry, it is the women who do the cleaning, preserving and gleaning of the fish so the language in the document was changed to 'fisherfolk'."

Thirdly, as with the World Bank Overview report, the document recognized the low growth of the Islands and agreed that special measures need to be taken in order

Vaine . . .

to help them meet their goals.

She stressed that the interests of the Pacific Islands that were furthered at this meeting must be strengthened in the future by Pacific governments and NGOs *"Staying active and visible. Most of the regional meetings usually focus on the Asian countries and the Pacific Islands are not given much attention. By keeping ourselves visible we remind the other governments that we too must be taken into consideration."*

"Our responsibility now is to disseminate this information to as many people as possible. All the governments here who have made a commitment to this document should now be held accountable. They



have deliberated over the issues and made commitments to reach the goals established. NGOs should be part of making sure that at their next meeting in 1997 many of the goals are reached and that the people in each country know what those goals are."

She also made the revealing comment that *"While I found the meeting to be good because it gave the social issues a lot of attention, it has been interesting to see which countries send their high up representatives. For example, the countries who give high priority to the social issues send their higher level representatives, others do not."*

I found Ms. Wichman's observations to be accurate.

There were countries who were represented by their Prime Ministers or Deputy Prime Ministers, while others sent their lower staff. One country was represented by the sports minister who stopped over to represent his country after the Hiroshima Games.

Pacific Women and the 2nd Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Women in Development.

The outcomes of the 2nd Asian and Pacific Officials and Ministerial preparatory meeting for the Beijing World Conference, that took place in Jakarta in June 1994, marked the first solid step towards recognition of Pacific women's concerns in forthcoming UN world conferences.

It provided the opportunity for Pacific women's concerns to be heard and included in the

region's preparation for the Beijing Conference. In particular, the Pacific Platform for Action was tabled and all the Pacific issues were included in the Asia Pacific Plan of Action. The Pacific Platform for Action was included in its entirety as part of the region's submission to the Beijing World Conference in 1995. This in itself is an achievement for Pacific NGO Women.

Source: **WINFO-TONGA**, Vol. 3 No. 4, July/August 1994, P.O. Box 62, Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga. Tel: 21 300 Fax: 23 888.



Loving Women, Fighting War

A Serbian Lesbian Examines Militarism and Homophobia

by Lepa Mladjenovic



Lepa Mladjenovic from Ms.,
Vol. V No. 2, 1994

A talk given on the occasion of the awarding to her of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission 1994 Felipa da Souza award, the award is given to outstanding activists worldwide.

'In wartime, lesbian love has no language.'

I come from a country where there is a war in which all the sides speak the same language and war rape means usually raping and killing women from the neighborhood. One hundred thousand people dead, ten times more injured. Five million people displaced.

In wartime, the image of love, apart from being heterosexual, has an additional quest of reproducing the nation. The image of sex, apart from being heterosexual with lots of pornography, violence and Hollywood movies on TV, has an additional element - war rape. The women I spoke to talked about being raped in private prisons, in soldiers' barracks, in soldiers' warehouses, in concentration camps. Their homeless souls and courage haunt me in the night, and in the morning, they give a political framework to my work and strengthen my will.

In wartime, lesbian love has no language. Out lesbians should swallow their own words. Every word about lesbian existence is taken as a desecration of the pain of war survivors.

Therefore, where I live there is no such social phenomenon as an out lesbian.

Where I come from, there is the rule of the nation-state. All of the possible wide range of identities have been reduced to national codes; those who either are faithful to or betray the regime's policy of ethnic cleansing. Where I come from, the regime permanently produces a false reality. They say Serbia is not at war, while women's projects deal with women abused by killers who come back from the front. They say all the human rights in the country are being protected while two million Albanians have no right to schooling or to the medical system and live in a state of siege; while thousands of Gypsies for years live in dark cellars and shanty barns; while half a million refugees are second class citizens.

There is still Criminal Law 110 that criminalizes sex between adult males. Lesbians and gays do not have the benefits of marriage, are not safe in their work places, and live in constant fear. And still, if I want to work with

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women, I need to compromise with state institutions, knowing that in the Serbian parliament and government there are men who are killers, rapists and war criminals - not in the symbolic sense, but legally so.

Working in wartime poses a dilemma for us feminists. How do we avoid the role men give to women during war: nursing the wounds of war survivors? How do we interpret the war torture if for some of us the world is gender divided? Does compulsive heterosexual construction of roles make one gender produce the conditions and means of destruction of everyone and make the other gender maintain and feed that same destruction? I know that many women I see on the streets are in conflict between their role as mother and the demand for faith in the nation. But they do not have any social or historical means to articulate their conflict. Women then plunge into deeper silence - the place they have known for ages.

Probably many feminist lesbians who live in countries of poverty and war share similar experiences with me. Trying and failing to understand why there is war. Encircled with images of the dead that appear with the sharp blowing of the wind or an unexpected sound. Where soldiers, proud of killing, still wear uniforms on buses and in markets. Where people are hungry and sick, and funerals become events one has to get used to.

Many times I wondered over women who love women in my town who are not identified as lesbian, who are not identified with the role of nation or mother, who do not want to think about war nearby. They walk down the same streets and I don't see them. I ask myself what are the words I could say aloud to make their faces and voices rise from their sheltered silent chambers. In the state statistics, they are probably counted as something they are not.

Women In Black

Where I come from, a small group of women got together, again supported by many women from different countries, and we formed **Women In Black Against War**. We stand on the street every Wednesday and show that we disagree with the government. Some of us are harassed by police from time to time, just to be reminded that 'they are watching us.' There are no more peace demonstrations on the streets of Belgrade; we are the only persistent positive warriors who believe that

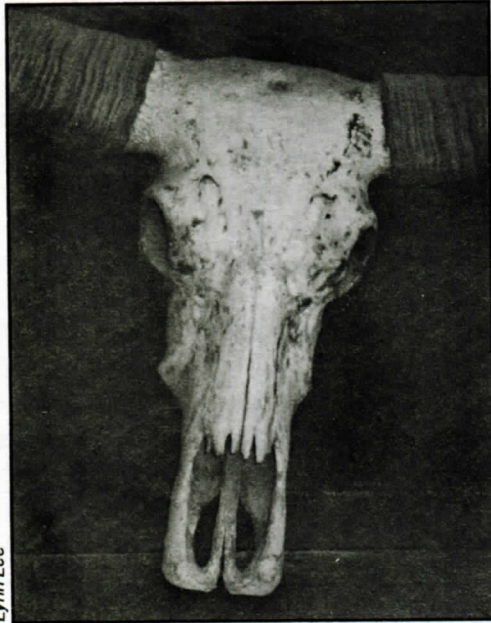
When the war started, I came out on the streets to let my body speak that I am against a government that kills. When the war continued, I felt that I had to work with women war survivors. So some of us feminists from Belgrade, supported by many women from non-war zones, opened the **Autonomous Women's Center** and many women fleeing their families, male partners or war zones come there.

In front of refugee women, I become the witness of their tragedy. I listen to their stories of lost children and lost lives. Some of them lost their homeland. They

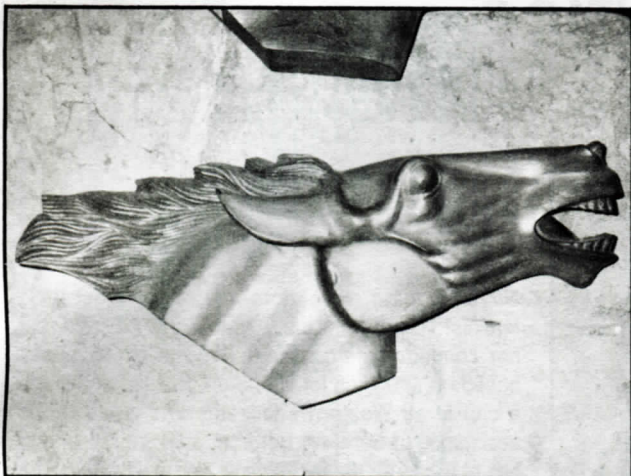
are revising their past, searching for the lethal errors they think they might have made, always from the beginning researching the anatomy of their destiny. We talk, at moments we create togetherness by tears. The recognition of two women's souls is a possibility for me that remains a place of hope in the deepest pain.

'Working in wartime poses a dilemma for us feminists. How do we avoid the role men give to women during war...?'

Two weeks ago, a woman called the Center. She was from Bosnia and had already spent a year and a half as a refugee with her two daughters. She spoke to me for the first time about the horror in the war prison. She had a tender voice that was hiding, trembling and screaming. The daughters were in school, she was alone and it was her birthday.



Lynn Lee



thrown out. The arguments that were spilled at us and at me relied on the fascist Criminal Law 110. The psychologists ordered us to leave - "*We share the same bathroom!*" they said. They said that their reputation was being ruined by our presence at the same address. The words used were supposed to mean that we were contagious, suspicious characters. The final comment was that lesbians are not supposed to work with minors

small acts of public disobedience are meaningful. We know they don't change any political decision, but they change our lives and they matter to other women. Women in Black also have a men's support group, formed by two gay men.

But I am not a war survivor, I am not a refugee, I am not a Serbian mother. The city I live in was not ruined. I am not identified with the regime, nor with the nation I come from. When the regime's paper named me a "*traitor of the Serbian nation*" it hit the hidden smile in me.

Where I come from is not the nation I was born in, but the lost lesbian country I never had and somehow still manage to create. So if they cannot insult me on a national basis, they certainly can insult me as a woman and as a lesbian. And they do.

'...when they hate you for who you are, this is the beginning of a war against you.'

In April this year, about a month and a half after our Lesbian and Gay group ARKADIA shared a flat with a group of psychologists who work with refugees, ARKADIA was

who are rape survivors.

So I thought, in pain to the bone, when they hate you for who you are, this is the beginning of a war against you. When the psychologists wrote a letter to announce their disapproval of ARKADIA, they wrote, "*IMMEDIATELY stop activities.*" I was surprised, my stomach was shuddering, my face was in danger of losing its shape. For a moment I thought, if all pedestrians tomorrow in the streets knew I was a lesbian and they all thought the same as these psychologists, how would I keep my face whole? How will I open my eyes and not be affected by their disgust? How will I not feel disgusted about myself too? Maybe the woman in the post office would want me to leave immediately if she knew I was a lesbian. Maybe the woman at the market, if only she knew, would not sell me her strawberries. I felt so very bad; I was fighting with myself in order to revive my own dignity for my passion and my politics.

Then I remembered the stories of women from the war zones and how they left their homes. Soldiers of different national colors would come to a village to be cleansed and order, "*Immediately leave your house!*" They wouldn't have more than an hour or so; feeling humiliated and not knowing why, they would have to leave their own



Loving Women. . .

homes, they would be made to feel awful for who they are and where they are. And in all that surprise, they would have to pack and run, and maybe remember to take only a few photos, some coffee or an apple for the road. No warrant. Immediately. I was cleansed in an instant.

After three years, the essence of war I experienced from my colleagues in the hatred of gays and lesbians is just around the corner.

But lesbians will remember and I know there were lesbians living in the wartime before me. Most of them did not leave me their guidelines. Women who loved women in my town a long time ago did not leave any traces of their voices, that I know. So sometimes in the moments of weakness I read *Audre Lorde* in her "Litany for Survival", or I remind myself that "there must be those among whom we can sit down and weep and still be counted as warriors" (*Adrienne Rich*). Many lesbians, feminists and pacifists from this country and other countries have supported us, sent post cards, packages (before the embargo), letters, books and journals and words of love. Then, when it all arrives, we sit in my kitchen, which we call the **Free Lesbian Republic**, we look in awe at the beautiful books and papers, we eat macaroni and some of us dance. And we still dream of how to bring the codes of the kitchen Republic into the streets.

Here I am in New York, so happy that there is a place where we can all be together - it is so fantastic that the force of our togetherness will be, we would say, food for my soul.

Source: *Off Our Backs*, October 1994, 2423 18th Street, N.W., 2nd Floor, Washington, D.C. 20009, USA.

SUSAN SONTAG Commences The Twenty First Century With Sarajevo



Susan Sontag represents one of the most lucid feminist voices from the 70's in North America, but her commitments have extended to other causes based on struggles for liberation. In 1993 she made a call to all Western intellectuals to come to the assistance of Sarajevo but from a very long list only two responded, *Juan Goytisolo* and *Annie Leibovitz*. Without feeling discouraged, in Sarajevo Sontag produced *Samuel Beckett's, Waiting for Godot*. Here is her experience.

Q: Why your two visits to Sarajevo since the initiation of the war?

Susan: I was introduced to the city last April as a result of my son, *David Rieff*, writing a book on the Bosnian war. Before that, I was already feeling moved by what was occurring there through my own sense of horror and indignation. I must admit that I had never thought of going to Sarajevo, what can you do there if you are not a journalist or working on behalf of a humanitarian organization? I have never had any fantasies of being an ambassador of goodwill for the United Nations. On my first visit, I spent two weeks in Sarajevo, it was an extraordinary experience. What made the most impression, aside from the immense suffering of the people, is that you can establish a strong connection with the Bosnians and their ideal that they can still be one country. I searched for a reason to return and to spend sometime doing something morally decent.

On my first stay, I asked people from the theater if they were interested in my returning to work with them for a period of time. They answered yes, the play *Waiting for Godot* came to mind without having to dwell on it for too long.

Q: Why waiting for *Godot* in Sarajevo?

Susan: Because it has an obvious impact that does not have to be explained. Everyone always smiles when they hear the story. People moving towards death wait day in day out for something that never seems to arrive. The people who with careless humor respond to their life, without hope, but without regard

continue to move forward. It would be difficult to find a play with such resonance, and not only because of its symbolism.

The second reason for producing *Waiting For Godot* is that it entails only one scene. I would like to produce a Shakespearean play, but it's impossible to do Shakespeare in a diminutive setting, with only candle lights and in a theater that could be bombed the next minute. As a matter of fact, I am situating the public in the scene itself because it's safer than sitting them out in the auditorium. The theater has some mortar damage on the roof already and on one day that I was there a mortar projectile fell close to the building and it shook. I will not put the public in jeopardy.

Q: What will be the significance of this city at the end of the twentieth century?

Susan: I believe the century began in Sarajevo and that the 21st century will also commence there. It has been a brief century, World War 1 was initiated in Sarajevo. The centuries do not begin with two zeros, the 19th century really began in 1815, with the restoration after Napoleon's downfall. Therefore, the 19th century is from 1815 to 1914 when the renewal of the world order after Napoleon was destroyed. I would say that the 21st century began in 1989 with the suicide of the Soviet empire but you could also be more ironic and say that it began with the war in Sarajevo....

Source: *Story and photo, Mujeres en Accion* 2-3/94, Isis International, Santiago, Chile. Translated by *Luz M. Martinez*, Isis International-Manila.

Assault is not 'Part of the Job

A Report on the Ontario Nurse Assault Survey

By Judy Britnell

Judy Britnell is a former chairperson of the Ontario, Canada, Psychiatric Nursing Interest Group, and is currently a nursing teacher at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute School of Nursing in Toronto. In the following article she describes the work of the Nurse Assault Project Team, of which she is a member.

Isis would like to know if nurses in other countries, especially in the Asian and Pacific regions, have experienced assault, and if so, what types and what did they do?

Background

In 1990, *Elinor Caplan* (then Minister of Health in Ontario) endorsed the Nurse Assault Project Teams' proposal to study the prevalence and impact of assault on nurses. The report was released on May 13, 1992.

The project group believed that the issue of nurse assault had for too long been neglected by nurses and their employers. We hoped that by reporting the prevalence and impact of nurse assault, the issue would be spotlighted and comprehensive policies to deal with it would follow.

From the approximately 20 people involved in 1990, a core group of 9 nurses remained over the two year period to see the research completed. The remaining group were all Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario and Psychiatric Nursing Interest Group members who were employed in clinical, educational, and administrative positions. None of us purported to be experienced researchers but weren't shy about collaborating with others. The research format, proposal writing for funding, review of current literature, and preparation for the release of the research were all accomplished by the collaborative work of the core group.

The funding supported the work of a consultant and the actual administration of the mailed questionnaire (3,000 questionnaires were mailed and over 800 were completed by nurses across the province).

Highlights of the Report:

- 59% of nurses surveyed had been physically assaulted during their careers.
- One in three had been assaulted in the last 12 months.
- One in ten nurses assaulted had required treatment for their injuries.
- 24% of those assaulted had ignored the incident or had taken no action.
- 98% of assaults were by patients although some were perpetrated by family members and physicians.
- Males assaulted nurses twice as often as females.
- Nurses reported being shoved, bitten, punched and kicked while administering care to their patients.
- 80% of those surveyed reported having witnessed, talked to or heard about a colleague who has been assaulted.
- 70% of those surveyed reported that effective policies and procedures to assist assaulted nurses did not exist in their workplaces.
- A majority believe that nurse assault is on the increase.

When the report was released nurses contacted the project team to express their gratitude that the study was conducted and/or to share their personal experiences with assault. For some it was the first time they had been able to reveal to another their own experiences of assault. Both nurses and non-nurses contacted us for advice and guidance about how to proceed in their own workplaces and others shared with us the steps that had already been taken by their employers to address the issue.

The risks of addressing this issue are many. Employers of nurses are not happy to know about situations that their employees don't think they have handled well in the past and naturally go on the defensive to protect the steps that they have already taken. The public, although by and large supportive of nurses and shocked by the research statistics, has also voiced its frustration with yet another piece of 'bad news'. A colleague overheard one member of the public say "What will those nurses want next?"

Assault continued

The issue of assault is not new to nurses but has only begun to be discussed. Nurses have the right to a workplace that is safe. In the event of an assault nurses must be supported. In many cases we know that safety measures have not been implemented by employers. Support policies in the event of assault do not exist, and where they do, are not comprehensive enough.

Support for assaulted nurses will include discussion with colleagues and administrators, psychological and/or legal counselling, financial support, education, and ongoing policy review to ensure that current procedures deal with current concerns. Policies that address the safety needs of both patients and nurses can only be created in environments that foster open discussion, collaboration, and trust.

We are gratified that this research has helped nurses to feel supported and has also helped them to feel that now they can take the issues forward in their own workplaces. The project team has demonstrated its sense of responsibility by undertaking the project but social responsibility is not something that you can do on a project basis. To feel satisfied we need to know that the issues related to nurse assault continue to be addressed in a way that has meaning for not only the individual nurse but for the profession. Copies of the research report are available from the Psychiatric Nursing Interest Group (PNIG), 33 Price Street, Toronto, Ontario, M4W 1Z2, Canada.

Source: **Towards Justice in Health**, Vol.1 No. 2, Fall/Winter 1992.

Health

Early Motherhood Highlights Women's Statistical Portrait: Is the cup half empty or half full?

Women are attaining education. They are better able to plan their families and to get medical care during pregnancy. Their children have better chances of surviving.

Yet "*many women's lives have not changed over time*". For example, in 13 countries more than half of women of childbearing age have no education - a factor that greatly affects their ability to have only as many children as they want and to keep these children healthy.

This situation of not quite getting over the hill is what persists for women in developing countries according to a statistical portrait drawn by the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) programme. The portrait, presented in the report **Women's Lives and Experiences**, summarises 10 years of survey research in more than 40 developing countries, and represents the combined experiences of over 280 million women of reproductive age. One of the world's single largest sources of information on women, the DHS programme is managed by Macro International Inc., a Maryland-based research firm, with funding by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Report authors *Dara Carr* and *Ann Way* describe the increase in female education as "striking" - in 27 out of 42 countries, the proportion of women aged 20 to 24 with no

education is less than half that for women aged 45 to 49. One of the most dramatic improvements is noted in Tanzania where 74 per cent of women in the older age group have had no schooling compared to only 16 per cent of the younger women. But in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Mali, Niger, Pakistan and Yemen, at least 75 per cent of women including the younger age groups have never been to school.

Early Marriage and Motherhood

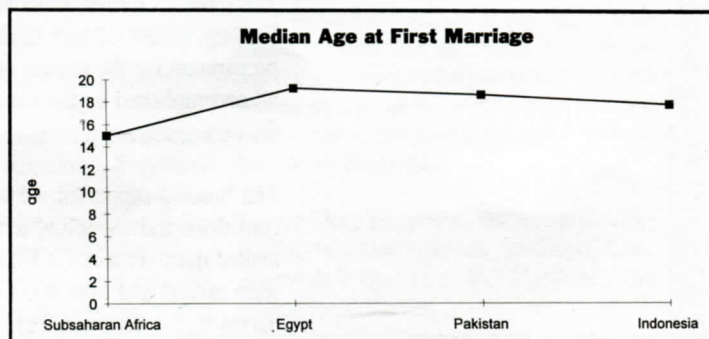
Among youths aged 6 to 15, almost as many girls as boys are likely to be in school. It is only in four countries - Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan and Yemen - that the differences in enrolment rates exceeds 10 percentage points. But from age 16, school enrolment falls more sharply for girls, "*consistent with the continued emphasis on domestic roles for girls and women, teenage marriages and early childbearing.*" The report points out that "*the age at which a woman marries often affects the rest of her life*" including her ability to stay in school, her participation in the labour force

and the number of children she has.

In many cases there is almost no transition from childhood into adulthood. At least half of women marry before the age of 18 in 14 out of the 42 countries surveyed. This is especially true in sub-Saharan Africa, with women in Mali, Niger and Yemen marrying at the median age of 15. But it is also true in some parts of Asia as in Indonesia where the median age at first marriage among women is 17.7 years, in Pakistan 18.6 years and in Egypt 19.2 years.

Moreover, young women in the countries surveyed are, on the average, initiated into sexual activity even before marriage. But because social mores frown on premarital sex, family planning services are off-limits to teenagers, depriving them of the knowledge that could help them become more sexually responsible.

Not surprisingly, **motherhood** in one's teens is common. "*In 17 of the 21 countries surveyed in sub-Saharan Africa, at least half of women had their first child before 20 years of age,*" says the report.





According to *Joan Davies* from the London-based group **Anti-Slavery International**, thousands of young girls across the world are being cruelly torn from their homes and forced into early marriages, some before they have even reached their tenth birthday. Economic hardship or tradition dictate the practice which not only has deep psychological effects on the child-bride but can endanger her life if she becomes a teenage mother.

"The lives of little girls are sacrificed by early marriages in a number of countries," said *Ms. Davies*, it was a form of slavery for some of the girls, she added.

According to a UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) study carried out in Nepal, 23 per cent of young girls of Maithili origins are married before they are 10. In India the average age of marriage is 14 years, while in Africa 50 per cent of girls marry before they are 18. In some regions it is quite common to meet 11 year old and 12 year old mothers. The situation is repeated in Latin America where girls of 12 can wed with parental consent in Ecuador, Uruguay and Venezuela.

A recent study carried out for the Organisation of African Unity found that in the Gojam area of Ethiopia, girls who married between the ages of seven and nine went to live with their young husband's family so the couple could get to know each other. The marriage is not supposed to be consummated before the girl reaches puberty, but often that is not respected. One father told the researchers that some *"families don't look after their daughter-in-law properly."* Often she can be the victim of violence, *"even rape."*

Apart from the psychological trauma which "may require years to recover" from, young mothers aged under 15 are five to seven times more likely to die during pregnancy and child-birth, than women of 20 to 24, *Davies* said. Their bodies are not fully-developed, and early complicated pregnancies can also leave them sterile, paraplegic or suffering from a variety of health problems.

But the current fear of AIDS and the economic crisis make it unlikely there will be any drop in the number of child marriages, *Davies* said. Young girls are 'considered less likely' to be affected by AIDS, and their dowry payments are

smaller, posing less of a burden for their parents.

The Report, **Women's Lives and Experiences**, says that in other regions the median age at first birth is at least 20 years, except in Guatemala where the median age is 19.9 years. For example, it is 24 years in Sri Lanka, 23.1 in Tunisia, 22.8 in the Philippines, 22.4 in Thailand, 21.3 in Pakistan and 20.1 in Indonesia.

Overall, fertility rates are highest in sub-Saharan Africa where women in 15 of the 21 countries surveyed have an average of six or more children. Women in the region also spend between 15 and 23 years of their lives caring for young children. On the other hand, the average woman in Sri Lanka or Thailand might have only two or three children. Thai women likewise spend the least number of years - 10.5 - caring for young children.

Compared to the risk of pregnancy-related deaths in developed countries which is less than 30 per 100,000 births, the **maternal mortality** rate is a staggering 500 per 100,000 births in five out of the six sub-Saharan countries surveyed. Lower ratios ranging from 197 to 371 deaths were found in Bolivia, Morocco, Namibia, Peru and the Philippines. The heaviest toll is believed to be on those women with the least access to maternity care, which is recommended from the third month of pregnancy onwards. Here the report makes at least the happy observation that women in 10 out of 41 countries surveyed received prenatal care for at least 90 per cent of the recent births.

But, it adds, in seven countries fewer than half of births were

covered by prenatal care. Moreover, less than half of deliveries in 18 countries were professionally assisted, that is by a doctor, nurse or midwife. It was only in the Dominican Republic and in Trinidad and Tobago that women received delivery care for more than 90 per cent of their recent births. *"Even with the technology to make motherhood safer, pregnancy-related complications continue to result in serious illness and premature death among women and their children,"* the report points out. It is a high-risk birth if the mother is below 18 years or over 34 years of age (*"too young/old"*), has had a previous live birth within the past 24 months (*"too soon"*) and has already had three or more live births (*"too many"*). In 35 out of 42 countries surveyed, 60 per cent or more currently married women fall into at least one of these categories.

Asked if they would like to limit or space their next birth, at least 30 per cent of women in eight of the 21 sub-Saharan countries surveyed, and in Bolivia and Guatemala, said *"yes"* but are not using family planning. Although knowledge of contraception is high - in most countries 70 per cent or more of women know of at least one method - contraceptive use varies widely, with two-thirds of married women using contraception in Brazil, Colombia and Thailand but users dipping to less than 10 per cent in nine out of 10 sub-Saharan countries surveyed.

Sources: **Depthnews, Women's Feature**, October 1994. **The Muslim World**, Vol. 32 Nos. 14 & 15, 24 Rabi-us-Sani- 2 Jamadi-ul-Awwal 1415 AH, 1-8 October 1994, P.O. Box 5030, Karachi 74000, Pakistan. Tel: 4969423.

TB deaths rising in Eastern Europe

Tuberculosis deaths are increasing in Eastern Europe after nearly 40 years of steady decline, according to a new WHO report. The increase is linked to the impact of recent political, social and economic changes on health systems. Three factors are mainly responsible, says the report: most Eastern European countries are using inappropriate tuberculosis control strategies; TB treatment programmes are vastly underfunded; and an increase in the average age of the region's population is contributing to the problem.

The report says about 29,000 people died from tuberculosis last year in the region, and over two million Eastern Europeans are believed to have been infected with the TB bacilli during the past five years. The most dramatic increases are in large cities: in Moscow, incidence has nearly doubled from 27 cases per 100,000 to 50; a recent study in the Siberian city of Tomsk reveals 200 cases per 100,000, a figure usually found in the regions most ravaged by the disease, such as Asia and Africa. The greatest increases in TB deaths are being reported in Armenia, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Latvia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania and Romania.

Source: *Go Between*, No. 47, August/September 1994, UN-NGLS, Palais de Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. Fax: (41) 22/788 7366

A Nation of Smokers

Besides being the world's most populous nation (about 1.18 billion people), China also holds the onerous distinction of being the largest producer and consumer of tobacco products. The country accounts for about one-third of all tobacco consumption, which explains why an estimated 1.17 million Chinese people died from tobacco-related illnesses in 1988 alone. The number is predicted to rise to two million

annual deaths by 2025. Of all Chinese alive today who are under 20 years of age, 50 million are predicted to die prematurely from smoking. (Asia-Pacific Tobacco News, Australia, Bulletin No. 7, March 1994).

Source: *Worldwide Consumer*, IOCU, No. 215, September 1994, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, Casilla 9635, Santiago, Chile

(Unripe) Bananas Protect Against Bowel Cancer

Nutritionists in Cambridge say a diet rich in starch, not just fiber, may be a 'major protective factor' against bowel cancer. Green bananas, cold boiled potatoes and other sources of virtually indigestible starch may provide particularly strong protection against this type of cancer.

After analyzing diet and cancer rates from 12 countries, *Aedin Cassidy*, *Sheila Bingham* and *John Coamings* of the Medical Research Council's Dunn Clinical Nutrition Centre said they found a strong association between starch consumption and cancer of the large bowel, colon and rectum. On average, the more starch consumed in a population, the lower the incidence of these diseases.

Of all the populations studied, Australian men and women consume the lowest amount of starch (100 grams or less a

day), while the Chinese eat more than 370 grams each day. These striking differences are matched by a fourfold difference in the incidence of colon cancer - ranging from 6.3 cases per 100,000 men in China to 25 cases in 100,000 among Australian men.

Writing in the *British Journal of Cancer*, *Bingham* and her colleagues argue that the anticancer effect comes from starch that escaped digestion in the small intestines.

Bananas that are still green at the tips contain substantial amounts of resistant starch, the researchers said, whereas in ripe bananas with black spots most of the starch has been converted to sugars.

Source: *Health Alert*, August 16-31 1994, HAIN, 9 Cabanatuan Road, Philamlife Homes, Quezon City, Philippines

Fake Ginseng Widely Sold

How pure is a bottled 'natural remedy'? In the case of ginseng, not at all - many brands of processed ginseng sold are fakes! A Swedish study has found that commercial ginseng preparations marketed as natural ginseng contain little or no trace of the medicinal plant. 50 commercial ginseng products sold in 11 countries were examined, the products were bought from pharmacies and reputable stores for natural remedies.

The study found wide variations in the level of ginsenosides - the compounds taken from the plant root and credited with therapeutic properties - in the products. Six of the products sold in Britain, Sweden and the US contained only traces of ginsenosides, i.e. levels less than 0.01%. The other 44 samples analysed had between 1.9 and 9% of ginsenosides.

One product sold in the US was found to contain substantial amounts of the drug ephedrine, a mild stimulant, which is banned by sports authorities, the presence of the drug was not declared on the product. In 1993, a young Swedish athlete who took this particular ginseng preparation failed a doping test by testing positive for ephedrine. The above findings were reported in *The Lancet* medical journal (Vol. 344, 9 July 1994).

Source: *Utusan Konsumer*, No. 311, September 1994, Consumers' Association of Penang, 228 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

UNEP launches 1995 global 500

Flora Nwapa writes 30

Flora Nwapa, the Nigerian author, publisher, teacher and administrator, died in Enugu on 16 October, 1994.

Writing in *Everywoman's* June books issue last year, Flora explained: "I had to engage myself full time, work full time, and, in doing so, create." She set up Tana Press and late Flora Nwapa Books to publish a story for children, *Mammywater*, one of the first available for Nigerian children - followed by many others. Despite enormous problems of book production and distribution, she concluded that the presses "have made a mark in publishing in Africa. They

are the work of one woman who believes in the ability of women in all spheres of human endeavour."

Flora worked closely with the African women's organisation in Britain, **Akina Mama wa Afrika**. The editor of their magazine *African Woman*, **Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi**, has written: "Though we are deeply saddened by her death, we rejoice in having known and worked with her, and we pray that her soul rests in perfect peace." Amen.

Source: *Everywoman*, October 1994, Freepost, London N1 8BR.

Every year, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) selects a number of individuals or organizations for outstanding achievements in protection of the environment. Nominations for the Global 500 award - Roll of Honour for Environmental Achievement - are now open. The inaugural awards were presented in 1987. Prominent prizewinners have included the Bellerive Foundation; *Sir David Attenborough*; *Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland*; *Anil Agarwal*; the Green Belt Movement in Kenya; His Royal Highness the

Duke of Edinburgh; *Raffi Cavoukian*; and Tenglu village in the People's Republic of China.

Nomination forms and selection criteria can be obtained from *Meryem Amar*, Secretary of the Global 500 Selection Committee, UNEP P.O. Box 30552, Nairobi, Kenya.

Source: *Go Between*, No. 47, August/September 1994, UN-NGLS, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. Fax: (41) 22/788 7366.

Indigenous Initiatives For Peace

The first assembly of **Indigenous Initiative for Peace** - a group headed by Nobel Peace Prize winner **Rigoberta Menchu Tum** - has adopted a resolution calling for the creation of a mechanism to prevent conflict and mediate and resolve disputes between indigenous peoples and nation states.

The assembly also outlined its objectives for the *International Decade of Indigenous Peoples* (1994-2004). While the main objective of the decade should be the achievement of self-determination, autonomy and self-government for indigenous people, specific objectives include a major information and education campaign about the reality in which indigenous people live; guarantee of

indigenous people's influence in decision making processes; greater funding, better communications, and more representation of indigenous women; and an improved legal framework for indigenous peoples.

For details contact: **Promoter Committee, Indigenous Initiative for Peace**, Heriberto Frias 339, Col. Navarte, CP 03020, Mexico DF, Mexico. Tel: (52) 5/638 0346. Fax: (52) 5/639 3976. E-mail: indipaz@laneta.apc.org.

Source: *Go Between* 47, August/September 1994, UN-NGLS, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. Fax: (41) 22/788 7366.

YWCA prepares for Summit

The World Young Women's Christian Association invites you to help formulate a Women's World Agenda by participating in the **International Women's Summit (IWS)** July 3-6, 1995, Seoul Education and Cultural Center, Korea. The IWS plan of action will be documented in a Women's World Agenda that will be used as a lobbying tool and reference document for the UN 4th World Conference on Women and beyond.

Some of the concerns that the IWS will address are: *Globalisation of the world economy and its impact on the lives of women; Religious and ideological intolerance; Reclaiming of cultural, economic and political rights of indigenous peoples; Education to improve women's economic status, human rights and*

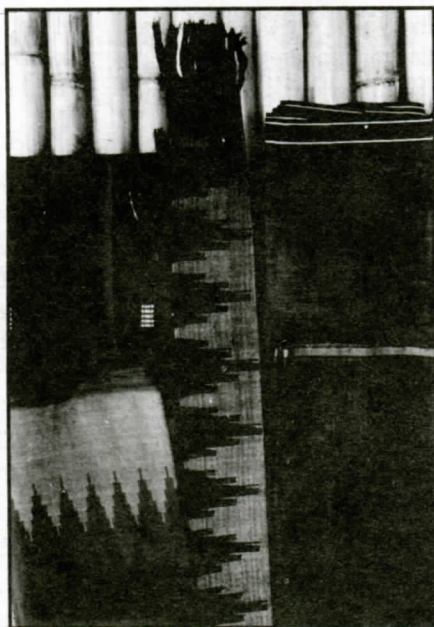
women's rights, including those concerning reproduction. They will be addressed under the headings of Equality, Development and Peace, with an emphasis on developing strategies for change.

Inquiries to: **World YWCA**, 37 Quai Wilson, 1201 Geneva, Switzerland.



Traditional Lombok Handicraft Center

In general, social welfare development for Lombok is far behind the rest of Indonesia. Many problems Lombok faces are chronic and there still is much that can be done to improve conditions in certain areas. The population is 2.4 million, the physical quality of life index is the second lowest in Indonesia, income per family is US\$10 to US\$30 per month, but jobs are unpredictable and thousands of children do not have adequate education.

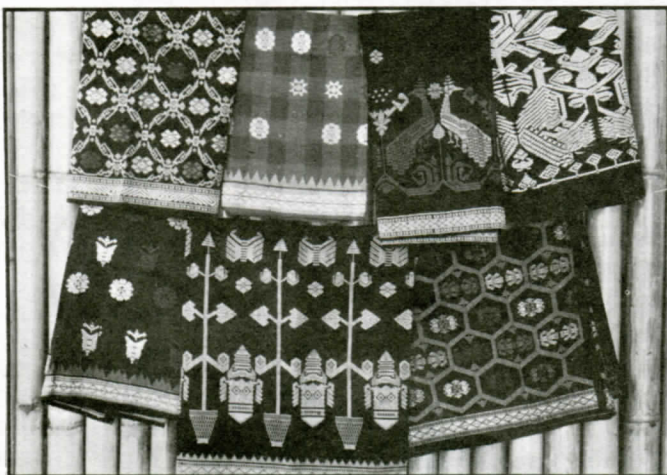


violence against women and applying a gender and development analysis in projects.

Yayasan Swadaya Membangun (YSM), Community Self Reliance Development Agency) is a non-government organization helping artisans to sell their products for their livelihood. The YSM's Women's Program is seeking cooperation with organizations or entrepreneurs to market handicraft products. YSM has programs on ending

For information on their programmes and on the clothing, materials, pottery and bamboo products they sell, please contact: **YSM Handicraft Centre, Jln. Dr. Sutomo 19, Mataram-Lombok, Indonesia. Tel/Fax: (0364) 23880 or (0364) 36076.**

Source: YSM, 1994.



Outrage

Village elders order and watch a rape

Village elders ordered and then watched the rape of a woman in a village in Punjab. Police said they had registered a complaint against *Ashiq Joya* who allegedly raped the woman, and the eight elders who ordered him to do it to

avenge the suspected rape of his wife by his victim's husband. Some policemen and dozens of other people were present but did not stop *Joya* when he dragged the woman inside a room and raped her, residents of the area said.



Source: **Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Vol. VI No. 2, 1994.**

WADATES

Abortion and the law

Burmese women's group harassed

In mid 1994 a thief broke the back door of the Bangkok office of the women's group **Empowering Women of Burma** and burglarized most of the working papers and office equipment. Isis assumes the motive was political harassment and information gathering.

Source: **Empowering Women of Burma, Newsletter, October 1994.**

In Spain, a bill calling for the elimination of all restrictions on abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy has just been submitted for judicial review by the Spanish Government. In Poland, however, *President Lech Walesa* refused to sign a bill which would allow a woman to terminate pregnancy due to financial or family hardship.

Source: **Everywoman, August 1994, Freepost, London N1 8BR, U.K.**

India: state and national laws against amnio-centesis

Rajasthan is the third Indian state to pass legislation banning the use of amniocentesis for fetal sex determination. Similar measures have been adopted in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

India's lower house of parliament (*Lok Sabha*) has passed a law to ban the misuse of medical tests which have led to thousands of abortions of female foetuses. The law is expected to be endorsed by the upper house. Genetic counselling centres are to be registered and will face closure if there are complaints of abuse. Doctors will be forbidden from disclosing the sex of a foetus and the advertising of sex tests, currently widespread, will be prohibited.

Women's groups have criticized loopholes in both local and national provisions, such as regulation of public but not private clinics. Widely available since the mid-1970s, amniocentesis has been used with increasing frequency to detect fetal sex and one study estimates that between the years 1978 and 1982, 75,000 females were aborted. The prevalence of these tests has contributed to a growing discrepancy in India's sex ratio, which fell to 929 women per 1,000 men in the 199 census.

Sources: *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, Vol. VI No.2, 1994; *Everywoman*, Freepost, London N1 8BR, U.K.

Call to defend book on violence against women

The Muvman Liberayson Fem in Mauritius is calling on women's organizations to protest the government repression of a novel, *The Rape of Sita*, written by the President of their Association. Acclaimed as an in-depth fictional study of rape and violence against women upon its release in December 1993, the book was immediately denounced as an attack on Hinduism by members of the Hindu Council in Mauritius. The Prime Minister spoke against it in

Parliament, labelling the book "an outrage to religious morality" and asked the police to pursue punitive measures against its author, *Lindsey Collen*. The author and publisher have withdrawn the book from circulation. Contact: Muvman Liberayson Fem, Lakaz Ros, 8 Celicourt Antelme Street, Forrest-Side, Republic of Mauritius.

Source: *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, Vol. VI No. 2, 1994.

In the Philippines, no coffee with condoms

In the Manila suburb of Makati the cries of scandalized residents and religious groups were heeded by the Makati local government on October 11, 1994 when it ordered the closure of the *Condom Cafe* barely a day after its grand opening. Operators said the bar is meant to be a venue for AIDS awareness.

Five policemen sent by the Makati municipal administrator padlocked the C.C. Bar and Restaurant - the name adopted by the cafe following the uproar over its original name. A huge sign was posted at the bar's restaurant, saying, "This establishment has been closed for violating existing municipal ordinances..."

The municipal administrator said the bar's operators committed certain violations such as failing to get a certificate of occupancy from the engineering department of Makati. But there is another reason, he admitted the Makati

mayor's office has refused to issue the cafe a permit because its name and interior could set a precedent for other 'indecent establishments'.

When the cafe opened about 100 people bearing anti-condom placards held a rally, reciting the Rosary and carrying placards bearing messages such as 'Condom Immoral' and 'Save our Children From Scandal.' The cafe's interior is embellished with condom-shaped mirrors and psychedelic paintings of condoms.

But some turned out in support of the cafe. "I think it's a bold move to promote a safer, sex-positive attitude in a sex-negative society," said the Rev. Richard Mickley, pastor of an ecumenical church in the capital which includes gays and lesbians in the congregation.

Source: *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Report by *Dona Pazzibugan*, October 13, 1994.

Central American women's human rights data base created

The Inter-American Institute of Human Rights in Costa Rica is engaged in creating a database containing the material available in the Central American region on the human rights and social status of women. The first of its kind in the region, this resource, which will be connected to Internet, will provide electronic access to the enormous number of gender-specific experiences, studies, methodologies, teaching materials, newsletters, laws, videos and events that have been produced or have taken place over the past five years. Contact: Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, P.O. Box 10.081, 1.000 San José, Costa Rica. Tel: (506) 34 04 04; Fax: (506) 34 09 55.

Source: *Worldwide Network*, 1331 H Street, N.W., Suite 903, Washington, D.C. 20005, USA.

Legal reform to remove sex discrimination in Pakistan

Pakistani women have hailed the decision of *Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto* to appoint a committee to review all laws that discriminate against women and to suggest amendments to them.

The real test though lies in the implementation of the law, says *Senator Nasreen Jalil*. Among the most obviously discriminatory pieces of legislation is the **Law of Evidence, Section 17**, which reads: '(a) in matters pertaining to financial or future obligations, if reduced to writing, the instrument shall be tested by two men, or one man and two women, so that one may remind the other if necessary...' The law considers a woman's evidence as worth only half that of a man.

The second law which women's organizations have been strongly protesting is the **Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood)**

Ordinance of 1979. (*Zina* means wilful sexual intercourse outside marriage and *Hudood* means Islamic punishment). This law also deals with the offence of *zina-bil-jabr* (rape).

In case *zina* is proved, both the female and the male accused are liable to punishment while in the case of rape, only the man will be punished. However, four eye witnesses are required to prove these offences. Women have taken serious exception to this, saying it is not possible to produce four witnesses to the offence being committed. Moreover, a rape victim can risk being convicted for *zina* or wilful intercourse if her attacker testifies that they are lovers.

A third law being protested related to citizenship. **Section 5 of the Citizenship Act** says 'a person shall be a citizen of Pakistan by descent if his father is a citizen of Pakistan at the time of his birth.' Citizenship,



From *Against All Odds* p.82

the women say, should also be determined by the descent of the mother.

In the rural areas, women may not even know their legal rights because of the extremely low literacy rate. Woman activist *Dr. Farzana Bari* says the present literacy rate for women is only 14 per cent in urban and six per cent in rural areas. Overall literacy rate is 36 per cent. Low literacy is also a factor in women's low representation in Parliament, which currently has only six women members. The Constitution provided for 20 seats to be reserved for women from 1970 to 1988.

Source: *Depthnews Women's Feature*, October 1994.

In Pakistan an Islamic leader gets 30 years for attack on wife

What went on behind closed doors between a husband and wife used to be hidden in Pakistan. But no longer - recently an Islamic religious leader was sentenced to 30 years in jail for torturing his wife. "Everyone is talking about this case," said *Shahnaz Bokhari*, head of the **Progressive Women's Association**, a feminist group which first publicised the case. Until now, Pakistani women who are abused by their

husbands, brothers or fathers have had little or no access to the law. Feminists hope this sentence - the highest ever imposed on a husband for abusing his wife - will help change attitudes towards violence against women in Pakistan.

Source: *Speak*, October 1994, Office 7, 17th Floor Conlyn House, 156 President Street, Johannesburg 2001, South Africa.

New women's organization in Russia

The Women's Innovation Fund 'East-West' is a non-government, non-profit organization based in Moscow that supports all efforts to create independent women's groups and initiatives in Russia - and to encourage networking between them - in order to increase the exchange of information and coordination with the international women's movement. 'East-West' aims to make telecommunications (such as electronic mail and databases) available and accessible to women. The group is organizing computer courses and managing a database of proposals of women's initiatives, organizations and enterprises from Russia and abroad to facilitate the matching of cooperative partners. Contact: **Women's Innovations Fund 'East-West'**, Box 375, Moscow 121019, Russia. Tel/ Fax: (95) 129-04-26; E-mail: femrus@glas.apc.org.

Source: **Worldwide Network**, 1331 H Street, N.W., Suite 903, Washington, D.C. 20005, USA.

New initiative for migrant women workers in Hong Kong

Cases of violence against migrant workers are frequently reported in the Hong Kong press. E.g., an Indonesian domestic helper, *Herni Wahyuning Astutik*, was gagged, tied up and then stabbed in the back, arm and side of her stomach. Her employment agency took her out of hospital after only 1 day and sent her to the Indonesian Consulate.

The **Coalition to Combat Violence Against Migrant Workers** was set up on 2nd August 1994, by several organizations calling on the Hong Kong Government to set up means by which migrant workers can be safeguarded against violence.

Source: **Asian Women Workers Newsletter**, Vol. 13 No. 4, October 1994, 57 Peking Road, 4/F, Room 403, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

Japan's 1st Pride march

Between 300 and 1,500 lesbians and gays turned out for the first ever Gay Pride parade in Tokyo on August 28, 1994. "This is a landmark day for us. We were able to prove that we're alive and that we exist in this society," said a 28 year old lesbian painter. Most Japanese lesbians and gays remain extremely closeted. "Japan is

not an easy place to live if you're a Lesbian," said *Akiyo Ohya*, an organizer of the parade, "so for me, organizing this was a way of reducing stress."

Source: **Off Our Backs**, October 1994, 2423 18th Street, N.W., 2nd Floor, Washington, D.C., USA.

Rolling strikes in Vietnam

About 150 workers at **Song Be Garment Export Company** held a 2 hours work sit-in on April 21 to demand extra pay for overtime work, the **Lao Dong Newspaper** reported. The company had started a quota-based work regime under which, if each production line failed to reach its quota within eight hours, the workers have to work overtime without pay until the quota is filled. Overtime work without pay is prohibited under Vietnamese labour regulations. Part of the orders were for jackets and sports shorts for a South Korean company.

When the representatives of the Board of Directors agreed to reduce the quotas, the workers returned to work. Later, the Director told workers that the original quotas would be maintained, and workers unable to meet them should resign. Two days after the strike, three workers were dismissed. They were allegedly the first to stop their sewing machines before the strike. (News from Vietnam Investment Review).

Source: **Asian Women Workers Newsletter**, Vol. 13 No. 4, October 1994, 57 Peking Road, 4/F, Room 403, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

Pandering to male preference?

A new clinic in Hong Kong is offering couples fairly good odds on having the son they want, for about US\$2,000 in counselling and initial treatment fees. The Gender Choice Center claims its sperm separation and artificial insemination service provides prospective parents a 75-80 percent chance of conceiving a boy. Anyone wanting a girl can have a 70 percent chance, but relatively few couples want daughters. More than 600 inquiries were made after the clinic opened last November, and 48 couples came in for counselling, almost

all seeking sons, according to clinic owner *George Rose*. Is the centre pandering to prejudice in the form of son preference? *"I think you should look at it as family planning"*, *Rose* says. *"A lot of them say, 'We're going to go on trying until we get the boy we want, and without your help we're going to end up with a much bigger family than we might really want'."*

Source: **Women Living Under Muslim Laws**, Vol. VI No.2, 1994.

(Mixed) victory for lesbian mothers

Legal history was made in London in July 1994 when a lesbian couple won a High Court ruling making them joint parents of a 22-month-old child. They were granted a joint residence order under the 1989 Children Act, which gave the mother's partner equal parental responsibility for the boy. The order could also be an option for lesbian couples caring for the children of a previous marriage or relationship and lawyers expect the ruling to lead to similar applications.

However, under current Child Support Agency (CSA) rules, because both women are living on state benefits the biological father of the child has a duty to pay maintenance and the CSA have confirmed that they would be seeking his name. If the women refuse to name the child's father their benefits will be cut. Other lesbian couples on benefit have had to declare biological fathers.

Source: **Everywoman**, August 1994, Freepost, London N1 8BR, U.K.

About Isis International

Isis International is an international non-governmental woman's organization, founded in 1974 to promote the empowerment of women through information sharing, communication and networking. Its network reaches over 50,000 individuals and organizations in 150 countries.

Isis International's activities include resource centers and information sharing, publications and multi media communications, health networking, advocacy of women's issues and skills sharing. Isis has two offices, one in Manila Philippines, that has a special focus in its international work on the Asian and Pacific regions; and an office in Santiago, Chile that coordinates the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network. Each office produces a regular magazine: *Mujeres en Accion* in Spanish (comes out quarterly) from our Chilean office and *Women in Action* in English (comes out three times a year) from our Manila office, which also produces the monthly update bulletin *Women Envision* with news on preparations for the 1995 World Conference on Women.

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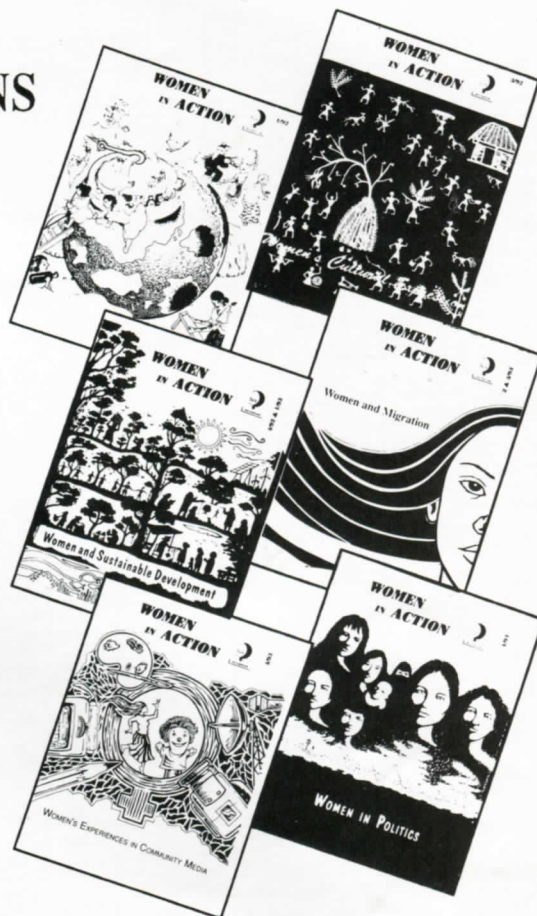


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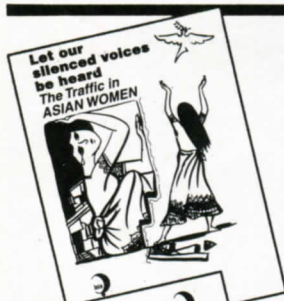
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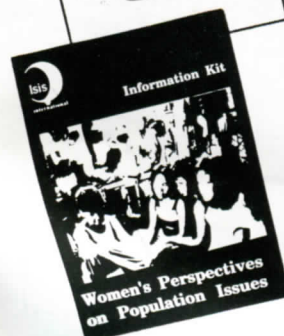
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