



WOMEN *in Action*

No. 2, 1996



FAIR TRADING WOMEN:
USING PROFIT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

APEC: BUSINESS WON'T BE AS USUAL

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH: WORKING FOR LIFE

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Enterprising Women



ften, we hear some so called revolutionaries put down people who are interested in making money. Only capitalists and the bourgeoisie pursue wealth. Revolutionaries should be dedicating their lives only and solely to the changing of society while living like spartans all the time. The criticism is never more sharp and bitter when they're directed towards fellow activists that one can not quite help wondering if the object of the revolution is not so much to redistribute wealth as to democratize poverty.

So when we met women who are activists and entrepreneurs at the same time, we secretly applauded their courage to engage in an enterprise that is both controversial and pioneering. These women are exporters, for now into fair trade of alternative markets but already eyeing the mainstream. They are serious and set on making their business a success because so many people depend on it. Yet, they are beset by dilemmas, as our story on "Fair Trade" will show. Long informal talks with them suggest they are carefully picking their way through a minefield of brickbats, and they are sometimes defensive about their decision to go into export. Cautious about being called reformists, they made sure we understood that the central problem in a semi-feudal economy such as theirs is still land ownership and they wanted us to know, in no uncertain terms, that they went into business only to raise the money needed to finance the fight for land.

The problem is while they wish to remain focused on the crux of the struggle and do not want to become business sharks, they need to become more aggressive, more competitive in

their business conduct in order to provide their workers—most of whom are urban poor mothers regular jobs, critical lifelines that can keep families from falling off the brink into absolute destitution. But jobs can only be regularized if the activists/entrepreneurs decide to jump into and become competitive in the mainstream.

But the women are confident they can make it and the statistics are there to back them up. Women-owned firms have been found to outlast businesses led by males, thanks to the flexibility and creativity that women naturally learn as they juggle work and home and thanks to the sensitivity to women's needs that they develop as they raise a family.

But just as women's businesses are surviving and passing the tests that any new enterprise go through, governments, in their characteristic fashion, decide to make it more difficult for women. In the Asia-Pacific, trade liberalization and globalization, as embodied and implemented by the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), will seriously undermine the viability of small and medium businesses, endeavors that many women engaged in. As noted in another story here, when the trumpeters of globalization pronounce its benefits, they are speaking to businesses that are already competitive and positioned to have access to credit and other support that investments need. They are not addressing business women that we have come to know. These women, for their businesses to survive, have to be not just a lot more enterprising; they will have to invest a lot more in the people's struggle as well.

Tom McCarthy cartoon

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On the cover: Cornucopia by Irene R. Chia. The Horn of Plenty is a symbol for blessings, specifically fertile soil and abundant harvests, pouring from the horn of the Great Mother. We use it here to stand for all the good things that come from the labors of enterprising women. The horn is set against a backdrop of money charms—a person with very large arms accepting gifts from heaven. As women give, so do they receive.

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Feedback on:

HEARD IN A CONFERENCE:

"WOMEN IN THE SOUTH HAVE MADE GAINS IN THEIR FIGHT FOR RIGHTS, EQUALITY. BUT WHEN THE LESBIAN MOVEMENT—WHICH IS MORE THREATENING TO MEN—ATTACHED ITSELF TO THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT—IT (THE LESBIAN MOVEMENT) ERODED THESE GAINS." DO YOU AGREE?

WHAT DO I THINK? I think that statement is plain bullshit. But first things first, let me just preface my comments with a question. Whose mouth uttered this statement? Whose brain (or non-brain) thought this out? Was it a woman? Was it a man? Was it a "feminist"? Was it a heterosexual "feminist"? Was it a heterosexual non-feminist? It would be good to know WHO because then the statement can be put into its proper context. Of course, there is absolutely no excuse for homophobia—to whoever uttered this statement, be forewarned—this is just the beginning.

But let me get back to the statement.

1. "Women in the South have made gains in their fight for rights, equality."

May I ask, concretely what gains have been made? Since I am not directly in touch with the Women in the South (does this refer particularly to Mindanao?), let me just say that some news about women from that region have been quite disturbing. The complaint filed by rape survivor Karen Vertido was just thrown into the dustbin. The SPCPD has no major women players—it seems that everything is so male-driven and male-defined. Where is equality here? Come to think of it—is that also why the major oppositors are women? And that's not all. Now, Misuari has gone around town talking about women in a very despicable and abominable manner. His macho ego can't probably stand the idea of women standing up to him. Has

feedback

any woman (Muslim and others—with the exception of Daisy Fuentes) taken him into account for his sexist slurs?

But I digress.

2. "But when the lesbian movement—which is more threatening to men—attached itself to the women's movement..."

Hello? Hello? Didn't I just notice a gaping hole in that statement? The lesbian movement did not, factually speaking, attach itself to the women's movement. It WAS and IS part of the women's movement. Its existence is an integral part of the evolution and shifts in the women's movement. I think it has to be made clear to whoever made that statement that the women's movement here and abroad have had lesbians from the very beginning. In fact, a lot of the theoretical formulations and understanding of feminism could be credited to lesbian feminists.

3. "... (the lesbian movement) eroded these gains."

Unless lesbians have the equivalent collective force of lahar, they cannot be rightfully accused of eroding the so-called gains of the women's movement. I think the credit goes to all the bigots, the right-wing fundamentalists, the bible-fanatics and yes, the homophobes in our midst who continue to masquerade as feminists or women activists but who do not, for a moment's repose, realize how much hatred and loathing they constantly spew out in their statements.

Eroded these gains? Speak for yourself.

Malu S. Marin, Can't Live In the Closet (CLIC), Inc., Philippines

P.S. On the other hand, if this statement was uttered by somebody from the women's movement, then I think the women's movement is one of the most unsafe spaces for lesbians. And I mean it. I've seen more hostility from the women's movement (towards lesbians and particular lesbian groups) than from gay men. Not that I am completely gaga over coalitionist politics—this has its own problems too.

I'm talking here of hostile, vile, and malicious attitude and treatment from organizations who dare call

themselves feminists. Is this patriarchy running in our very own blood and bones? The sad thing is some of the viciousness come from lesbians themselves. Don't ask me why—until now, it floors me to no end.

Yes, Virginia, the women's movement is not a sanctuary. It is not immune from gunk and grime. I should know, I've been in the women's movement for EIGHT years now. This hypocrisy has got to stop before it gobbles us all.

P.P.S. There! if ye think it's too rabid and frothing in the mouth—you ain't seen nothing yet. Of course, I'm not discounting that the women's movement had a lot to do with the blossoming of the lesbian "movement". Nothing's perfect in this world, I suppose. And yes, there's more to life than this.

Here's a birthday card that is printed in the Philippines and which gave me, a southern woman, great joy!

FRONT: "On your birthday I want you to know that if we were the last two women on earth and there was only one smart, funny, romantic, sexy man left..."

INSIDE: "He and I would have you over on a regular basis!"

Gigi Francisco

The A-team, Philippines

I sense some ambiguity in this comment. While the person talks about making gains in a "fight" for rights and equality, in the same breath, one senses a need not to antagonize the men in the process. So, is this person saying that the women's movement in the south must negate issues which may be potentially difficult for men to understand? Whose prerogative is it to define these issues for ALL WOMEN? Do the women of the south then need the approval of patriarchy to succeed in this fight?

This comment I think is a reflection of how difficult and deeply ingrained homophobia is in our system. This comment

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

According to the Far Eastern Economic Review, July 4, 1996, Singaporean and Malaysian Executives state that sexual harassment is not a problem in their country. Is this true?

If you have questions you wish to raise, send them to us also and let's ask our readers:

"What do you think?"

expresses concern and desire to ensure the success of the women's movement but with a rather simplistic analysis of how it can be sustained and achieved. Can we truly say that lesbian issues alone have eroded these so-called gains? I would be interested to know why and how it could have possibly eroded these gains. What gains are we talking about here anyway? Does this person even have an iota of understanding of lesbian issues to make such a sweeping comment?

The right to express sexuality, and its many facets is integral to any women's movement. It is basic. If we as women, cannot even control and claim our own sexuality, how can we even make a dent in the social structures that shackle our very existence? How can one or a few women claim "gains" when there are women being discriminated against on the basis of their "otherness" whether it be in terms of class, age or expressions of sexuality? Can we really speak of empowerment and liberation when we ourselves negate the experiences of other women? Can one really talk of gains when we cannot even transcend our own biases?

The lesbian movement did not attach itself to the women's movement. It has always been part of it. Everywhere you look within the movement, you can see,

read and touch it. It is that palpable. A woman's choice to engage in women-identified relationships or identify as a lesbian, does not lessen her commitment. In the same way, that a woman who identifies as heterosexual or engages in affirming heterosexual relationships does not become politically suspect. Until we learn to recognize and respect our diversity then the women's movement will itself erode the very gains that it has worked so hard to achieve.... with no help from us lesbians.

Giney Villar

*Coordinator, Womyn Supporting
Womyn Committee
Steering Committee Member, The
First National Lesbian Rights
Conference '96 (FNLRC '96)
Philippines*

Dear friends at Isis,

Greetings from Sudan! I have been receiving your valuable publications. I hope your work with women is progressing well and that you keep in touch with me.

Since 1992, I have founded with another partner our own company. Here in Sudan we have few women entrepreneurs so we need all the support we can get to fight the customs and social barriers hinders women from entering the business field.

I would also be grateful if you can inform me about conferences on women in business and addresses of organizations in this field to diversify my experience and widen my network. Also I would like to continue receiving your publications. Thank you and I am anticipating your support. With best wishes.

Zeinab Elasad

PO Box 10890, Khartoum, Sudan

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WHEN BEAUTY COMPETITIONS LEAD TO UGLINESS

Female beauty and religion are undergoing a tug-of-war in Malaysia. While some beauty contest winners are dissolving in tears of joy, others are being tossed out of high school.

Newspaper pictures of contest winners wearing swimsuits look markedly out of place in predominantly Muslim Malaysia. But with a mixed population of Malays (60 percent), Chinese (30 percent) and Indians (eight percent), Malaysia promotes itself as a tolerant, multicultural nation and so far beauty contests have survived.

Organisers of such contests increasingly insist it takes more than a pretty face to win. Michelle Chong, 23, named Miss Chicago in a contest run by a local advertising agency last week, was asked questions on pollution, road bullies and abandoned babies—all key local issues.

"We do not want to create a new generation of beauty queens who know nothing about the issues pertaining to their own country," organiser Catherine Moir-Bussy said.

But participation in beauty contests is not being tolerated by school officials.

Seventeen-year-old student Fahyu Hanim Ahmad was warned after emerging as a finalist in the Miss Teen Malaysia/International pageant that she could be expelled from school. But she persisted and ended up with the title along with M\$500 (HK\$1,500), a M\$2,500 scholarship for further studies and a return air ticket to Costa Rica for the international pageant.

C I P S

The Form Five pupil was escorted home from school by four teachers, one of whom handed an expulsion letter to her father. But she will be able to take her final exams in November.

Education Minister Najib Tun Razak said the ministry would no longer let students enter beauty contests because of "possible adverse effects".

Source: South China Morning Post, 7 August 1996

CHAD: FATWA AGAINST ZARA AND HER PRESENT CONDITION

A fatwa (death penalty) was pronounced against a young female film producer by the Mufti of N'Djamena after her film "Feminine Dilemma" was shown on public television. Her film, which was aimed at raising awareness about female genital mutilation (FGM) in Chad, showed parts of the operation on a young girl and this brought the wrath of the most influential Muslim leader in N'Djamena.

The Inter-African Committee (IAC) along with many other associations and individuals sent letters asking for the decision to be reconsidered. A reply has been received from the government which stated that no measures are being taken against Zara and that the government has nothing against her. Recently, an association known as "Women living under Muslim laws" sent us excerpts of a letter it received from Zara in which she stated the following:

"If you hadn't stepped in, there would have been no reaction, and God knows what would have happened to me by now..."

"Your call for action led the President of the Republic to tell the Imam to calm down and forget this case... People's attitude has improved a lot, but there are still suspicious looks..."

"The situation is now calm. The hardest is past. I have stopped taking (security) precautions and am trying to regain confidence..."

"It is time to say thank you to all the people who helped... I am still receiving support letters."

Source: Inter-African Committee Newsletter No. 19, June 1996

BELGIUM GRIEVES DEATH OF 2 CHILD SEX VICTIMS

LIEGE, Belgium (Reuter)—Silent crowds began gathering in this eastern Belgian town ahead of the funeral of two 8-year-old girls who died while in the hands of a convicted child sex offender.

Melissa Russo and Julie Lejeune were buried after an emotional memorial service in the Saint Martin basilica in their hometown of Liege which was televised live across a shocked nation.

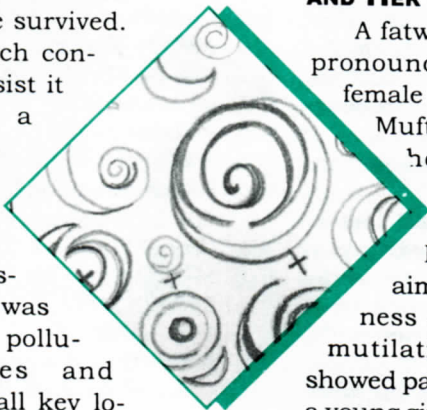
Up to 100,000 people are expected to attend the service which will be held after a private commemorative ceremony for the close relatives of the two friends. The burial of the two white coffins with the girls' remains will be private too.

Those who will not be able to enter the church can follow the service on a large video screen outside.

Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer, 23 August 1996

COUPLE SLAIN FOR BEING HOMOSEXUALS

MEDFORD, Oregon—A man accused of killing a lesbian



couple said he did it because he hates homosexuals and bisexuals.

Previously, Robert James Acremant had said he shot the women during a robbery that went awry, and their homosexuality made it easier.

Acremant said in a letter to his hometown newspaper, the *Stockton (Calif.) Record*, that he invented the robbery motive because he was nervous about how other jail inmates would react.

"Now I just don't care what people think, including the jury," Acremant, 27, wrote from the jail where he is awaiting trial on aggravated murder and related charges. "They can kill me for all I care. I've never liked life anyway."

Trial was set for February.

In the August 8 letter, Acremant also said he killed a man last year in a drunken rage after the man made a pass at him.

The bound and gagged bodies of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill were found in December in the back of a pickup truck. They had been shot in the head.

Gay community leaders expressed fears they were killed because they were outspoken champions of homosexual rights.

Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer, 23 August 1996

GAMES HELP FUEL WOMEN'S REVOLUTION

While the US men's 4 x 100 relay team was busy being trounced, their distaff counterparts were on the same track—four fast females running for gold.

Chryste Gaines, Gail Devers, Inger Miller and Gwen Torrence thus joined what became an ever-increasing circle during the Olympics: women who delivered big performances and received a lot of notice for doing it.

Amy Van Dyken left the swimming pool with four golds.

Kerri Strug became a poster girl for athletic fortitude.

Marie-Jose Perec of France produced the

same 200- and 400-

metre double that

Michael Johnson did,

and not much less impressively.

It would be absurd to suggest that Olympic heroines are

some kind of a 1996 innovation.

Long before there was Gail Devers, there was Wyomia Tyus, and Fanny Blankers-Koen. Before Van Dyken, there was Dawn Fraser of Australia. Nadia Comaneci and Olga Korbut were gymnastics wonderkids before Strug and Dominique Dawes were born.

Still, there's no doubt the Atlanta Games catapulted women's sports to a new level of interest in those achievements.

"These Olympics, probably more than any before, are showing a lot of little girls it's okay to sweat, it's okay to play hard, it's okay to be an athlete," tennis gold medallist Lindsay Davenport said. "It shows how far women's athletics has come, just in my lifetime."

Davenport was born in 1976. That year, in Montreal, 1,247 women competed in the Games. Eight years before that, in Mexico City, a total of 781 women participated.

In Atlanta, the number of women was an all-time high of 3,779—or 37 percent of all athletes.



What accounts for such vast increases? To Donna Lopiano, executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation, it has much to do with what Davenport referred to—a marked shift in cultural attitudes toward women in sports. It also has to do with an ever-growing number of girls who are playing sports at a young age, creating what Lopiano called "a critical mass" of participants.

"The progress made to date has been made possible by the first generation of mothers and fathers whose daughters (not only) play sports but can get athletic scholarships doing it," Lopiano said.

But the biggest factor of all was the passage in 1972 of Title IX in the US, legislation that demanded men's and women's sports be treated equally. Title IX meant scholarships. It meant increased respect, funding, opportunity.

The more that women began to play, and play well, the more a market began to develop. Corporations saw the upward attendance curve.

They saw a chance to reach female consumers, who were not only playing, but watching, too.

Even sports that did not get huge air time flourished.

"It was another step, bigger than most," Mia Hamm said, speaking of women's soccer's Olympic debut.

"Maybe it will help start a league, give girls who want to play soccer something to look forward to."

The same can be said for a whole spectrum of women's sports at the Olympics, where change is coming faster than a Lisa Fernandez heater.

Ask Dot Richardson about that. When she was 10,

Richardson wanted to play Little League Baseball. The coach said sure - just cut your hair, dress like a boy and we'll call you Bob.

Dot discovered softball instead. The year was 1972, the same year Title IX passed, and an athletic revolution began.

Source: South China Morning Post, 7 August 1996

GANG RAPE AS PUNISHMENT

Gang rape is common practice—it is used to punish girls who have more than one boyfriend. Gang rape might even be used as “a punishment” if a girl tells her boyfriend he has passed a sexually transmitted disease (STD) on to her.

This startling information emerged from one of the workshops held with young women in Mpumalanga last year to develop the Women's Health Project workshop manual on sexually transmitted diseases.

The issue of gang rape came up during role plays in a workshop. In the workshop a “girlfriend” had to tell her “boyfriend” that she had an STD. This is followed by a role play in which the “boyfriend” discussed this information with his “friend.” In this role play the “boyfriend” said: “I was so annoyed by this girl who said that it was me who made her ill. When I realised that I also have the disease, I decided to arrange a group of boys to come and rape her.”

In the discussion after the role play we asked the young women whether gang rape was a reality in their community. They said gang rape happens in their community; it is a common practice especially as a punishment for a girl who has

more than one boyfriend. Then young men meet and arrange that a group of men should rape such a girl.

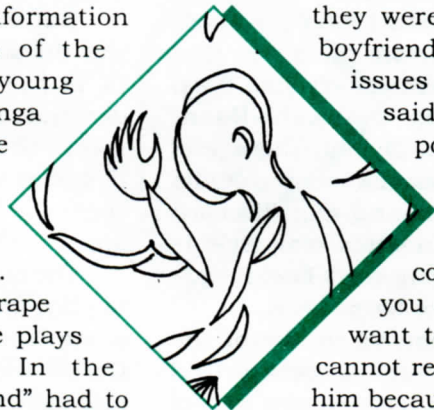
The young women described gang rape as a method that is used to punish women “who do not behave well.” They said girls “behave well” out of fear that they may be gang raped and even felt it was good that “misbehaving women get punished because it is wrong for them to make the boyfriends fools.” Young women who sympathised with girls subjected to gang rape were in the minority and they also voiced their condemnation of such girls' behaviour.

While the young women said they were not scared of their boyfriends and could discuss issues with them, they also said they were not in a position to suggest the use of condoms to them. They told us: “Even if you have the condom there is nothing you can do if he does not want to use them and you cannot refuse to have sex with him because he is going to beat you up”.

The young women didn't question the inequalities in relationships. They saw men as leaders who should always also be initiators.

The above issues have come up in STD and other Women's Health Project workshops. As a result of this, WHP feels that there is a need for educational materials that will address violence, health and sexuality issues.

Source: Women's Health News, May 1996, No. 18



APPROACHING MID-LIFE? READ ON

Women who reach natural menopause menstruate between 400-500 times during their lives.

Smoking can bring on an early menopause.

Japanese women have a very low rate of menopausal complaints. It is suggested that this may be due to their higher consumption of *tofu* (soya bean curd).

Mangoes are an anti-depressant.

Banana and lettuce calm your nerves.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) helps improve memory and may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's Disease

Men also experience midlife changes when the testosterone levels in their bodies decline.

Some researchers believe that testosterone treatment may prove equally effective for male patients as oestrogen is to females.

Source: NEWomen NEWSletter Winter 1996

MURDER PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON PROSTITUTION

SOUTH AFRICA—The prostitute's corpse was found buried upside down in bushes near Milnerton in November 1995, her legs and buttocks protruding above the ground. The post mortem revealed she had probably been buried alive.

In January 1996, another body was found near Durbanville, and police announced a serial killer was on the loose in Cape Town. He had murdered at least nine prostitutes, strangling them with their clothes, and torturing three of them before they were killed.

The police have stepped up their manhunt, forming a task force which visited prostitutes at their usual places, inviting the women to visit police stations to have their fingerprints and photos taken and their personal details recorded on a database. The information will be used to keep track of women and, if the killer is not caught, help to identify the victims.

More than 200 frightened prostitutes responded and were interviewed by police by mid-January, volunteering information about themselves and offering new clues about the killer.

This unusual co-operation between police and prostitutes has raised hopes of continued sympathy for sex workers from officialdom. However, a police spokesman said that the police would have to comply with the law, which prohibited acts of indecency for reward.

Ilse Pauw, coordinator of the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Task Group (Sweat), welcomed the police's new cooperative approach to catching the killer by working with prostitutes and said she hoped police protection would continue in the future.

The organisation was aware of numerous incidents where women prostitutes were abused by their clients. "But they tell us they can't go to the police station to report what happened to them because they were involved in an illegal activity at the time of the assault," Pauw said. "What they want is to be taken seriously and their cases to be treated equally with other women."

While the decriminalisation of prostitution would improve

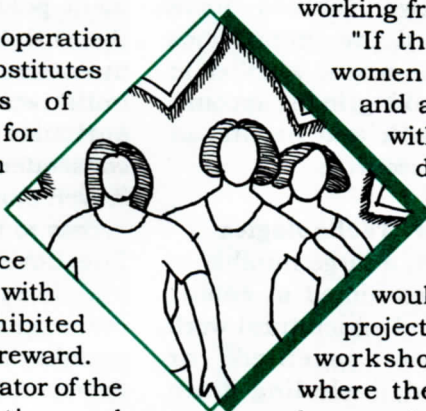
the service prostitutes receive from the police, Pauw said it would probably take time to remove the stigma attached to the profession. Pauw said while police deserved credit for their effort to catch the serial killer, she had no doubt that their reaction time had been slower because the victims were prostitutes.

Pauw said while it was assumed women working street corners were more at risk, all prostitutes were vulnerable to assault or murder by their clients. "It's too simplistic to say they're safer at an agency or working from home.

"If the clients knew the women could report abuse and assaults to the police with impunity, I have no doubt sex workers' safety would improve tremendously."

Pauw said Sweat would undertake a major project this year to provide workshops to sex workers where they can discuss and learn the implications of decriminalisation, or the legislation of prostitution. "People don't always understand their options and we want to ensure they make informed choices."

Source: Mail & Guardian, 1 February 1996



WORLD MEDIA EMPIRES

The international media scene points to empires that practically determine what's news and what's not.

Among these empires is Time Warner Inc., formed by a merger of Time Inc., and Warner Communications, and is the largest media corporation in the world. It owns Time, Life, Fortune and Sports Illustrated

with a worldwide readership of over 120 million. Its assets (\$15.9 billion in 1994) are greater than the combined domestic product of Bolivia, Jordan, Nicaragua, Albania, Liberia, and Mali. It is also the second largest cable company in the world and one of the largest book publishers.

Last year, Time Warner merged with Turner broadcasting which further raised its combined revenues to \$18.7 billion.

Reuters, established since 1849 has become the main provider of print and broadcast news from developing countries, thus determining what is foreign news. It also owns part of the British Independent Television News (ITN) network and the Worldwide Television News (WTN).

News Corp. Ltd., controlled by Rupert Murdoch, has the highest newspaper circulation in Australia, almost half of the circulation in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the South and East Asian market. He controls Fox Broadcasting Network and 20th Century Fox movie studios, is part-owner of CBS/Fox video and is the world's largest distributor of videocassettes.

Wire Services

Wire services are instrumental in determining the flow of information. For decades, international news has been gathered and distributed by five major wire services: AP (US), United Press International (US), Reuters (UK); AFP (France) and TASS (Telegranfnoi Agentsvo Sovestkavo Soyuzo of the former USSR).

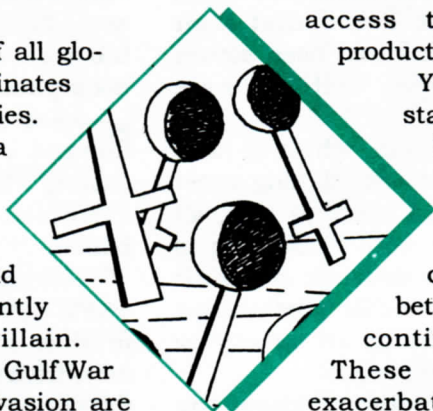
The dominance of these wire agencies has resulted in disproportionate coverages of first world news and a

corresponding lack of interest in and/or ignorance about issues in developing nations.

News concerning the latter are mostly those concerning disasters, calamities and in general those labelled as "bad news."

Ninety percent of all global news, in fact, originates from only four countries. So it is not much of a surprise that during times of global conflicts, only one side is played up and the other conveniently portrayed as the villain. Media coverage of the Gulf War and the Panama invasion are classic examples.

Source: IBON Facts and Figures, "Who owns what?" Vol. 19, No.11, 15 June 1996



development (IWD) were initiated. The whole point was to find solutions that would do away with two major constraints on the expansion of women's activities both in rural and urban environments, namely, access to credit and to production means.

Yet, in 20 years, the status of rural women has evolved very little.

Governments continue to give priority to cash crops. The inequalities between men and women continue to be ignored.

These two factors have exacerbated the imbalances between the sexes, whether in decision-making, in the appointment of work and profits, or access to resources.

Unaware of Technologies

And yet, a large number of technologies aimed at easing domestic and agricultural work have been invented or modernised, including grain mills, improved cooking bobs, hydraulic pumps, wheelbarrows, trolleys, solar-ray captors, processing and conservation equipment for food products and oil extraction presses. When questioned, some women say they are unaware of these technologies. Others, on the other hand, complain about the high cost of these technologies or that the implements are difficult to use. Also, spare parts for tools and machine-tools are not always available in the countryside. The slightest breakdown is a problem and it is sometimes necessary to go to the nearest large town, or even as far as the capital located hundreds of kilometers away, to find a repairman.

Moreover, some of these technologies, because they are ill-suited or costly and are limited in use, have only resulted in increasing the workload of women. Studies also revealed that, due to the inequality of relations between the sexes, it is not always in the interest of women in some societies to gain access to technology which allows them to increase their productivity and, hence, their income. Why? Because the men who control the women keep the extra money generated in this way for themselves.

Finally, structural adjustment policies have resulted in the withdrawal of government incentives that promoted private initiatives to support women's agricultural activities. As a consequence, women are finding it even more of a problem to gain access to technology and credit. The development of popular initiatives is therefore an even more pressing item on the agenda than ever before.

Source: AIRD News, March 1996

BARE HANDS

by Codou Bop

Women peasants play a vital—though unseen, unpaid and undervalued—role in agriculture.

The majority of women in the South live and work in a rural environment where they play a vital role in agriculture, frequently a dominant sector in the economy of countries in the South. Yet, women rarely have access to credit and production means. According to an estimate by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), women's agricultural work contributes from 60 to 80 percent of food production. Apart from food, women are also present in the cash crop sector.

As if to acknowledge this vital role of women in agriculture, the year and then the decade for women was proclaimed in 1975. Policies for the integration of women in

(Editor's Note: We received this call for action sent by several women's and human rights groups and individuals in Egypt. They denounce the act of gender discrimination enacted in a university in their country against two female professors. It is important to mobilize before such a case becomes common.)

It is with grave concern that the undersigned women's and human rights organizations and individuals in Egypt view the recent discriminatory actions taken against two female professors in the faculty of Science, Zagazig University. This discrimination, which contradicts the law and the constitution of the country as well as all human rights conventions to which Egypt is a signatory, was enacted through a decision by the Board of the above Faculty. The Board decided to exclude two female professors from the supervisory committee of a doctorate thesis of a post-graduate student, in acquiescence to the student's request to have no "female element" on the committee.

On 10 January 1995, the Board of the Science Faculty approved the request by a post-graduate student to change the supervisory committee of his doctoral thesis by taking away the committee's "female elements." The Board approved the decision of the Research Committee to replace Dr. Somaya El-Sheikh and Dr. Nabila Ismail with one male professor.

The chemistry section, to which the two professors belong and under which the doctoral student is registered, met on 18 January 1995 and unanimously refused the Faculty's decision. It noted that not only have the two female professors supervised many thesis before but that they have contributed since 1972 to the establishment of the chemistry section in the Science Faculty.

Responding to the chemistry section's report, the Research Committee withdrew its decision

and reinstated the original supervisory committee.

On 14 September 1995, the head of Zagazig University approved the decision of the Research committee, reinstating Dr. Somaya El-Sheikh and Dr. Nabila Ismail to their supervisory capacity over the student's thesis.

The student refused to accept the university's decision and filed a case with the administrative court. The court ruled in favor of the student.

We therefore appeal to all human rights, labour rights, and women's rights activists and organisations all over the world to raise their voices against this act of gender discrimination, as yet unprecedented in the history of Egyptian universities. We appeal to readers to stand in solidarity with the two female professors until the withdrawal of this "shameful" decision by the Faculty's Board, a decision damaging to the status of Egyptian universities as platforms for culture and enlightenment. Please send your appeals to the institutions listed below, most of which can be reached by mail with only the name of the person and institution written. This would also apply to telexes.

For further information call/fax (202) 3367186.

Send letters to:

The Egyptian Embassy in your country

Mr. Hosni Mubarak/President of Egypt

Fax: (202) 3555177

The People's Assembly

Fax: (202) 5748822

Mr. Hussein Kamel Baha-El-Din, Minister of Education

Fax: (202) 3553102

The Haed of Zagazig University (2055) 34552

The New Women Research Center (NWRC)

The Center for Egyptian Women Legal Aid (CEWLA)

The Association for the Development and Enhancement of

Women (ADEW)

El-Nadim Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence

The Center for Human Rights Legal Aid (CHRLA)

The Legal Research & Resource Center (LRRC)

The Appropriate Communications Technology Center for Development (ACT)

Dr. Younan Labib Rizk, history professor

Mona Zulficar, lawyer

Dr. Nadia Farah, Director, Cairo Center for Development Studies

Awatef Wali, People's Friends Association

VIOLATIONS OF WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

On 5 June 1996, the Mexican Social Security Institute's Solidarity Programme held a day clinic in San Miguel Pocitos in the municipality of Saltillo la Fragua, Puebla. This community of 1,300 people lives in extreme poverty. During what was supposedly an examination for the detection of cervical and uterine cancer, and without having given their consent, women were fitted with interuterine contraceptive devices (IUDs).

The women reported that the local government workers warned them that if they did not take part in this campaign, they would not receive their food allowances. Some days later, a number of women suffered from infections and vaginal bleeding, and after seeing the doctor, found out about the IUDs. The physician with the Mexican Social Security Institute's Solidarity Programme threatened that if the women reported what had happened, they would no longer receive medical care.

It is also reported that the Solidary Programme routinely fits post-partum and post-D and C patients with IUDs. This violates the women's right to make free choices as to the number of children they wish to have. Furthermore, similar cases are reported in communities in San Francisco, El Sabinal, and

a c t i o n a l e r t

Gonzalez Ortega.

Please write to the Mexican government protesting these violations of women's rights. Impoverished women, without alternatives to health care, are being forced to take part in government-run health campaigns. In these campaigns, women receive contraceptive devices without their prior knowledge or informed consent.

Write to:

Lic. Ernesto Zedillo
Presidente de la Republica
Palacio Nacional
06067 Mexico, D.F. Mexico
Fax: 011-525-271-1764

Copies to:

Comision Internacional de los Profesionales de la Salud para la Salud y los Derechos Humanos
Edificio 22 Depto 904
Villa Olimpica, Delegacion Tlalpan
14020 Mexico D.F. Mexico

Source: The Sisterhood is Global Institute, 20 August 1996

SYSTEMATIC RAPE IN RWANDA

The French relief agency Doctors Without Borders has reported that "the scope of rape in Rwanda defies imagination... It appears that every adult woman and every adolescent girl spared from a massacre by militias was then raped."

While the Hutu-led "ethnic cleansing" in Rwanda is well documented and well known—an estimated 500,000 to one million Rwandans, largely of the Tutsi tribe, were killed—reports of systematic rape as a tactic of war have received little attention. One survey, conducted in the capital Kigali and several other areas by Rwanda's Ministry of Family and Women's Affairs, estimated that between April 1994 and April 1995 more than 15,700 girls and women between the ages of 13 and 65 were raped. In all areas in which the Hutu militia massacred civilians, they also raped women. Some women were gang-raped, some were forced to watch their families murdered and then were raped, and some

were taken as "prizes" of war and coerced into living in the homes of the men who raped them. In short, according to the report by Doctors Without Borders, rape was "systematic, arbitrary, planned, and used as a weapon of ethnic cleansing to destroy community ties."

Many of the details of the circumstances surrounding the rapes have been provided by the women who survived. As the United Nations International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague continues to investigate the atrocities and to seek indictment of human rights violations in both Rwanda and Bosnia, these women's voices must be heard.

Source: Ms., May/June 1996

PLEA FOR PEACE

May God's blessing be bestowed on you.

For the past 50 years, we have endured the Zionist terrorism. There are no words that can describe the nature and cruelty of these crimes. Some of these include forceful occupation of part of our land, destruction of our infrastructure, damaging of our plantations and crops and unlawfully consuming our water supplies, continuous air raids and shelling of villages and towns with weapons that are banned by international laws and the taking of helpless women and children as hostages and human shields.

After all these years of Jewish and Zionist hatred, the Israeli nation still has more to offer. They show their intentions to make peace by more shelling, destruction, invasion and crucifixion of innocent and harmless people. Israel had been successful in their Air-Sea-Land operations, attaining more than 50 air raids daily and more than 60 artillery rockets fired per hour from land and sea bases. And evidently, their targets are civilian cars, homes, hospitals, schools and even ambulances and pedestrians. Furthermore, they shelled and destroyed part of the

electricity networks and water tanks.

Last but not the least, they committed massacres, the worst of which was committed in the village of Qana, by shelling United Nations bases sheltering almost 300 civilians, mostly women, children and the elderly. Killed were 102 civilians; 150 were injured.

Israel's actions led to the evacuation of more than half a million civilians towards Beirut and the suburbs and the evacuees could do nothing but occupy schools, colleges and town halls.

From the heart of this resisting nation and in the face of the Zionist terrorism, we are urging you and all those who believe in humanity and human rights, to support and help us. Most of all, help us through mass media. In many press reports, the Zionist movement is able to hide the truth; facts are altered and forged. We are ready to provide detailed information, ranging from pictures, statistics and documents to help you in your efforts.

This is not just our cause but a cause for all mankind. We trust in your efforts and we are waiting your response to our call.

Your sisters in the
Social Solidarity Association and
Lebanese Cultural Association
Haret Hureik, Dakkash Street,
Beirut, Lebanon
Fax: 601054, 603468, 603469
Tel: 03/336426 (cellular)
Hajjeh Afaf Al-Hakim



Breaking the glass Ceiling

The surest way for women to become bosses is to start their own companies.

It has been a wonderful century for women. Whether it be reliable contraceptives and safe obstetrics or the dishwasher and the drip-dry shirt, technology has made their domestic lives easier, at any rate in the rich world. Outside the home, lots of closed doors have creaked open. Women now make up between a third and half of the rich world's workforce; and their pay has risen sharply relative to men's. They sit in legislatures and on court benches. A few run governments or opposition parties. But big companies? Unless, Italian-style, you are daddy's heiress and inherit the job along with the family jewels, forget it. Everywhere, women bosses in large companies can be counted on a few manicured fingers.

This seems odd. From a male point of view, it is women who have the edge in today's labour market. "Women's" jobs have boomed, while "men's" have vanished. Unskilled young men now find it much harder than their mothers to get jobs. Yet from the viewpoint of an ambitious young woman, the female job market still looks like a depressingly flat pyramid. There may be plenty of jobs at the till, the bedside or the blackboard: but move into management, and they dis-

appear. Climb the management ladder, and women eventually bang their heads against the so-called glass ceiling.

Prejudice? Family pressures? Self-doubt? Choice? The answer is probably a bit of each. Certainly, women's progress up the ladder is constrained by the assumption that they will be the main child carers. American research has also found that some of the few women who do crack the vitreous barrier feel so unsatisfied and undervalued that they leave early—and in proportionately greater numbers than their male rivals.

Big organisations are surely unwise to draw so little of their top talent from the skirted half of the workforce. But women have an alternative: to set up businesses of their own. In the US, women now own eight million American companies—one-third of all firms—and their number is growing at double the rate of firms owned by men. Women-owned firms also have more staying power than the average; three-quarters of those that existed in 1991 were still alive three years later, compared with two-thirds of all American companies. The number of people employed in women-owned companies that have 100 or more workers is rising more than twice as fast as the average for all such American firms.

Where America leads, other countries follow. In Britain, for

instance, women now start one new business in four. Going-it-alone has been the recourse of previous social groups that have felt excluded: Britain's Quakers bequeathed such blue-chip giants as Rowntree, Sainsbury and Cadbury; America's Jews founded retailers such as Bloomingdales and Macy's; French Protestants started Compagnie de Suez. This does not end discrimination, to be sure; bank managers may still insist in talking to the boss's husband, rather than the boss. But it brings other advantages, notably the flexibility that fits with the conflicting demands on many women's time. As small-business owners like to say: "You work 24 hours a day, but at least you get to choose which 24."

Running your own firm may sound like poor compensation for failing to become CEO of General Motors. But yesterday's giants are nowadays often insecure and unexciting. The fastest growth comes from the small and nimble. So far, women have created few Netscapes or Novells. If that changes, and their energy turns them into tomorrow's main employers, men had better hope that their new bosses will be less discriminatory than today's male-run firms.

Source: The Economist, 10-16 August, 1996



by Luz Maria Martinez and Marianita Villariba

If a woman can decide who should get the last piece of toffee, the 4-year-old or the 6-year-old, she can run a business. We are led to believe that it's a financial science controlled by men. That is a lie. It's about buying and selling. It's about having a product that's so good that people will give you some profit for it with which you do something else." This statement embodies Anita Roddick's business philosophy.

The name Anita Roddick may not ring a bell, but try Body Shop. A 20-year old British business that sells natural beauty oils, creams and cosmetics, Body Shop is now a worldwide business with about 1,400 shops in 12 time zones, covering 46 countries, and with a staff of 1,200 in its distribution center. Anita Roddick, Body Shop's founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was recently in Manila to inaugurate the opening in the city of two more Body Shops and to speak to business people and college students. Anita looked exactly the opposite of the stereotype CEO.

her BODY SHOP

Dressed in a long loosely hung black dress, black crocheted espadrilles and dark rim glasses and wearing no makeup, Anita looked more like an activist with wild long hair.

In fact, that is how Anita describes herself: an activist. She says she takes “experience journeys” where she works with indigenous communities and with women in villages and hears their stories. She claims it is this experience that keeps her whole. “As I get older, I find that travelling is about storytelling. Every group I have visited told stories as part of their educational process.”

Perhaps this is the reason why Anita too decides to tell stories when she’s supposed to be talking about business plans. Anita shows slides of herself with the Maasai in Kenya and this starts her on a roll. “Every tribal group thought I was so ugly. They didn’t like the moles on my skin. They thought my hair was like bird feathers. They told me to start decorating my body a bit more, not to be so plain and dull.”



Anita poses with her equally, if not more famous, Body Shop products

poverty structure. The authorities always put prisons so far away that families could not get there. I spent time in communities outside prisons. I spent time in shacks and I saw a new economy that is [based on] drugs. Everywhere I went, crack and drugs were being made.

“At the end of my journey, I was going to do this huge talk in New Orleans. I just stood up and I shared my experience to 2,000 CEOs. I was trying to get them to undergo these experiences because these move you into action. They

Photos of the Wodaabe of West Africa elicits another tale: “You know quite well I don’t like the beauty business but more than anything I hate beauty pageants where every woman has to look like she has been stretched through a conveyer belt, and every woman has to say she wants to save the world and be a brain surgeon. But I completely changed my mind when I went to Africa because this is the only male beauty pageant where women decide if men are beautiful. But you never look at the men straight in the eye because that would be too aggressive. So you cover your eyes and flick your eyelashes up and choose three of the most beautiful men whose beauty depends on how they roll their eyes and how they show their teeth. Then there is a charm competition where the winners are men with the greatest poems about cattle and cows.”

But if there’s one thing Anita likes talking about is her latest adventure. Travelling with a vagabond through the poor south in the United States, Anita realized that though she “knew poverty in most parts of the world, I don’t know poverty in America. I think to be poor in America is hard because it’s a land of so much plenty.” Anita goes on to point out what she calls the US media’s conspiracy of silence.” Poverty is not talked about in the press. Racism as part of the poverty structure is not talked about in the press. Money only goes to the hands of the multinationals. It does not go into the hands of people who need it. There is no notion of care.”

“The prison system is another element of the

have got to experience poverty and they have to see that people are desperately trying to live good lives despite a system that doesn’t protect them.”

Travel form part of Anita’s most valuable experiences. “Experience,” Anita said, “develops values. That is why we make sure that Body Shop’s staff members also take on new experiences. In our business, management courses are different. Staff are sent to Romania to work in orphanages with young, dying babies. We work in orphanages and mental institutions in Albania for two to three weeks at a time. Some 400 young people in the Body Shop go there. It is a spiritual education. Your values change when your experience changes.”

These same experiences teach people respect for different cultures and traditions. Learning to respect people has led Body Shop to practice “Trade Not Aid” whose goal is to help create livelihoods and explore trade-based approaches to supporting sustainable development by sourcing ingredients and accessories directly from socially and economically marginalized producer communities. Body Shop’s Brazil nut oil used for hair conditioner is supplied by the Kayapo village in Brazil and the Mbanayilli and Dalung Women’s Shea Nut Cooperative in Ghana. A woman’s cooperative in Bangladesh supplies jute containers and clay bowls. General Paper Industries in Nepal recycle paper using traditional skills and an association of the Ñahñu indigenous group in Mexico supply maguey and agave products for body scrub mitts and shampoos.

ACTIVISM AS TRADEMARK

Instead of commercially advertising its products, Body Shop conducts social justice projects and mounts campaigns for human and women's rights, the environment and the protection of animals. As far as Body Shop and Anita are concerned, these campaigns come first, sales second.

Wherever it may be set up, Body Shop is consistent in its activism and uses all commercial avenues to address social issues. Body Shop's recycled bags carry messages. Distribution trucks in England show the faces of and information on missing children. Broadsheets on women's rights are given to customers and are made available at Body Shop stores. The use of mobile billboards with messages around the distribution plant are wheeled in and out every day since the town council does not approve of permanent billboards. Stores are converted into action stations for human rights letter writing campaigns on behalf of prisoners of conscience. Yet, Anita says that the issue of human rights is not always easy. "It's very easy to hug a tree or to save a bunny rabbit. But it is not always easy to talk about human rights."

One other cause Anita is passionate about is women's rights. She says that wherever she goes, she sees that women bear the greatest responsibility but are, at the same time, the least educated. "It's always the women who keep the family together, the community together. It's rarely the men. It's always the women who are part of education. Yet they are

always exhausted with the cycle of births and pregnancies and looking after the men's heirs."

Except perhaps in Guinea where, Anita says, females are celebrated. "There is a wonderful tribe in Guinea and I recommend that everyone go there. When a baby girl is born, it is raised to the heavens and there is a five-week celebration. When a boy is born, they say 'that's nice' and then they go back to work."

Six years ago, Body Shop set up their first child development center. "We train eco-warriors here. These are young kids who are taught about the environment and about caring for different culture groups. Children are encouraged to show their activist projects to their mothers while they are working in the offices." Many of Body Shop's staff, Anita said, feel that the role of business is "to protect the family, to honor the work of women and to work towards human rights." The concept of family, Anita believes, extends beyond its nuclear members. The community, as far as Anita is concerned, is an extension of family.

Of course, such a creative angle in business implies that the founder must have possessed qualities that other business minds do not possess and an hour with Anita Roddick will show anybody that, indeed, she is a special kind of person.

ECCENTRIC BUSINESSWOMAN

In 1976, Anita, wearing jeans and a Bob Dylan T-shirt, walked into a bank to ask for a loan. Apart from her outfit which hardly projected a business image,

ANITA RODDICK, *the extraordinary and "a little" eccentric entrepreneur who used her all-natural, chemical-free cosmetics as propaganda for social issues and, at the same time, made big business out of selling them, took time out to speak with Isis International-Manila while she was in the city to promote her new shop. Excerpts:*

Isis: What keeps you whole?

Anita: Empathy for the human condition. Understanding and living with poverty. The ability to know that you can be a bridge with your position.

Q: What makes you strong?

A: I always go towards people whose visions are stronger than mine. Some of the important influences in my life are Bryan Simms and Matthew Fox, who are people deep into the stories of creation and the universe. I am interested in their spiritual awareness.....I am a grassroots activists. When I see women and especially indigenous tribes work in the fields and I join them in their work, you **cannot not** have reverence. That is my biggest spiritual education.

Q: If you had only one day in your whole life. How would you spend it?

A: One day? Well, it would be in the company of the people I love. My kids, my granddaughter who I am training to be an activist and a revolutionary.

I'll also organize my funeral which would have to be hugely funny. I want only my female friends to carry the coffin and I hope they all fall down and I'll tumble out. I want all the great things, the great love poems, writings, put inside my coffin, things from my kids which they loved. And then I want great music played. I want to be celebrated for having great breasts and short legs. I want a celebration of the body, and all parts of it too. I will not be cremated. If I am smart, I shall be wrapped in wonderful cloth and put on top of a tree where birds can peck at me. ☺

Anita also had two young children in tow. "I wanted £4,000 for this idea I had to sell body cosmetics in little containers. I called the idea the Body Shop. He [the bank manager] went white. He thought it was England's first sex shop! Eventually my husband got the loan from the bank and passed over the money to me," Anita said.

Anita got her idea for Body Shop from all the years of living with "tribal groups, industrial groups, and farmers" while working for the United Nations and living mostly in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean Islands. In Sri Lanka, Anita saw that women did not throw the skin of the pineapple away but cleaned their skin with it. "This was the start of fruit acids." Anita also lived in the Polynesian Islands and the women she met there "had absolutely no teeth because they chewed on sugar cane. But they had skin like velvet because they completely covered their body with coca butter."

Challenge everything.

When Anita opened the Body Shop, she immediately got into trouble because she decided to open the shop near a funeral parlor whose owners became very, very upset. "The coffins would pass my shop with the name 'Body Shop' so people wanted me to close it down. But I said 'no.'

"Then I hired my first saleswoman whom I hired because she had wonderful handwriting and not because she had selling skills. All the labels and everything in the store were handwritten but every label ran so nobody could read the writing. In the shower, the labels ran so you had to smell what you put in the water." She remembers with humor her earliest mistakes. "I did not know at that time that you could lie to people. When we had henna shampoo, we actually put henna in it. Nobody told me that henna smelled like horse manure! So I would write little notices that said: 'Don't worry about the smell, this is what henna really smells like.' Then there was the honey and beeswax cleanser. We had bee hives from where we would take the honey then mix it up with rose water. But there were black bits in the pot. So we had to write a label that said: 'Don't worry about the black bits. Just scoop it up. They are the dirty footprints of bees. They don't wipe their feet when they go into their house.' We also used the cheapest bottles in the world and called them 'urine sample bottles.' They weren't but that's what we called them.

We never filled them to the top because we couldn't afford to do so.

"The second shop was on a street that was so out of the way that even dogs did not know where it was. So I had to paint all these flowers and all these buttons. From where I parked my car, I would spill my perfume all the way to the shop and people would find it by smell. That is what you call guerilla tactics," laughed Anita.

Anita's store was a small shop based on frugality. "My mom said: 'You run a shop like how I ran my house in the second World War.' We refilled everything, recycled everything and used everything." Anita laments that, today, the art of frugality is no longer recognized. "Nobody talks about good management with frugality. Now you get awards if you are the consumer of the year. You don't get awards for being frugal."

Frugality coupled with creativity continue to be the cornerstones of the Body Shop headquarters in England. There, the atmosphere is always animated and fun. Anita says people there are continuously being fascinated, bewitched, dazzled and delighted."

FIGHTING WORDS

Part of the fun comes from spending a "lot of time looking for products and working with communities in need." Anita continues to say that "governments do not know how to do this. Governments do not measure itself on how it treats the weak and the frail. No government is interested in how the poor are doing. Governments are economic governments, whether it's your government, my government or the American government. Everything you do in business has ripple effects and affects millions.

"One of the greatest disasters is this belief that we can dump our businesses and set them up in countries where there are no environmental regulations or where there are no support for human rights. There is a global agenda to look for the cheapest prices and the least environmental regulations. There is one big race to the pit stop, to the bottom and we have to challenge that. Businesses can do more than governments. They [can act] faster than governments. [Businesses are] richer than governments. But if they [businesses] and governments do not have any moral agenda or any sympathy, then God help us all!"

And, to the young audience she faced in Manila, Anita said: "Challenge everything. Challenge everything that you are taught at school. Challenge everything that you read in the papers. Challenge everything because then you have a sense of curiosity, which will give you a sense of creativity, which will make you an astounding individual." ☺

KA PATRING, A WIDOW AND A
FARMER, REAPS THE REWARDS OF

Spirit and Spunk

by Marianita Villariba



If you are 53, a widow, have eight children, had reached only primary education and have a monthly income of a few hundred pesos, what will you do to keep your family alive?

Patricia or *Ka Patring*, as she is fondly called, organized a savings and credit group, starting with 10 women, on a simple formula. She got them to save five pesos individually a week. Every month, they saved around 20.00 pesos until they were able to raise P1,000. Then, P700.00 of this amount was then used to provide credit to members of the organization who wanted to buy and sell food to generate income. A capital of P100 for buying and selling mushrooms a woman makes P20-30 peso daily earning.

Ka Patring then earmarked the remaining P300 for the

group's emergency needs like illness or death. The women could borrow P100 interest-free for an emergency if they paid it back within the week. This P100 can pay for the P50 doctor's fee and a P40 antibiotic medicine. Whenever anyone was unable to pay after a week, she would pay P10 for every P100 she borrowed. Women who got loans for income-generating activities were asked to pay 10 percent interest after two weeks.

At first, many joined and there was a great demand for emergency loans. This made it difficult to collect from women who needed the money for emergencies and the members had to reassess the credit terms.

They decided that their capital was too small to accommodate both emergency

and capital needs. They changed their tack to offering credit only for farming needs. In this way, they were sure to collect, in kind, and replenish their fund. By this time, *Ka Patring* has already been able to raise the group's morale and now they have P2,000.

But this is not the only enterprise that *Ka Patring* has organized.

Being a farmer ever since she could remember, she joined a federation of farmers engaged in organic agriculture in Nueva Ecija called *Kalikasan* (Nature) in 1992. *Kalikasan* provided its members with credit and training opportunities in sustainable agriculture. She plowed her small land of 250 square meters, planted a special rice breed, and harvested from 12 to 30 sacks of rice, depending on how much rain was available. The land had no irrigation system and she could not afford to have it built. From her harvest, *Ka Patring* would pay *Kalikasan* immediately what she owes and sell all the rest to the organization. For every 50 kilos of rice seedling, *Ka Patring* paid 75 kilos of unhusked rice.

With *Kalikasan*, she was able to get into training workshops provided by the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) and one of its partners, the Education for Life Foundation (ELF). She improved her skills in organizing and generating income.

ELF, as it is popularly called, is a folk school that promotes the education of grassroots leaders based on the Danish and Philippine philosophy of learning from

life. It was designed to develop the capacity of women and men in communication, organization and entrepreneurship. During the three days of life history workshops, which is a screening agenda and process for grassroots' readiness to pursue a participatory method of learning, *Ka Patring* would suffer from headaches because she was not used to sitting for hours in workshops, let alone presenting her life as the main agenda for learning. She did not pass the first screening.

When she found out that the leaders who took the course gained tremendous confidence in their leadership, *Ka Patring* persevered and was accepted to join the second batch. *Ka Patring* went through the six-week course and passed with flying colours. She literally sang her way during studies on culture, nationalism and gender. She became expressive and confident. *Ka Patring* even learned how to handle negotiations with government officials.

As *Ka Patring* developed her skills in communication and negotiations, she got involved in many activities in her community. Her most inspiring accomplishment is winning her bid to be recognized by the government as the sole tenant to the land she has tilled for more than 20 years. Her being widowed was an obstacle and traditionally, tenancy claims were only given to men. She fought hard and won. Now her children are secure that their small land will not be awarded to anyone but their mother.

But how does she feed her family if she is very active in

social and political concerns? She is very frugal and can stretch money. She uses ideas as pots for generating resources. For every five pesos she gets, she thinks of ways to make more. Recently, she got women to make aprons from flour sacks and sell them to market vendors. They can make an apron with many pockets for P3.00 and sell it for P15 to P20. They usually make around 50 aprons in one week. This apron business is expanding to several markets and they have been swamped with orders. Now their aprons sell for P25.

People in her community have initiated income-generating projects due to her persevering community work. With this fervour, *Ka Patring* does not worry about her daily needs because the organizations she relates with provides her credit. The people and groups she relates with are markets for testing her ideas and selling goods. The community she belongs to continues to give her security. In the folk school practice, *Ka Patring* is an effective leader, devoted to raising its members' level of education and income status.)

Marianita Villariba is the Director of Isis International-Manila.

business as usual

by Pinky Aragon Choudhury

NOT

A market-driven economy does not guarantee equitable development. Yet, it is estimated that by the year 2000—four short years from today—more than 90 percent of the world's population will live in countries strongly connected to the market-driven, cut-throat competitive world economy. Will the poor women of the Pacific Rim benefit from open trade, from investments and from the economic and technical cooperation being promoted by the 18 member economies of APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation)?

Bob Hawke, then Prime Minister of Australia, introduced the concept of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in 1989. His idea was an informal forum where the agenda is defined by a process of consultation among the countries of the region and not by treaties and formal agreements. This is why the terms “state” and “government” are never used in any of APEC's official literature.

APEC includes Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand

and the United States of America. APEC's 18 members account for 56 percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product and represent 46 percent of the world's merchandise exports. APEC economies account for 30 percent of the world's land area and nearly half of the world's population.

SMEs

High up on APEC's agenda is the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). SMEs have material assets that range from US\$57,000 to \$750,000. A survey of the APEC secretariat in 1994 shows that SMEs comprise over 95 percent of all enterprises and 32 to 48 percent of employment in the APEC community. APEC's Third Small and Medium Enterprise Ministerial Meeting held in Cebu City, Philippines, 5 to 6 September this year hailed SMEs enormous contributions to the APEC economies as sources of growth, employment, income, trade innovation, entrepreneurship, and opportunity for people.

RUN BY WOMEN

Along with early female education, women's increased participation in entrepreneurship was singled out by APEC heads of state as one of the key factors for higher sustained economic growth and steadily-reduced pov-

erty. Studies show that women are in SMEs as entrepreneurs, managers, officers and laborers. That women work in SMEs and that the number of women-controlled business is on the rise are facts “consistent in both developed and developing countries.”

Recognizing this and the fact that APEC is unstoppable, 63 women leaders gathered to launch a network that means to press for the inclusion of gender concerns in the action agenda of APEC leaders meeting in the Philippines in November. “We accept it [globalization] and face the challenge of protecting the women who will be badly hit by a market-driven economy,” said Aida Gordon, president of her own food processing company and until her retirement, the most senior woman executive of San Miguel Corporation, one of the Philippines largest private business groups. Gordon, like most of her group, is comfortable with globalization.

Andrina Lever, managing director of Expansion International Advisory, not only accepts globalization; she is excited by it. “In developing countries and countries in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region that are experiencing explosive economic growth, the sheer number of



APEC's senior women leaders smile and pose for posterity. They're not the ones to suffer the evils of trade liberalization.

opportunities and the demand for a larger work force are creating opportunities for women in business that were never available before. Throughout Southeast Asia, entrepreneurship has become a very important occupation for women. Entrepreneurship is on the rise."

OPPOSITION

As the well-dressed and well-heeled women of the newly launched network held a press conference inside the posh Diamond Hotel, sweating and shouting women workers picketed outside. Members of the Philippine Kilusang Manggagawang Kababaihan (KMK), or the Movement of Women Workers, protested what they called the conference's cosmetization of APEC. The women inside, they said, were merely "pushing for safety nets." They, in contrast, are questioning the very framework of APEC itself.

"Globalization, for which APEC was established, is depriving women of their lands, homes and jobs." Nanette Miranda, a

former industrial worker and now KMK secretary-general says that in the Philippines, "labor flexibilization schemes, sanctioned by the state through anti-labor laws, enable capitalists to hire and dismiss women workers as they please. This has not only worsened job insecurity for women who are employed but has also meant women's actual loss of jobs. Those who manage to remain in their jobs continuously suffer violations of their basic rights."

Precision Garments is a recent example. Using laws that are overly friendly to capitalists but inherently hostile to workers, Precision was able to wiggle its way out of its responsibility and commitment to its women workers simply by changing its name. This, despite the sacrifices of the women which included the arrest of 17 workers last September 1996 for striking against low wages and management violations of provisions of their collective bargaining agreement.

Miranda adds that because of these, there is great "cost in terms of emotional, mental and physi-

cal stress on women."

Criticizing the government of Fidel Ramos, who has reaped credits for the country's more than seven percent economic growth, Liza Maza said that the Ramos government has done nothing by way of critical reforms or instituting policies to solve women's poverty and gender inequality. Instead, it merely puts "forward palliative measures" meant to delude people into believing that it is possible to soften the impact of globalization and trade liberalization on impoverished and working women everywhere.

Dr. Martha Tilaar, founder, president and director of Indonesia's leading conglomerate of cosmetic and herbal products companies, is concerned about women's unpaid labor. She reports that Indonesian village women are 40.11 to 43.94 percent more likely to *have* to work in family industries than their urban counterparts. "One-third of the labour in small family industries [in Indonesia] are women who are mostly members of the family. The percentage of women who do

not get paid for their labour is higher than those who do.”

Tilaar also points out that the low education of many household entrepreneurs will have an effect on the “kind of technology being used and the obstacles this brings to the quality and marketing of products produced in villages.”

Thailand, where SMEs in export sector are also mostly women, “female workers in SMEs (in both the formal and informal sectors) can lose their jobs because SMEs lose out to multinationals which have much greater capital, employ high technology, have better management systems and marketing skills, and which can produce the same products at lower costs,” says Dr. Yada Praparapun of the Bangkok-based Ramkhamhaeng University. Because these women usually have low skills and fewer opportunities than males to enter training and retraining programs, the women are the first to lose out when SMEs close shop or relocate to a neighboring country in search of cheaper labor. The same thing happens when SMEs start operating as sub-contractors and as informal businesses.

Older female workers, despite having greater experience, are the first to be replaced because of their declining physical ability. Of course, “they will find it very difficult to find a new job. In fact, these older women may end up permanently unemployed,” says Praparapun.

Remedios Ignacio-Rikken, national coordinator of the non-governmental organization PILIPINA (National Organization of Filipino Women), singles out the issue of poverty. Many village women simply have no savings that would make them eligible to join loan-giving societies in the first place. Rikken was formerly the executive director of the Na-

tional Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) where she helped implement the Loan Revolving and Capability-Building Fund for Poor Women.

“It was here where we saw the effectiveness of NGOs to reach the poor, especially the women among them,” she says. NGOs are particularly effective, Rikken adds, if these groups have overhead support to continue training women until they could be integrated into normal cooperative processes.

Yet, Rikken warns that semi-literate and illiterate women must also be strengthened in their personal skills and awareness of their rights. Women are often familiar only with their own limited market and do not have the capacity to assess product development needs in response to changing demands or opportunities outside this market. “Even if poor women may receive skills and management training and have access to credit from NGOs, they have very little idea of business planning and bookkeeping to manage an enterprise on their own.” The result is unanticipated loss of income.

EVEN THE MONEYED

Though their problems will be different from the workers, women capitalists will have to contend with difficulties too. Lever believes that the challenges faced by women in SMEs are the same as those faced by any small- or medium-sized business owner. But she concedes that the challenges are often greater, simply because they are women.

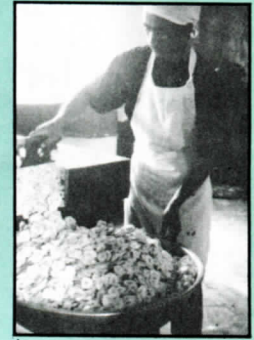
“Women,” Lever says, “face difficulties in access to capital, being taken seriously, balancing family life with working life, maintaining growth and competitiveness, responding to the need to create wealth and a company of value which will contribute to

their retirement, and confidence to do business internationally or to expand beyond a comfortable size, geographical area or into new business ventures.”

The premise and promise of APEC is that market-driven prosperity will bring about economic growth, and that trade and investment liberalization will release the creative energies of economies and consequently generate jobs and wealth. But there is a flipside to this picture of bliss being painted by the movers of APEC, a flipside admitted even by those who agree with globalization.

Market-oriented development brings about not only gender-differentiated development; it also affects different women differently. Benefits will accrue to groups and sectors already competitive—those already in possession of resources. Dr. Patricia Licuanan, chair of the Main Committee of the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, underscores the absence of any guarantee from the market economy that there will be equitable development. For APEC to benefit various groups, including women in poverty, governments will have to step in and implement commitments they made in Beijing. ☺

Pinky Aragon Choudhury is a writer regularly asked by Isis International-Manila to do stories. She is a correspondent of the Manila bureau of the Women's Feature Service.



Women provide jobs and raise capital for social change

Fair

Ironic as it may seem, as soon as the women decided to put up the business, they also made up their minds that they would not be making personal profits. Prior to their becoming entrepreneurs, the women were activists and community organizers—they still are, actually—when they realized that the people they were serving and trying hard to organize desperately needed jobs as well as political reforms. So the women established the Panay Fair Trade Center (PFTC) to meet both needs: to set up an enterprise that would provide jobs as well as raise capital to pursue the social changes that they have been working on for so many years already. The women made this decision five years ago.

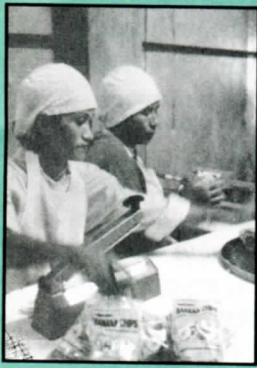
Today, PFTC, is a struggling but established alternative trading organisation. It acts as the marketing arm of peoples' organisations in Panay

that are engaged in alternative trading. It assists groups expand their markets and seek capital and financing assistance.

More importantly, PFTC believes that its goal is to help people gain confidence in themselves and become self-reliant. Presently, PFTC has a network of 10 federations and organisations.

In 1991, the Kababaihan Bangon para sa Kahilwayan (Women, Rise, Walk Towards Freedom), whose acronym, KABALAKA, also means justice, saw the need to go into socio-economic activities to help urban poor women in the island of Panay in the Philippines to improve their livelihood.

The island of Panay sits in the Western Visayas region of the Philippines. Its four provinces—Aklan, Antique, Capiz and Iloilo—just like many other parts of the country, are beginning to modernise. Small and medium enterprises are rising in both of Panay's urban and rural areas.



photos courtesy of OXFAM

Trade

by Lilian S. Mercado Carreon

Still, Panay's economy remains largely agricultural. Equally blessed with sun and rain, Panay's weather is ideal for growing rice, corn, sugar cane, coffee, vegetables and fruits. Of its many fruit crops, Panay boasts of quality bananas. So when the women decided to set up the Panay Fair Trade Center (PFTC), they decided to produce something they have been making all their lives: banana chips.

Banana chips production has long been a backyard industry in many of Panay's homes, but only recently did it become a product for alternative or fair trade. PFTC produces banana chips out of naturally-grown, quality bananas that are carefully processed and attractively packaged.

But where to get a steady supply of quality bananas? The women's solution combined in a single strategy their political goals and an excellent business plan. They linked up with poor farmers who would provide them with raw bananas that the

women would process into export products. This way, they, poor urban women and poor upland farmers, would be helping each other.

Bananas come from farming communities as far as the mountain areas of Dabong and Leon. Here, farmers grow bananas using only organic fertilisers and without any pesticides.

Many of Dabong's farmers belong to a cooperative called KAMADA, the Katilingban sa Mangunguma sa Dabong (Dabong Farmers' Cooperative). Ever since linking up with PFTC, KAMADA has been selling their bananas exclusively to the Center.

"We used to sell our bananas in town. But prices were very low we might as well have given away our bananas for free. PFTC was looking for groups it can help and when they saw that we were organised into a cooperative, they asked us to join them. PFTC offered to buy our bananas at the same price that

they sold in town," says Paterno Barranco, president of the farmers cooperative.

The prevailing market price for bananas is P2.50 (less than US\$0.10) per kilo. PFTC buys KAMADA's bananas at the same price but the farmers are able to save on transport costs since PFTC sends a truck to pick up the products from the community. Apart from the P2.50 that goes directly to the farmer, PFTC also pays an additional .20 centavos per kilo of banana. This extra amount goes to KAMADA's funds.

"But it was a better deal," continues Paterno, "because they

offered to buy directly from us. We would no longer need to pass through middlemen." He smiles as he says this and the lines criss-crossing his brown face stand out.

Life has been hard for Paterno, making him look older than his 49 years. He is married and has 10 children. But because he and his wife could not feed such a large brood, Paterno gave two of his children for adoption to his sibling.

Paterno is a hardworking person, before as a farmer and now as the cooperative's chairperson. But while the farmers have benefited from Paterno's

dedication, his wife Aurora has had to take up the slack in the farm, working longer and harder now while taking care of the small children left at home.

Bananas are supposed to be a year-round crop but farmers lose their harvests during the typhoon season. Panay is often in the path of strong typhoons. In 1995, an especially devastating typhoon hit Panay and farmers lost not only their crops but their homes as well.

When PFTC realized this, they acted to weave disaster relief into their program for farmers. In 1995, it approached Oxfam (of the

d r e a m s

"My dreams are simple. I dream of giving my children an education, of feeding and clothing them. I dream of having regular work and a steady income. I dream of a home where my family can live. Other than these, I wish for no more." Instead of hope, there was fear in Jocelyn Gabion's eyes as she spoke about her dreams. She knew how far away she was from realising these dreams, no matter that they are simple.

Jocelyn and her husband are industrious people who will accept any job for as long as it was honest. Her husband drives a jeepney, the Philippines' most popular form of public transportation, but his income is never enough. So Jocelyn has been working as a packer at PFTC to help eke out a living.

But work at PFTC is irregular and when there's a lull in the factory's operations, Jocelyn and the other members of the urban poor organization that she leads do odd jobs.

Thirty-two members of NAGKAISA work at PFTC. These workers are actually more than PFTC needs. PFTC has long ago proposed to regularize a few of the them but NAGKAISA's members refused. The women, led by Jocelyn, opted to share whatever work was available among themselves rather than have any one of them go jobless. Jocelyn herself knows what a job means to urban poor women like her. Some extra income, however small, could keep children in school.

"Last year," Jocelyn narrates, "my two eldest sons had to stop studying because we were really short of money. My father fell ill and it was all we could do to make both ends meet". The boys, 15- and 13-year-olds, went to work


as stevedores. Jocelyn saw how his sons labored, carrying sacks of corn or cement that seemed heavier than either one of them. Jocelyn was afraid the load would break her sons' young bodies. The mere sight broke her heart.

Jocelyn, like many other women, has thought of going abroad to work as a domestic helper. She was aware of all the tragic stories of many overseas contract workers but she thought that it was her family's only hope. A year abroad, just one year abroad, she thought, would not only put her children back in school. It would also allow her to save some money to move her family to a better home. Jocelyn's family squats on a piece of private land and she knows their house can be demolished anytime. In fact, two nearby neighbourhoods have already been bulldozed to make way for an international port.

But friends finally dissuaded Jocelyn from leaving. They kept repeating all the sad tales of women who have gone abroad. Besides, her friends told her, there's the prospect that work at PFTC is going to get better.

Today, Jocelyn's children are back in school. Jocelyn is glad that neither one of them is bitter about their lot. She is very proud of them.

Jocelyn and the other urban poor women of NAGKAISA has also started a catering service for non-government organizations and they are able to earn some profit. Orders for banana chips and other products are also beginning to come in and Jocelyn sees that PFTC is working hard to sustain its operation.

Each day, Jocelyn is uncertain of the future. But she has decided to live each day with hope.  by L.S.M. Carreon

United Kingdom and Ireland), a development agency and one of PFTC's fair trade partners, for disaster assistance. More importantly for the farmers, PFTC decided to provide farmers with a safety net by raising the price of bananas during the typhoon season.

From the farms, bananas are then brought to the PFTC factory in the town of Oton. There, urban poor women work the different production stages of banana chips.

Jocelyn Gabion, who has been working at PFTC for four years now, is also the chairperson of NAGKAISA (*Nagaisa nga Kababaenhan nga Imol sa Syudad* or the Organization of Urban Poor Women). Jocelyn's husband drives a passenger jeepney but his earnings could hardly support their brood of three. So Jocelyn helps eke out a living by working as a packer at the Panay Fair Trade Center (PFTC) factory. Jocelyn, like the other women workers of PFTC, rely on banana chip orders for additional income. She said: "Our husbands have no permanent jobs and we have to work in order to feed our children and send them to school." There are 32 women from Jocelyn's organization who work at PFTC.

"Workers here undergo a one-day training," explains Jocelyn, "during which time they are given a small allowance. After this, they become regular workers. But the work is not really difficult; one can learn simply by looking at how it is done."

Raw bananas are gathered and peeled by the bunch. The workers, using thin flat sticks, apply just the right amount of pressure to separate the skin without scarring the banana's flesh.

The bananas are then sliced. A woman picks up four or five

bananas at a time and rubs these against a tin foil laid flat on a piece of wood. A blade—a very sharp one—protrudes at one end of this simple tool and new workers have to be extra careful not to cut their fingers and not to slice the bananas too thick or too thin.

The banana chips are then gathered on a wide table for inspection by a quality controller. Those that pass are then cooked at a very high temperature to

The problem they need to beat is sustainability

prevent the chips from sticking to each other and from absorbing too much oil. After draining the excess oil, the fried chips are then cooled and checked again for quality.

Water and sugar are combined to make a syrup where the chips are dipped and then fried again.

After the second fry, a blower dries the chips to prevent them from sticking. PFTC's first batch if chips were all-natural, meaning the women did not add any coloring or flavoring. But the value of an all-natural product was lost on Europeans who said the chips did not smell of "real bananas." After that, the women started flavoring the chips, but only very slightly, for them to have "the natural smell of banana."

ALL'S NOT WELL

But the problem that PFTC has so far failed to beat is sustainability. Ruth Fe Salditos, PFTC marketing officer, explains

how PFTC intends to achieve this. "We want to go into the domestic market and we are testing this now. We are also developing product variations. We're developing tropical dried fruits products though as of the moment, orders are irregular and we are in no position to invest more finances. We are also studying the possibility of producing salted and spicy banana chips. Fair trade provides us with a lot of possibilities. Through it, we can reach out to a lot of people."

All these are in the drawing board but in the meantime, women workers have been feeling the crunch. Work has been few and far between, sometimes getting as bad as just a few days in a span of six months.

"Of course," Jocelyn says, "we want regular work. But right now, we work only when there's an order. But an order for three tons, for example, we can finish in two-and-a-half days. We get paid for only that amount of work. Sometimes, the order is good for only one-and-a-half days, sometimes, five days, sometimes three days."

PFTC had long ago proposed the assignment of regular workers, just a few since the business cannot as of yet pay so many regular workers even if PFTC wants to.

But the urban poor women declined the proposal, preferring to rotate the work among themselves even if this meant working only for as much as five days in a six-month period. "All of us need the job and we would rather share what's available among ourselves rather than have some members jobless," Jocelyn explained. "This is why our dream is for PFTC to be able to sustain its operation. Our work at PFTC has already added to our meagre

incomes but regular jobs will greatly improve our lives.”

CATCH-22

The general pattern of trade tends to benefit the trader but leave the producer vulnerable to exploitation. The producers that are especially vulnerable are indigenous people, people with disabilities, refugees, urban slum dwellers, seasonally employed agricultural workers and women.

Fair trade hopes to give producers a better deal and strengthen their hand in a trading relationship. Only through fair trade does PFTC see it can assure its workers and suppliers of prices and wages that are better than those being offered by big producers and exporters. But this also means pricing their products at costs that are higher than those pegged by commercial establishments. This also means a dilemma. For PFTC to become sustainable to the point that it can regularize production and, consequently, work, it knows that it needs to break through markets other than those in the fair trade network. It also knows if and when it decides to pursue the opportunities in the commercial or mainstream market, either locally or abroad, it will have to seriously consider lowering its prices.

PFTC of course realises that its workers need regular work and that to provide this, it is crucial for the Center to expand and sustain its operation by going into markets other than those offered by fair trade.

Yet, fair trade has helped PFTC pursue its goal of helping Panay's poor gain some degree of economic stability and self-reliance. It opened opportunities for workers and suppliers from organised communities in Panay and other parts of the Philippines to meet

buyers and solidarity groups from all around the world. It introduced PFTC to new markets which could, hopefully, lead to more orders and mean regular work.

In between orders, the women work odd jobs. They do other people's laundry, vend food on the streets, scavenge and sell junk. But on days when PFTC has work for them, the women are either fetched from an agreed meeting

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lives.

place by PFTC's truck (the same one used to pick and transport bananas from farmers) or are reimbursed for their fare.

On these days too, the women leave their children in the home of the family whose turn it is to serve as daycare center. Initially, the women thought of putting the daycare in the PFTC factory but decided against it after they realised that they would not be relieving themselves of the burden of childcare. So they enlisted their husbands' help and established community-based daycare center instead.

TRANSFORMING SOCIETY

Fair trade has paved the way for visitors to establish direct contacts with PFTC and provide

its workers and suppliers with support: both direct and indirect, moral and material. PFTC is counting their gains: an alternative trade network, a consolidating effect on organised groups, the empowerment of women. Before they had PFTC, the urban poor women felt they were dependent on their husbands. Today, they're able to bring some income home and this gives them a sense of self, of importance and a degree of independence.

Despite its problems, PFTC is doing well in terms of using the benefits it has gained from fair trade to pursue the process of social transformation. Ruth Fe Salditos, who worked with the Women's Center and KABALAKA even before she got involved with alternative trade, believes that fair trade should be an integral component of the people's continuing effort to improve their lives, a goal that can be achieved only by improving society's structures.

This is why PFTC has always ensured that a part of the profit goes to the organisations. These funds are used for skills training, education and community organising. "We do not want our members to lose sight of their overall and long-term goals. This is why the very first thing that we do when an organisation comes to join us is to explain that fair trade will be useful to us if we see it as a tool that we can use in transforming our society. Only then can we truly transform our lives.")

Lilian S. Mercado Carreon is married and is rearing three kids. At the same time, she edits Women in Action and heads Isis International-Manila's Communications Program.

Rolling Out the Dough

by Chen Ya
Women's Feature Service

XIAMEN—Until 1989, Yang Meiyu, a middle-aged working woman in China's southeast Fujian Province, had been living frugally on her small salary.

Like many ordinary Chinese, she never anticipated that China's economic restructuring could affect her so abruptly as it did in the late 1970s when the country began following a policy of reform and opened its doors to free trade.

Upon graduating from high school in the late 1960s, she worked at various odd jobs before being recruited as a cook to the Chemical Industry Bureau's factory canteen. Eight years later, she was transferred to the company's guesthouse, and within seven years she worked her way up from cook to manager.

For Meiyu, married with two children, everything seemed to be going well. Then the guesthouse closed and the staff was dismissed due to an economic reshaping in late 1989. At 42, Meiyu found herself unemployed and seemingly unwanted.

"I tried to seek a job at the old factory where I worked eight years, but I was turned down," she recalls. "The factory was over staffed."

Without the security of a job, Meiyu says it was as if a wall she had always relied upon collapsed. Her income had been the sole support of her family of five, including an

elderly mother, unemployed husband and two kids in school.

"I felt I was betrayed by life and had become an outcast," she says. "I had devoted all my youth to work, then I suddenly found myself redundant and a loser. I was totally unprepared for the bitter experience. In despair, I thought of committing suicide."

But out of love for her family and a sense of obligation to them, she pulled

herself out of this depression. Now at 49, Meiyu is the owner of a fast food chain—the Youli Fastfood Ltd. Co.—with fixed assets of US\$360,000.00, five stores and a staff of 72.

Meiyu says the turning point in her life came when she was laid off and she went to the local trade union to complain about her unemployment due to the reforms.

"People there tried their best to soothe me, and suggested that I start some



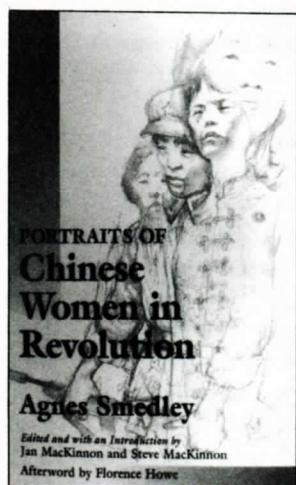
Irene R. Chia

> p. 44

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Women of Asia



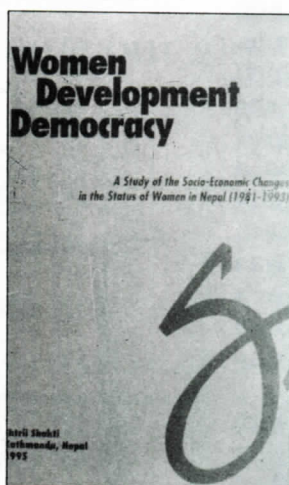
PORTRAITS OF CHINESE WOMEN IN REVOLUTION by Agnes Smedley

Agnes Smedley (1892-1950) worked in and wrote about China during the years of war and revolutionary turmoil from 1928-1941. The pieces in this collection were all written in the 1930s and through them the flux and turmoil, the despair and exaltation of China on the throes of revolution are vividly depicted. Smedley, who also wrote a biography on the peasant general Chu Teh, now lies buried in Beijing beneath a gravestone inscribed "Friend of China." (*New York: The Feminist Press, undated. 208 p. RN SOC 02337.00B*)

STATISTICAL PROFILE ON WOMEN OF NEPAL edited by Shavitri Singh

Women in Nepal represent slightly a little over a half of the total population. This compendium of statistical data on the status of Nepalese women is intended to as a resource material for planners and policymakers.

Wherever applicable male/female comparisons have been made. Geographic variations and changes over time, particularly after the international women's year 1974, has also been attempted. However, some information are quite old owing to the absence of regular surveys. (*Nepal: Shtrii Shakti, 1995. 111 p. RN GENREF 02438.00B*)



WOMEN, DEVELOPMENT, DEMOCRACY: A STUDY OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES IN THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN NEPAL (1981-1993) by Shtrii Shakti

This comprehensive study of women in fifteen sites sought to find out to what extent and in what ways the changes over the past ten to fifteen years, are reflected in the lives of the different groups of women in different parts of Nepal. These groups differ from each other in economic status, cultural norms, geographical setting, education, political awareness, and access to communication facilities. This

study used the findings of the Status of Women in Nepal (SOWN), an in-depth research carried out over four years and published in 1981, a base-line data against which the changes in women's lives over the last decade were measured. (*Nepal: Shtrii Shakti, 1995. 217 p. RN GENREF 02433.00B*)

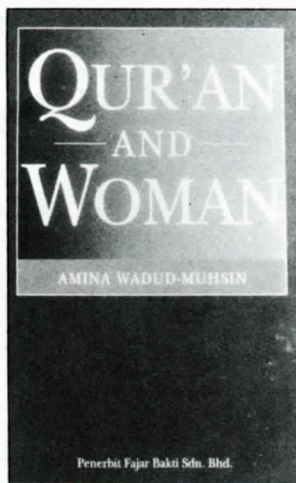
STATISTICS ON THE VIETNAMESE WOMEN edited by Nguyen Kim Cuc

This compilation of statistical information about the present status of Vietnamese women was prepared and published by the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam on the occasion of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Comprehensive in coverage, it is a useful primary guide for researchers, advocates and policymakers. (*Hanoi: Statistical Publishing House, 1995. 191 p. RN GENREF 02441.00B*)

GENDER & DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM by Le Thi Nam Tuyet, Le Van Phung and La Nham Thin

Comprise of 200 statistical charts and an annex of 50 statistical tables, *Gender and Development in Vietnam* covers the status of women in the areas of economy, politics, culture, health and education. The information contained in this important volume comes from official data, as well as from surveys and studies conducted by the Hanoi-based Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development. (*Hanoi: Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development, 1994. 257 p. RN GENREF 02440.00B*)

Woman in Islam



QUR'AN AND WOMEN by Anana Wadud-Muhsin

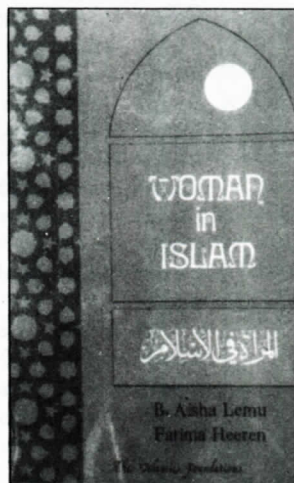
This is an analysis of the concept of woman drawn directly from the Qur'an. Is an explicit attempt to return to the original source—the Qur'an, when the tendency has been to confuse the works of Islamic scholars with the Qur'an. It demonstrates that in order to maintain its relevance, the Qur'an must be continually reinterpreted; that the importance of the Qur'anic text is its transcendence of time and its expression of eternal values.

Qur'an and Women sheds some new light on the role of women through reviewing Islam's holy book itself with its principles of social justice and human equality and its objective of justice. (Kuala Lumpur, Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1992. 118 p. RN WIS 02437.00B)

GENDER EQUITY IN ISLAM: BASIC PRINCIPLES by Jamal Badawi

Gender Equity in Islam presents an overview of the status and rights of Muslim women as defined by the Qur'an and Sunnah. In this brief pamphlet, Dr. Jamal Badawi examines the spiritual, social, economic and political aspects of women's position in Islam and, in doing so, summarizes the role of women in

Muslim society. Further, in explaining the sources that provide the foundation for Islam's stance on gender equity, Badawi discusses the role of Islamic scholars in their approach to women's issues. (USA: American Trust Publications, 1995. 62 p. RN WIS 02412.00B)



WOMAN IN ISLAM by B. Aisha Lemu and Fatima Heeren

The International Islamic Conference held in London from April 3-12, 1976 had the major aim of promoting a better understanding of Islam and Muslim culture in the West. One of the most remembered sessions was the one devoted to them relating to woman in Islam. It was addressed by two Muslim women, both coming from Western backgrounds, one English and the other German. "*Woman in Islam*" is a small pamphlet that carries these lectures about the status and experiences of Muslim women. (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1993. 51 p. RN WIS 02416.00B)

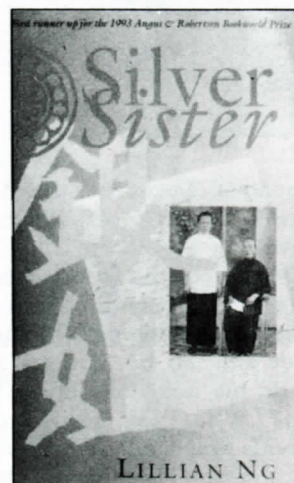
Literature

THE DRAGON'S PEARL by Sirin Phathanothai

Sirin Phathanothai was born into one of Thailand's most privileged and politically prominent

families. But at the age of eight, her life changed dramatically. She and her brother were sent to be brought up in Beijing under the direct auspices of premier Zhou En Lai as his wards. Sirin went swimming with Mao, was privy to major political and historical events and lived through Mao's economic Great Leap Forward. Then, during the Cultural Revolution, her world was torn asunder. Her brother was expelled from China and she was saved only by the People's Liberation Army deep in the countryside. But, unlike many of her friends, she survived and went on to play a pivotal role in China's opening to the West.

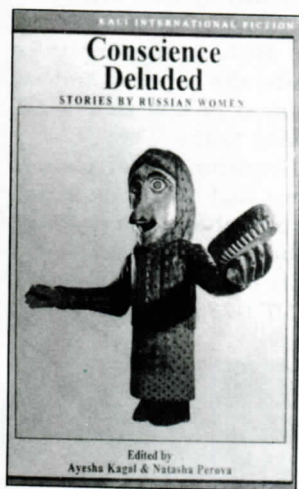
Sometimes harrowing, and always highly illuminating, Sirin Phathanothai's story is a unique historical document. (London: Simon & Schuster, 1994. 336 p. RN LIT 02335.00B)



SILVER SISTERS by Lillian Ng

Born into the grinding poverty of peasant life in the Chinese village of Lung Sun, Ah Pan had little expectation of ever venturing far from the village. But, orphaned at 14, Ah Pan joins a "sisterhood" that changes the course of her life forever. Ironically, Ah Pan's solemn vows of celibacy and loyalty to her "sisters" offer her a freedom unknown to most Chinese women of her time—financial independence. As a domestic servant, Ah Pan encour-

ters worlds far beyond the experience of a simple peasant girl, from the cloistered luxury of the fabulously wealthy House of Tang in Canton, to the Hong Kong apartment of famous singer Little Peacock Lien; from the grim struggle for survival in Japanese-occupied Singapore, to the sometimes bewildering freedoms of present-day Australia. (*Australia: Mandarin, 1994. 307 p. RN LIT 02398.00B*)



CONSCIENCE DELUDED edited by Ayenka Kagal and Natasha Perova

What does the ritual slaughtering of a pig symbolise for a mother-son relationship? Why is Kozlov smitten by Alyonka and how do his wax dolls break her spell? What is the bloody women's ward all about? Who were Marcsha Peredreeva's three loves? Lenin dies in March 1953 and a young Jewish girl come of age.

This ground-breaking collection of stories by Russian women from the post-Perestroika period, are presented here in an English translation for the first time. The ten writers in this anthology span the better part of this century and demonstrate a range of styles and literary devices used by women in Russia today—fable, allegory, fantasy, realism. Each story, compelling told, deals with different facets of the lives of

Women Empowering Women

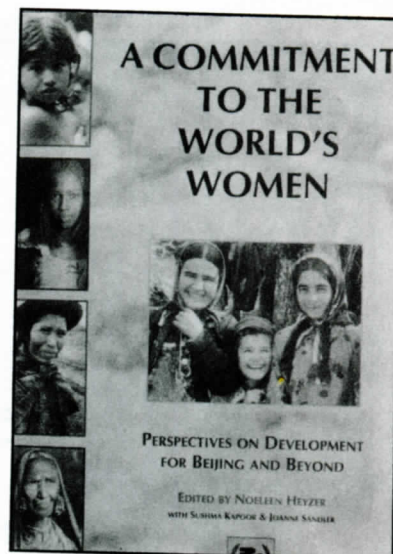
A COMMITMENT TO THE WORLD'S WOMEN: PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT FOR BEIJING AND BEYOND edited by Noeleen Heyzer, Sushma Kapoor and Joanne Sandler

Throughout the preparations for the 4th World Conference on Women, women and their governments seemed to agree on one idea: the importance of developing a specific and realistic list of commitments for advancing women's status and ensuring women's empowerment. The commitments that emerged from Beijing serve as the basis for promoting gender-responsive approaches to the development of commitments and nations worldwide.

This collection includes articles by more than 30 thinkers, organizers and leaders. These authors have proven their own high level of commitment to the empowerment of women during the many years of dedicated work on gender issues. They resist the crucial issues and processes that have been detrimental to women, their families and societies and offer recommendations and insights for achieving a sustainable future. (*New York: UNIFEM, 1995. 269 p. RN DEV 02446.00B*)

MANAGERIAL CHALLENGES: NGOs IN WOMEN, POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT edited by: Caridad Tharan and Moi Lee Liow

This is a summary of the papers presented during a regional seminar of NGOs in women, population and development held from 29 September-3 October, 1992 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The articles deal with practical managerial challenges, issues and constraints peculiar to the structure and nature of NGO operations. Highlighted by the articles is the wide range of activities the participating NGOs are engaged in, as well as the managerial challenges they face. The managerial issues that were pointed out include



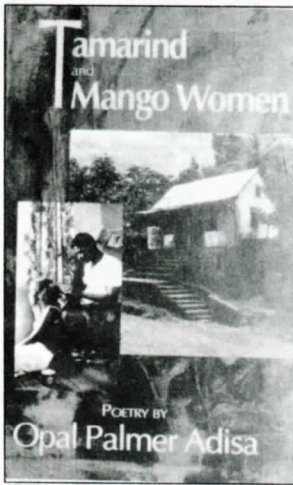
sustainability, community participation, networking, voluntarism and professionalization. (*Kuala Lumpur: The International Council on the Management of Population Programmes, 1993. 104 p. RN DEV 02414.00B*)

BY WOMEN, FOR WOMEN: A STUDY OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN THAILAND by Darunee Tantiwiramanond and Shashi Ranjan Pandey

This book, according to its authors, is an exploratory work to document and analyse, and publish for the first time, case studies of women's organizations in Thailand. These case studies provide insights into the issues of women in development and the role of women's organizations in Thailand.

Examining conservative, liberal and feminist women's organizations, the authors conclude that the presence of these organizations in their variety demonstrate the diversity of women's mobilization. They further point out that of these organizations, it is the progressive organizations that seem to represent a new social movement with new values and actions. (*Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991. 186 p. RN SOC 02453.00B*)

Russian women, before and after glasnost, and is unforgettable in its imagery and intensity. (*New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994. 247 p. RN LIT 01976.00B*)



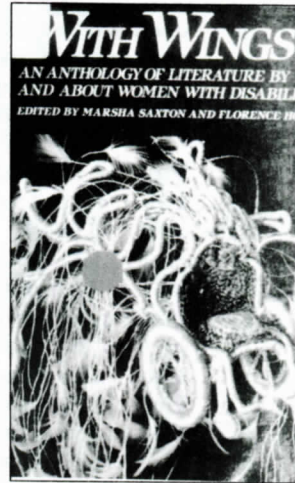
TAMARIND AND MANGO WOMEN by Opal Palmer Adisa

In this collection of poems, Adisa's voice is loving, challenging, seductive and humorous. They are offerings of tamarind and mango, from mother to daughter, of bitter and sweet, of strong black women. (*Canada: Sister Vision Press, 1992. 120 p. RN LIT 01998.00B*)

WITH WINGS: AN ANTHOLOGY OF LITERATURE BY AND ABOUT WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES edited by Marsha Saxton and Florence Howe

With Wings speaks with the many varied voices of unique women—young and old, black and white, heterosexual and lesbian, rich and poor—on a common theme. Through personal accounts, fiction, and poetry, women describe the physical experience of disability; explore the effects of disability on their relationships with family, friends, and lovers; and reach for transcendence of the social and internal barriers of being female and disabled.

Published almost ten years ago, *With Wings* is still considered a touchstone by many because of the clarity and quality of the works it carries. More than thirty



writers, some of them well known, others previously unpublished, contributed to this brave anthology. (*New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987. 167 p. RN LIT 01953.00B*)

Women and Entrepreneurship

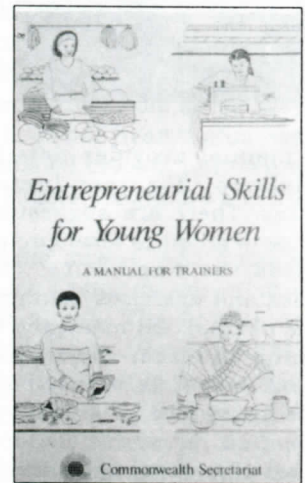
WOMEN, MONEY AND POWER edited by Chris Black

Women it seems have always been in charge of the finances at home—they balance the family budget, and make sure that there is enough money to run everything in the family. Despite this, there are very few women holding key leadership position in banks, the Stock Exchange and other monetary and finance institutions. Women are not seen as "money experts."

Women, Money and Power makes this point and further analyses areas in both the public and private sphere where women's relationship with money—access to, use of—reflects their own empowerment. Areas that were examined in this monograph include women in business, marriage and financial independence, matrimonial property rights, financial management and dealing with legal documents. (*Australia: Australian Women's Research Centre, 1994. 124 p. RN ECO 02436.00B*)

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILL FOR YOUNG WOMEN: A MANUAL FOR TRAINERS by Women and Development Programme, Human Resource Development Group

This manual is divided into three major sections: gender issues, achievement motivation, and how to start and run a business. Intended to help meet the training needs of women, particularly those involved in the informal sector, it provides resource materials and suggests teaching methodologies which could be useful to a wide range of trainers who are involved in developing entrepreneurial skills among women. The manual uses the experiential learning model, also called structural learning exper-



iences which is characterized by full participation of trainees, analysis of information and a focus on specific goals. (*London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1992. 205 p. RN ECO 00863.00B*)

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS by Uschi Jraus-Harper and Malcolm Harper

Millions of women throughout the world, are the main or only contributors to the incomes of households, through self-employment and businesses of various kinds. Such women are not full time entrepreneurs, because of the many other demands on their time and energy. However, experiences everywhere show that they repay loans more reli-

ably and spend their earnings more responsibly, than most businessmen.

Designed for anyone who is responsible for designing, managing or actually conducting business training for women,



this manual provides detailed guidelines for conducting courses. There are suggestions on how to adapt to local circumstances the hand-outs, case studies and exercises contained in the manual. On managing the training courses, the manual also has materials on the special training needs of businesswomen, on recruitment and selection of participants and on evaluating the training. (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1992. 166 p. RN ECO 00857.00B)

Helpful Directories

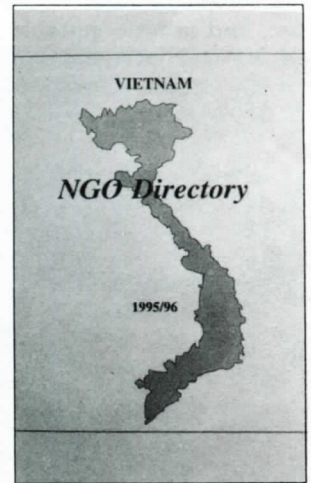
DIRECTORY OF NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC edited by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

First published in 1987, this revised edition has been compiled from information collected through a questionnaire survey conducted in 1994. In cases where no response was received, the information contained in the directory's 1992 edition was

used instead. In all, 43 countries are covered in this directory. (New York: United Nations, 1995. 198 p. RN GENREF 02443.00B)

VIETNAM NGO DIRECTORY 1995-1996 edited by the NGO Resource Center

Some 160 international NGOs, foundations and trusts working in Vietnam are covered in this directory. Aside from basic information like address in Vietnam and in the home office, the directory also carries each organization's mission and philosophy, main programs, number of staff, annual budget, and geographical scope of operation. Annexed are a listing of government offices and UN organizations in Vietnam with



their corresponding addresses and phone numbers. (Hanoi: NGO Resource Center, 1995. 217 p. RN GENREF 02442.00B)



All the titles that appear here are available in the Isis Resource Center and Library. For information about the publishers and how copies can be borrowed or bought, write, fax or e-mail Isis International-Manila.

Reviews

I, LATINA

LUZ MARIA MARTINEZ REVIEWS FELLOW LATINAS ANA CASTILLO'S MIXQUIAHUALA LETTERS AND SANDRA CISNEROS' WOMAN HOLLERING CREEK

In my euphoria at learning that Latina writers are hitting the best seller list not only in the US but also internationally, I sat down to read back to back Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters* and Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek*. The stories I encountered mirrored my life and captured the essence, contradictions, pains, and passions of being a Latina in the United States.

Different from the writings of other immigrant women in the US, *The Mixquiahuala Letters* and *Woman Hollering Creek* pointedly and saliently depict what it is like to journey through life straddling two cultures, while asserting only one identity.

The largest immigrant community in the United States are Latinos. Mostly coming from Mexico and Puerto Rico, many of us are children of poor migrants who had come seeking out the land of "milk and honey." But because we are poor and a people of color and minority ethnic cultures, we find that the honey is laced with vinegar and the milk is curdled. Our geographical proximity to our native lands—Mexico, Puerto Rico and the rest of Latin America—

make us different from many other immigrant groups both past and present. We have what sociologists call "one foot in the US and the other in the homeland." Unlike other immigrant groups in the US we try hard not to assimilate, choosing to maintain and strengthen our extended family connections across boundaries. It is these mesh of filial and cultural ties that give us our pride, identity and sense of belonging.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's my generation became the first large contingent of Latinos in the U. S. to have formal education. The Civil Rights Acts and the newly established equal opportunity quotas finally gave many of us an opportunity to go through college and have careers. Many of those who took this option were women. Suddenly we had a chance to work at a career, and to avoid early marriage and motherhood which was the only choice given our mothers. We were rife for the feminist movement, which at that time was energizing society. It took some time however for us to define our feminism since the movement in its early years had an overwhelmingly white and middle-class composition. We struggled with our own

contradictions: we resisted the voices of white women on the frontlines who seemed to sing a different tune from us, yet we could not help but hear the pained and anguished cries of our own mothers, sisters, neighbors and friends.

Like myself, Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros are products of these times. The stories in *The Mixquiahuala Letters* and *Woman Hollering Creek*, resonate with the struggle of that first generation of educated, liberated, and proud Latinas in the US during that period in our life which Castillo calls our "fledgling womanhood."

Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters* is the story of best friends Tere and Alicia told through a series of the former's letters to the latter. Mixquiahuala is where the two met: an obscure, pre-conquest Mexican village, as Tere describes it. A daughter of migrant laborer, Tere describes herself as a woman with dark hair and Asian eyes. In contrast, Alicia has fair skin and hair, traits that give no hint that her grandmother was a Spanish gypsy who had sang strange, dark love songs. Her parents had kept these connections away from her; they have long embraced main-

stream America's ideals and way of life.

These two women from different places in life navigate its many byways. They look for love in all the wrong places, test their values, and take in life's pains and glories. Tere the writer of the letters, conjures up memories of days gone by in her and Alicia's parallel lives. Each letter reveals the intimacy of their friendship and the depths of their being.

Ana Castillo, writes in the lyrical and mystical way only a poet knows how to. The two friends—one of indigenous roots, the other of European roots but both assimilated into the US mainstream culture—signify the tensions that exist between Latinos and their colonized roots. The descendants of the colonizers, shunning the isolation of being boxed in the role of Spanish-speaking citizens of Europe now, seek to identify with Latin America. They now attempt to understand and imbibe a culture that has survived colonialism and absorbed the varied colors of all the people that settled in the Americas.

My grandmother used to tell us her grandchildren, "you should not be afraid of the dead, for they will not hurt you but be fearful of the living for they are the ones who can do you harm." I grew up in a culture where the supernatural is seen as a natural part of life, and sometimes a medium through which life's profound meanings are discerned. In letter Twenty Four, (the letters are identified only as numbers), the two women are revealed to have experienced being "visited" by beings from another dimension. This letter strongly shows how much Ana Castillo has achieved in giving words and color to those experiences and feelings that my Latina friends and I have always taken for granted:

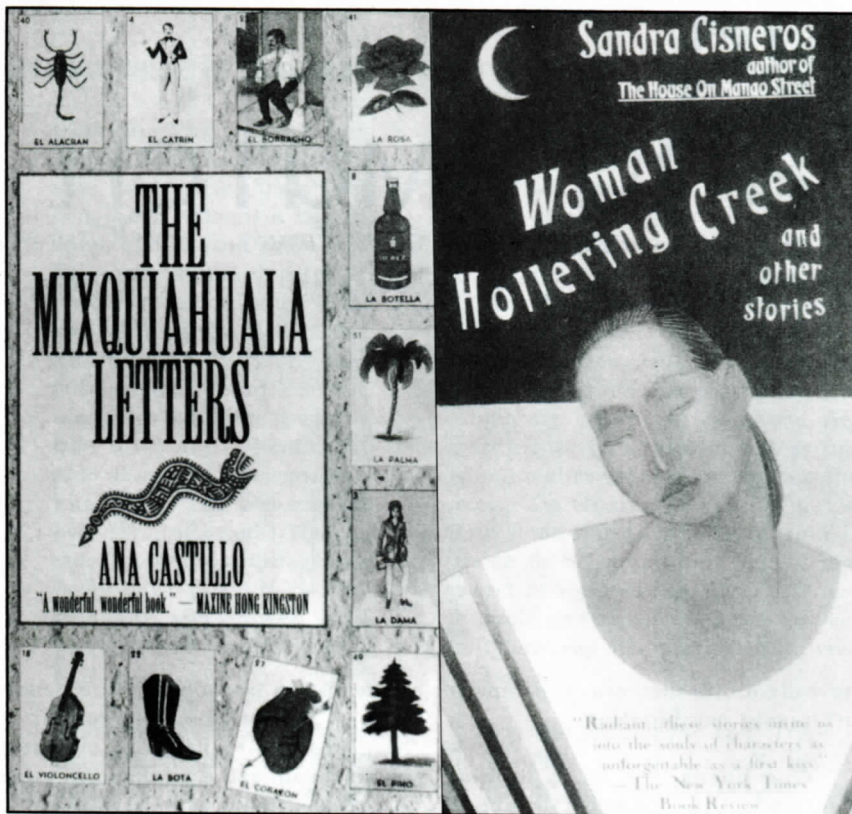
"There were hushed stirrings in the house...Furious rain poured outside on the patio, bathing the foliage that adorned the building's facade. We had gone to bed in scant clothing, the humidity of the night suffocated. Again, I was stirred from my sleep. I felt you leave the bed. You went to close the door to our room. We had deliberately locked it before going to bed. The skeleton key was in the lock. You had just closed it, turned the skeleton key...yet we both watched as it deliberately pushed inward. You jumped back into bed and my hands were moist as I reached out and clutched you...I recalled my spiritual guardian's advice, my grandmother, who had told me long ago: only fear could harm one...Clutching the crystal-beaded rosary in my hands and winding it around your fingers against my chest. I whispered with an exorcists will in your ear.. Our Father Who art in heaven...You've never been indoctrinated into an institutionalized religion, never heard eerie folktales from the old ones who lived in the Sierra Madre or near ancient ruins: never feared God or Satan, but there you were, quivering spasmodically in my arms. Hallowed be thy name."

Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek* is a compilation of well-written, witty short stories that demonstrate this writer's ability to capture the absurdities and contradictions, as well as the zest and spice of being a Latina.

Mexicans in the US hold on feverishly to their customs, traditions and beliefs. For us who are

predominantly Catholic, our religion is an integral part of our everyday life. We may or may not know it, but our brand of strong Catholicism is actually infused with the pagan beliefs of our ancestors from all three continents—Africa, Asia and the Americas. To most people then, including Catholics from other cultures, our religiosity is somewhat odd. We believe for instance in a Holy Trinity that presides over hundreds of saints who each can and will make miracles for and grant the prayers of the most devout. We therefore make it our business to know which saint does what and what ritual is appropriate for each heaven-bound petition. The story *Little Miracles, Kept Promises* shows this side of our identity as a people. Irreverent but not disrespectful, Sandra injects humor, reflecting on the issues that affect Mexicans and Mexican-Americans alike.

In *Eyes of Zapata*, Cisneros deals with our belief that love and hate are equal just as life and death are. Zapata is of course the revered Mexican revolutionary. Cisneros cleverly uses the legendary hero's reputation with women as a starting point of this tale about the complexities of Latina women's relationships with men. The narrator is one of Zapata's mistresses. We see her adoration of her lover, and we feel the heat and passion between them. Yet we are also made aware of her unflinching awareness of Zapata's boorish machismo. She makes us rile against the injustices women suffer just because they are women. More profoundly, she lets us into her secret: she can love and hate this man, her lover, at the same time and with equal fierceness because she is stronger than this great revolutionary. As she tries to understand his philandering she says:



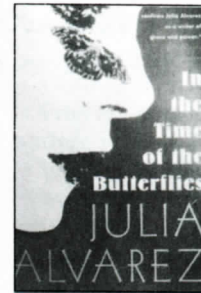
" You have your pas-times. That's how it's said, no? Your many pastimes. I know you take to your bed women half my age...These stupid country girls, how can they resist you? The magnificent Zapata in his elegant charro costume, riding a splendid horse. Your wide sombrero a halo around your face. You're not a man for them; you're a legend, a myth, a god. But you are as well my husband. Albeit sometimes. How can a woman be happy in love? To love like this, to love as strong as we hate. That is how we are, the women of my family. We never forget a wrong. We know how to love and we know how to hate."

With Cisneros' stories we are allowed to traverse different boundaries, to move through time and history. The reader quickly finds herself immersed in two cultures without losing sight of one singular

identity. Or one's feminist perspective. The feminist perspective though that permeates Cisneros' stories is not the same as the viewpoint of sisters from the North or even of native Latin American women. This is a perspective that recognizes and deals with our contradictions as Latinas who have "one foot in the US and the other in the homeland." We are reluctant to be like our mothers and sisters, yet we embrace their own love for passion and romance. We hold on to a culture that is intensely patriarchal, because that same culture also defines our people's great spirit. In *Woman Hollering Creek*, Sandra Cisneros boldly, passionately and sensuously brings this to the fore.

Luz Maria Martinez was born in Mexico and grew up in the same streets in Chicago as Castillo and Cisneros. She has been a Philippine resident in the last four years.

More Latina Writings in the Isis Library...

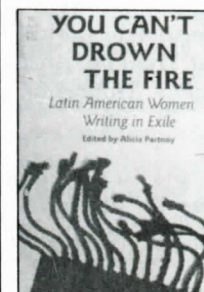


In the Time of the Butterflies by Julia Alvarez

Out of the Mirrored Garden: New Fiction by Latin American Women edited by Delia Poez



Knives and Angels: Women Writers in Latin America edited by Susan Bassnett



You Can't Drown the Fire: Latin American Women Writing in Exile edited by Alicia Partoy

Beyond the Border: A New Age in Latin American Women's Fiction edited by Nora Erro-Peralta and Caridad Silva-Nuñez



Reviews

sleaze and SMUTCH

THERE'S SOMETHING FOUL ABOUT THE NEW BOOK *GODDESSES OF THE LUST TRIANGLE*, AND KATHLEEN MALTZAHN SAYS THE STINK IS COMING FROM ITS AUTHOR, A KNOWN HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE.

"Like many true-blooded males of my generation, I was socialized to appreciate female bodies, especially in its (sic) prurient dimension. For men like me, the tempting sight of these ladies is hard to resist. They satisfy our sexual needs and provide a much-needed respite from a hard days work." (p.3)

No, this is not a sleazy Australian sex tourist visiting Thailand or the Philippines. Nor a big-bellied businessman leaving the strip shows of Metro Manila. This is Arnel de Guzman, executive director of the Philippine migrant welfare NGO KAIBIGAN, and author of the *Goddesses of the Lust Triangle: An Excursion into Manila's Erotic Dance Industry*.

Goddesses of the Lust Triangle describes itself as an attempt to "contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of women working in Manila's erotic dance industry.." (p. 5). Its author comes to this issue with expertise in several areas: Arnel de Guzman is a long-standing human rights advocate and an academic. As well, he says he has a "personal commitment to explore the issues of exploitation of Filipinas abroad," explaining that the growing phenomenon of Filipino women entertainers abroad has an impact on what

he calls erotic dancers. It seems a promising combination.

One hopes that as a human rights advocate, he will talk about the increasing recognition that women's rights are human rights, and perhaps investigate the international push to treat prostitution and other forms of sexual violence as human rights violations. One would also expect that as an academic, he will provide a broad perusal and sharp analysis of the issue. There is a rich array of information to be tapped on this issue; women's NGOs have been working with prostituted women for almost a decade now. Finally one would hope that as an activist committed to exploring the issues of women's exploitation, Arnel will at least show some compassion and sensitivity.

De Guzman does none of these. Perhaps, he sees no reason to. It is enough, he says, to make the data public. Those who may be "interested in exploring more possibilities can use [it] as a take-off point."

So what does he do?

He enters the bars, watches the strip shows, invites the women to his table and fondles their bodies. I can't see what take-off point these provide, except for male suprema-

cists out to consolidate their feelings of dominance. The reader is hard-pressed to find any evidence of his promised sociological "edge in terms of being able to intellectualize [his] own erotic tendencies" (p. 4), much less his self-declared commitment to serious research.

Try and find genuine discussion of exploitation in the following extract, where de Guzman, and his friends, enter the club *Night Tripper's* VIP Room. VIP rooms are private rooms in bars that men can rent and have women sent into. There they can sit and watch the strip show without anyone seeing them, and they are given free reign with as many women as they want and can afford. VIP rooms allow men to treat women as they please and have sex in whatever way they want, without even having to leave the bar. In the name of research, de Guzman and three of his friends hire a VIP room, and women. Their "partners" are dancers and periodically leave the VIP room to perform:

"We breathlessly awaited [Aiko's] re-entry into the room for the much-awaited "shower and lotion" portion. She was really well-endowed. Her breasts were round and firm. The nipples were not so big and a little

THE WOMAN IS THERE TO BE CONSUMED, AND IF SHE WON'T OBLIGE BY PRETENDING TO ENJOY HERSELF,

pinkish. The mound between her shapely thighs was bushy. Handling [sic] [Engineer Nelson] a bar of soap, she poured some water from a small pitcher onto her smooth and shiny body...Dutifully, Nelson did as he was told. ...[He] rubbed her behind. Since it was not forbidden to scrub her luscious breasts, he also massaged her melon-like boobs...In her second set, Aiko returned... Nelson was the first to massage her body with the lotion. But this time, she allowed us to participate in the act." (p.45)

And this, I think, is the value of this book. It shows us how men such as de Guzman see women. It is not about "goddesses" but gods: men who believe themselves to be the masters of women and their bodies. It shows the lack of compassion and intelligence of supposedly mature, even politically progressive men, and it underscores how irrelevant the likes and dislikes of these women and girls are.

In one incident, a naked woman is sent into de Guzman's VIP room. The author describes without surprise or dismay the fact that she says nothing to them as she is pawed and perved at. It seems her personhood is considered absolutely irrelevant:

"Bruce held her waist and sucked her two erect prune-like nipples. We were envious so each complained loudly. "It is unfair. How about us? Oh, she even gyrated". Lyka ignores us completely. She just continued swaying to the music as if savoring each word. "Close your eyes, I'd like to see you tonight in my sweet dreams." (p. 58)

Many people would see this

as a classic example of disassociation: a woman cutting off from a situation, and even her body, to cope with being humiliated, harmed, or treated like an object. It is often discussed as a common coping mechanism of people being sexually abused, including women in prostitution. But the sociologist not only misses this completely, he misinterprets the whole scene. According to him, she is not struggling to survive; she's savouring the song. De Guzman does not get it and does not care. The woman is there to be consumed, and if she won't oblige by pretending to enjoy herself, de Guzman will re-write reality and say she is savouring sweet dreams.

Goddesses of the Lust Triangle is shallow, simplistic and self-indulgent, and one can only wonder how it qualifies as research towards a PhD in sociology. But it is more than embarrassingly superficial. This book contributes to the never-ending justification of the sex industry. It feeds into the ongoing blurring of the way men benefit from and enjoy the sex trade, and legitimises the blaming or trivialising of the women involved. One example of this is the author's approach to the women. While conceding that the culture of the club is "one of exploitation" (p. 113), de Guzman insists that the women "are not angels" (p. 114). "Their 'lumpenic' or socially deviant tendencies are obvious..." he says, "[g]ive them an inch and they will take a foot." This is, he says, 'a result of the "social world" and "conditioning." What this means is not explained or explored. However, in case we read such comments as showing compassion for these women, or awareness of the way society forms, uses and exploits them, the book ends with a reminder of the dangers of prostitution, for men!

"...these are instances when

these victims become the "victimizers." They take their "revenge" on the customers...These customers are stripped off [sic] their money. The women twiddle them around their fingers. It is too late when they realize that they have been scored at [sic]. The world of the exotic dancers in the "lust triangle" is a complicated one. The world of Aiko and Medina and Patricia Jones is definitely not a one-dimensional world. Enter their world at your own risk." (p. 115)

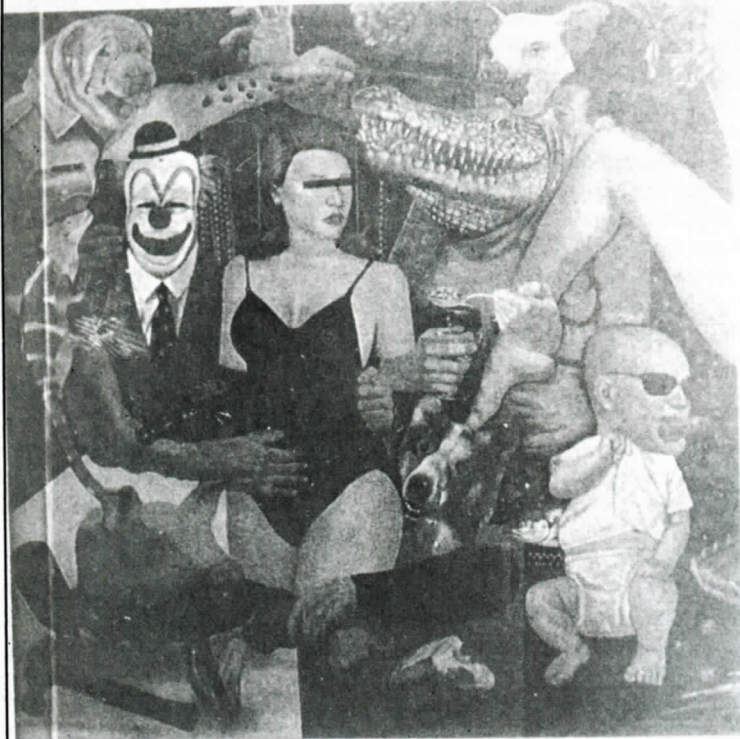
This world of the sex industry is a risky one. But it is women and girls who are at risk, not men like Arnel de Guzman, or any other man who goes to strip clubs and uses women in prostitution.

Seeing these risk, humiliation and harm, many feminists talk of prostitution as a male system, one that benefits men and insists on their self-proclaimed right to women's bodies. In the short-term, some women earn enough to survive. In the long term, however, women pay a high price. Prostitution is not a long-term, life-affirming "profession". It is not something women can stay in safely and securely. Instead, it is likely to expose them to humiliation and violence, make them sick, leave them to raise children without support, and discard them when they are too "old", too "ugly" or just aren't wanted any more. But not everybody loses out as badly as the women who are its raw materials. Ironically, the sex industry is a multi-million dollar, multi-national industry. In prostitution, and its brother industry, pornography, sex industrialists are made wealthy and powerful, and ordinary men are reassured about their power over and superiority to women.

DE GUZMAN WILL RE-WRITE REALITY AND SAY SHE IS SAVOURING SWEET DREAMS.

GODDESSES

LUST



ARNEL F. DE GUZMAN

If de Guzman had been interested, he could have discussed all these and more with the women's groups in Quezon City, who have offices only minutes away from his office. He didn't bother. Instead, he devoted only one paragraph, in the last pages of the book, to considering these arguments, incorrectly claiming that feminists see the women as blameless and victims, and in doing so depict them as "helpless creatures" (p. 114). In fact, feminists are among the first to affirm and salute the survival skills and fortitude of women in prostitution but that does not mean they excuse the industry. Feminists believe the women should be supported and assisted, and at the same time, the dehumanising in-

dustry of prostitution should be criticised and dismantled.

But de Guzman does not simply ignore feminist work and feminists, he denigrates and ridicules them. He describes Bruce Lewis, his "constant companion in the course of [his] research" as "the quintessential 'feminist'." This is the same man who is shown repeatedly sexually harassing the women. Why feminist? Because, says de Guzman, in what one can only as-

sume he sees as a little joke, he prefers his own "Filipino translation of that label - 'babaero' (womanizer)". (p. 116). It's about as cute as calling Marcos a human rights advocate.

While this book would be a concern regardless of who wrote it, Arnel de Guzman's position in KAIBIGAN, an NGO working for Filipino migrants' rights and welfare makes it doubly so. What does it mean to advocate and lobby for Filipino entertainers in Japan when in the Philippines he is clamoring to get his hands on their bodies? Is it just that his macho patriotism means that he does not want Japanese men to have "his" women? And how would he be able to listen to, represent and fight for women who are being humiliated and objectified, and at times beaten, raped, or murdered, when he thinks that prostitution and the trafficking in women are about "lust", men's "sexual needs" and women "twiddl[ing] [men] around their fingers'. It may be that KAIBIGAN's integrity as a migrant organisation committed to all people's human rights, regardless of gender, is severely and irreparably compromised by de Guzman's continued leadership within it.

Goddesses of the Lust Triangle is a sleazy, shoddy, little book. It capitalises on women's pain and feeds off their bodies. It reminds us how ordinary, supposedly decent and enlightened men can still see women as less than human. It reminds us of what it means to live in a world where men are gods, and women their playthings. And it reminds us of the need to work for a world where we can bring down the gods from their heights, and all live equally as human beings with dignity and value.

Kathleen Maltzhan, an Australian, lived in the Philippines for five years and helped found SINAG and BUKAL, NGOs that work with streetwalkers on issues like health, AIDS awareness and police harassment. Aside from freelance writing, Kathleen also writes poetry; some of her works have previously appeared in Women in Action, HECATE and other feminist publications.

Healthy Readings

IN 1991 FIVE WOMEN'S DOCUMENTATION CENTERS from different regions, each with health as a primary focus, met in a roundtable conference to try to develop a common core collection of resource materials on women and health. Originally, the five women's centers conceived of a single core collection. This core collection was seen as representative not only of the width and breadth, but also of the high quality of productions on women's health issues and concerns. It was soon realized though that, since together they represented three languages, it made more sense to develop two or three collections: one in English, one in Spanish, and perhaps another one in Portuguese. The five centers were ARROW (Malaysia), Cidhal (Mexico), Isis International (Chile), Sos Corpo (Brazil) and the Boston Women's Health Book Collective.

The books featured here make up the core collection of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, a pioneer in women and health issues and the publisher of "Our Bodies, Ourselves," a classic guide to women's health for nearly 25 years. Their core collection, according to the BWHBC, might serve as a "start up" library collection in health or a "useful health component added to a collection with a broader focus."

We at Isis are particularly keen in promoting the BWHBC Core Collection, not only because all the books in it are available in our own resource center and library or because one of our own books made it to the list. Many of the books in BWHBC's list have received good feedback from our library users and readers. If we are made to draw up a list of the most frequently borrowed books in our library, a number of BWHBC's top choices will most definitely be on it.

1 in 3: Women with Cancer Confront an Epidemic edited by Judy Bride (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1991); **Challenging the Culture of Silence: Building Alliances to End Reproductive Tract Infections** by the International Women's Health Coalition; *Women and Development Unit-University of the West Indies* (New York: IWHC, 1994) **Changing Bodies, Changing Lives** by Ruth Bell (New York: Random House, 1987); **Close to Home: Women Reconnect Ecology, Health and Development Worldwide** edited by Vandana Shiva (Philadelphia, New Society Publishers, 1994); **Freedom from Violence: Women's Strategies from Around the World** edited by Margaret Schuler (New York: UNIFEM, 1992); **From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement** edited by Marlene Gerber Fried (Boston: South End Press, 1990); **Immigrant Women's Health Handbook** by the Immigrant Women's Health Centre (Toronto: IWHC, 1988); **Natural Healing in Gynecology** by Rina Nissim, translated by Roxanne Claire (New York and London: Pandora Press, 1986); **Norplant: Under Her Skin** by Barbara Mintzes, et al. (Amsterdam: Women's Health Foundation and Eburon, 1993); **Organizing Strategies in Women's Health: An Information and Action Handbook** edited by Lakshmi Menon (Manila: ISIS-Manila, 1992); **Reproductive Rights and Wrongs The Global Politics of Population Control** (revised edition) by Betsy Hartmann (Boston: South End Press, 1995); **Taking Population Out of the Equation: Reformulating I=PAT** by Patricia H. Hynes (North Amherst, Massachusetts, Institute on Women and Technology, 1993); **The Health of Women: A Global Perspectives** by Marge Koblinsky, et al. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993); **The Menopause Industry: How the Medical Establishment Exploits Women** by Sandra Coney (Alameda, California: Hunter House, 1994); **The New Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women** (4th edition) by Boston Women's Health Book Collective (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992); **The New Ourselves, Growing Older: Women Aging with Knowledge and Power**

Boston Women's Health Book Collective's Core Collection

by Paula B. Doress-Worters and Diana Laskin Siegal (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); **The Universal Childbirth Picture Book** by Fran P. Hosken and Marcia L. Williams (Lexington, Massachusetts: Women's International Network News, 1981); **Vaccination Against Pregnancy: Miracle or Menace** by Judith Richter (Amsterdam: Health Action International and BUKO Pharmakampagne, 1993); **Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden, World Bank Discussion Paper No. 255** by Lori L. Heise, Jacqueline Pitanguy and Adrienne Germain (Washington DC: World Bank, 1994); **Women and Disability** by Esther Boylan (London: Zed Books, 1991); **Women and Health** by Patricia Smyke (London: Zed Books, 1991); **Women and HIV/AIDS** by Marge Berer and Sunanda Ray (London: Pandora Press, 1993); **Women as Wombs** by Janice G. Raymond (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993); **Women's Health: Readings on Social, Economic, and Political Issues** (2nd edition); edited by Nancy Worcester and Marianne Whatley (Dubuque, Indiana: Kendall/Hunt, 1994).

For more information about the books, write or email Isis International-Manila, or the Boston Women's Health Book Collective: Box 192, West Somerville, MA 02144, USA.



lust across cultures

so this is how it feels like
i thought to myself
as I massage your narrow forehead
to touch you
smooth, japanese skin as i expected
you closed your eyes to the rhythm of my strokes
down to the bridge of your small nose
"lie on your stomach for P500," i jokingly uttered
i sensed your willingness
as i knead your back
small frame, lithe but firm
"this is my favorite," i said
"it's good you found a part you like," you responded
as i slid my hands on your neck and chest
i noticed your hardness
as i breathed behind your ears
your eyes closed to relish
as i kissed your nipples
more goosebumps formed i noticed
we were laughing as i explore
more sensitive spots
"where are the others, sensuous man?", i queried
"no clues", you said
your hands and feet get cold
when you are excited
"as cold as my heart", you declared
we caught each other's lips endlessly
tongues rolling, exploring, tasting each other's juices
"that's 2 songs and a half long", i whispered
"are you going to have sex with me even if i don't love
you?"
"i don't care, as long as i enjoy it", i spoke
you wrapped me with your arms and legs
that pacified me to sleep
and we continued again as i wake
and went on after we were totally undressed
i savoured the wetness of your tongue
gliding from my lips down
to my neck and breasts and lower
though i nearly threw you off when you tickled my tummy
you keep licking me hungrily
so this is the good life, i thought
and then you went
inside me and thrusted
"not so rough, it hurts" i protested
but you haven't heard
and i got lost in the sensual pleasure of it until
you came and your weight descended upon me
we were both out of breath
for a while i thought we were united
as we snuggled deeper in each other's sweat.

yen, 9 january 1996

VIS-À-VIS

for you
remind me of
starry nights
and the moon
at its fullest
while I nibble
your heavenly
body inch
by inch.

*porque tú
me recuerdas
de esas noches
con muchas
estrellas y
una luna llena
mientras que
mordisceo
tú cuerpo
celestial pulgada
a pulgada.*

wildhead

28 may 1996



(cont. from p. 29... Rolling)

small business by myself," she says. "They kindly explained the policies and regulations concerning the setup and operation of a private business, and encouraged me to have a try."

Meiyu was inspired. She realised that her experience as a cook and manager could help her run a small business selling snacks such as dumplings and buns. Borrowing US\$960 from friends, she set up a 16-square-meter shop making and selling fastfood. The shop was named Youli, meaning "benefits from friends."

"It was really a hard beginning," reminisces Meiyu. "Every morning I got up at three o'clock to knead dough, mix fillings and steam buns."

When business slowed down, Meiyu would hawk her baked goodies on the street. "That was quite trying," she says, "especially when I bumped into acquaintances who laughed at me as if I were begging."

Despite the small size of her business, Meiyu stuck to her own creed of being honest and never selling stale food. If there was a surplus, she took it home to her family.

Her delicious home-made snacks and enthusiastic service became well known in the neighbourhood, and gradually her business grew.

In 1993, she expanded her snackbar into a fastfood store, serving rice and other dishes. Then in March of 1995, she established her chain of stores beginning with three. But she soon saw the demand for more and added another two.

One of her stores is located at the Huli New Zone, an area

where new factories and joint ventures are being built daily. Meiyu saw the potential market for her quick lunch foods, and as soon as she had the economic strength, she invested US\$60,000 to set up the store. The Huli store proved a good investment, raking in nearly US\$840 daily.

Meiyu runs her fastfood chain her own way. In the morning, she sells snacks; at lunch, she provides fastfood. Meiyu and her employees don't have an idle moment in their day. In the afternoon they produce frozen snacks for the Xiamen market. Every year, her company turns out about 20,000 bags of quick-frozen dumplings as its sideline production.

As the business expanded, her husband and college-educated son and son-in-law joined her in managing the chain stores. But there are still things that Meiyu insists on doing herself.

Every morning, she personally goes to the market to do the shopping. Usually, she needs 500 kg of rice, 200 kg of meat and 500 kg of vegetables for the daily supply of the chain stores.

"To guarantee the quality of our food, I make sure that we use fresh meat and vegetables, so I buy them everyday," she says. She purchases directly from farmers, paying 15 percent less than the market rate. By doing so, she manages to keep prices stable in her stores.

From Meiyu's shops, a diner can have a nice lunch of two hot dishes, a bowl of soup and a bowl of rice for around US\$1.20.

"The price here is quite reasonable," says Xiao Zhang,

a 20-year old worker at a factory near Meiyu's store in Huli. "There are some cheaper stores around but their quality is no match for Auntie Yang's. Lunching here is a kind of enjoyment."

Another principle Meiyu has set for her stores is sanitation. "Sanitation of the food and environment is what I care for most," she says. All her employees receive medical check-ups before being hired and 15 days training before starting work. Each store is equipped with a sterilizing machine to ensure clean utensils.

Sometimes Meiyu invests in what seems to be a lost cause, such as the contract for the operation of the Songbai High School canteen in 1995.

Impressed by Meiyu's reputation, the school's headmaster approached her with a request of helping him open a canteen in his school. "Ours is among the top schools in Xiamen, and I wanted our canteen to be first rate as well," he told Meiyu.

Meiyu didn't let him down. Her fastfood made the canteen the most popular among high schools in the city. But because she had cut her prices by one third to help them out, she began to lose nearly US\$480 each month.

But Meiyu has her own way of counting. "What I've scored from the Songbai canteen is more than money. Its prestige can bring me more chances in business," she says.

Meiyu knows the value of money, but doesn't think that money is everything, it's more a matter of hard work and being able to earn your own way in this world.

Women and Internet

Face to the South

by Lourdes Vázquez

When women took their first tentative steps towards using

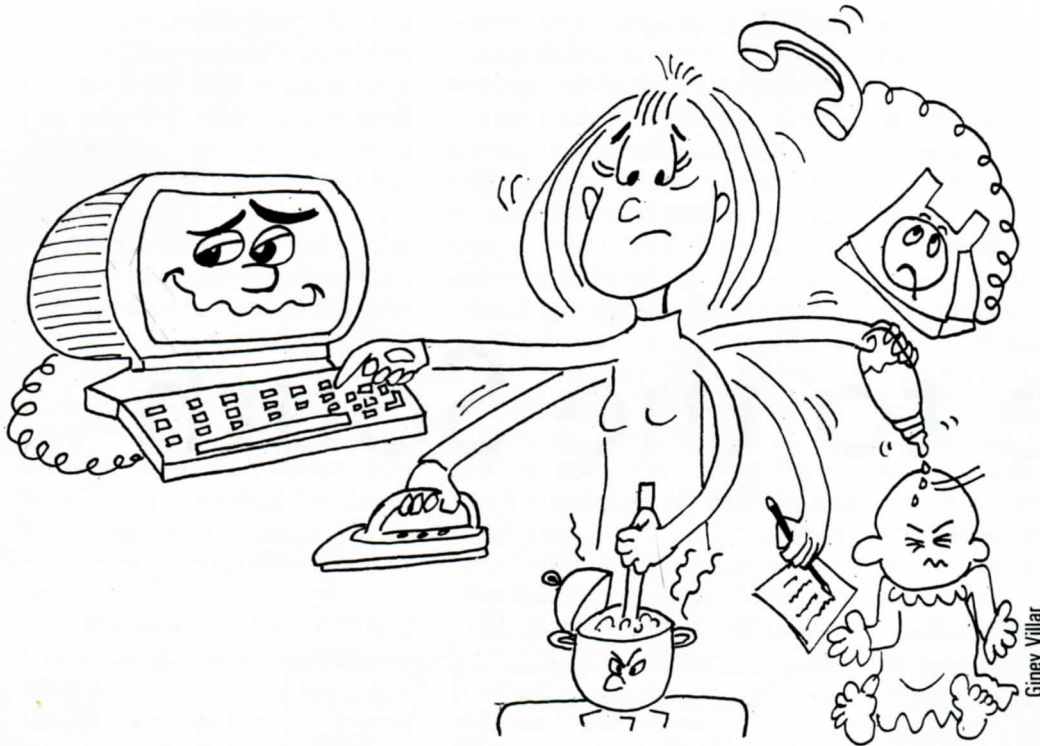
computers some 15 or 20 years ago, it was an experience similar to when we first tried to drive a car at the beginning of the century, or when we first entered the world of photography. Considering the social prejudice that we faced, the seduction of the camera lens, like the adventure of the automobile, was a challenge for women. Today, we approach a computer, we install a modem, not because they taught us how to in the shop, but because a friend told us that a modem is that electrical thing that is connected to the computer and converts "digital signals into a sound which can be sent by a common telephone line." We still don't understand, but we get the modem and install it, and another friend gives us a list of addresses. In this way, we enter the Internet, without any



type of training or real idea about this vast interactive world.

It is only later, when we begin to study this new dimension, that we discover that the experience of the woman in this virtual screen is both personal and political, and that cyberspace is once again a predominantly male area. This is why many women use neutral pseudonyms online, so as not to feel discriminated or—worse—sexually harassed. And this is

why one day, two or three of us decide to get together and create a work group, whether to study this crazy cyber thing a bit more, or to help those who are as bad or worse than ourselves. And so we begin to understand and concretize some of the tools which the Internet provides, like the OPAC venue with its vast catalogues of the most important libraries of the world, the electronic mail which makes it easy for us to send and receive messages, the electronic con-



for the rest of the world and especially in the South.

In Latin America and the Caribbean for example, Jamaica connected on the Internet in 1991, Ecuador in 1992, Bolivia in 1995, Argentina and Chile in 1990. Venezuela, as a typical petroleum country connected in the 1980s, but again as a typical petroleum country did

Giney Villar

ferences or newsgroups in which we can participate in discussions and debates, WAIS, Telnet, "World Wide Web" with its potential for sound and graphics.

We also discover that the electronic conferences, which are organized around distinct themes, allow us to dialogue and debate with other colleagues without taking academic backgrounds or age into consideration. One definition of these work groups can be found in an IDRC essay on information: "Carefully designed computer conferences offer a unique opportunity for conducting investigations at an international level. Participants can at their leisure take as much time as they want to articulate their points and carry out any homework they deem appropriate."

However, we know from experience that this technology is not equally available and we can talk for hours about the feminization of poverty, but it boils down to the fact that women's salaries are much lower than men's and that women receive much less training or education in general, and in the area of science and technology in particular. Thus it is less easy for women to own or have access to computers, modems, and computer programmes or to subscribe to a private electronic mail service. The cost of telecommunications and the lack of equipment like telephone lines and computers are critical in countries in the South. The Internet has had a strong support of the American government and has been in the USA for a couple of years. But this is not the case

not start using it till the '90s. We know that electronic mail is being used a lot by academic and government institutions and corporations in Brazil and Mexico. We also know that generally this technology is in the hands of male supervisors and technicians who control its use, because they have better education or because they are on the management level.

How much money is the state investing in this technology? Venezuela, Colombia and Chile, for example, allocate two million dollars in order to improve their access to Internet. What does this mean? Where does this money go exactly? How many members from the civil society will actually benefit from this investment? How many women?

We could add to this list other factors that usually are not taken into consideration and which can affect women's

use of the technology. Outside cyberspace and in the reality of our lives, women are still burdened and tied down by their usual daily concerns and decisions. Women researchers from the Bay Area in the USA note that "additional deterrents to on-line participation may be attributed to women's roles in society. While more women are now in the work place, they often are still the primary caretakers for their children. In the majority of households, women bear the brunt of household chores. Women may find they have less free time to learn to navigate on-line systems." Statistics in the sphere of computer science, verifies what we already know: that only a small number of women are specializing in this field. Clearly, more men than women have entry into cyberspace.

The women who do enter cyberspace use it differently than men. Studies show that women navigate the Internet in a distinct way. Their dialogue is more inclusive, less formal and categorical, and is much less hierarchical. Look at this message from the Association of Independent Women's Initiatives in Russia: "Dear Sister! Today we have our e-mail training in Tver. It is Saturday. The weather is fine. The sun is shining. But we crowd around our computer and can't stop our work..." Josephine Beoku-Betts of the Secretariat of Once and Future Action Network (OFAN) said in

an OFAN electronic conference that as women, we can be intimate. Our language is like that of our mother when she wakes us up. "Good morning. How are you today. I hope you all had a pleasant and restful holiday season." Cyberspace is full of these women and their cauldrons of spells.

What do some of these women do? The women of MAGIN from Cuba is unique if only for the fact that it made the first attempt to connect women in Cuba with those outside. Its objectives include maximizing the exchange of

Outside cyberspace and in the reality of our lives, women are still burdened and tied down by their usual daily concerns and decisions.

information, developing techniques, and coordinating research and projects. By doing so, it facilitates a democratic space in which to talk and make decisions. There is also ModemMuher. This is a project of Mexican women that arose out of the need to set up a permanent communication between the feminist movement and women at the national and international level via electronic mail. There is also the Alai mujeres, a group that works in the area of communication, training and policy making, facilitating a space where

women's movements can coordinate and exchange information on media and communication projects and policies.

But what characterizes these technically skilled women, most of whom dedicate a considerable amount of time to offering training and workshops, creating work groups and conferences or posting information? What kind are these women who offer voluntary services to support this interactive dialogue? The common characteristic is age. They are

young activists in the post-modern era, self-taught in computers, programming and data bases. Personally, this is marvellous. It shows that young women have always been there with the feminist movement. They capture the attention of people who, after having spent months talking with them by electronic mail, meet them in person and are fascinated by their youth. "So young?" they ask, not understanding that it is precisely because of their youth that these women took the risks to enter the world of science and technology. It is these young women who search daily for the appropriate technology for their organisations, who give technical assistance, who dialogue with different tele-communications companies, who offer training in the use of the Internet and its different components, and who also keep up to date with the innovations in this area such as the World

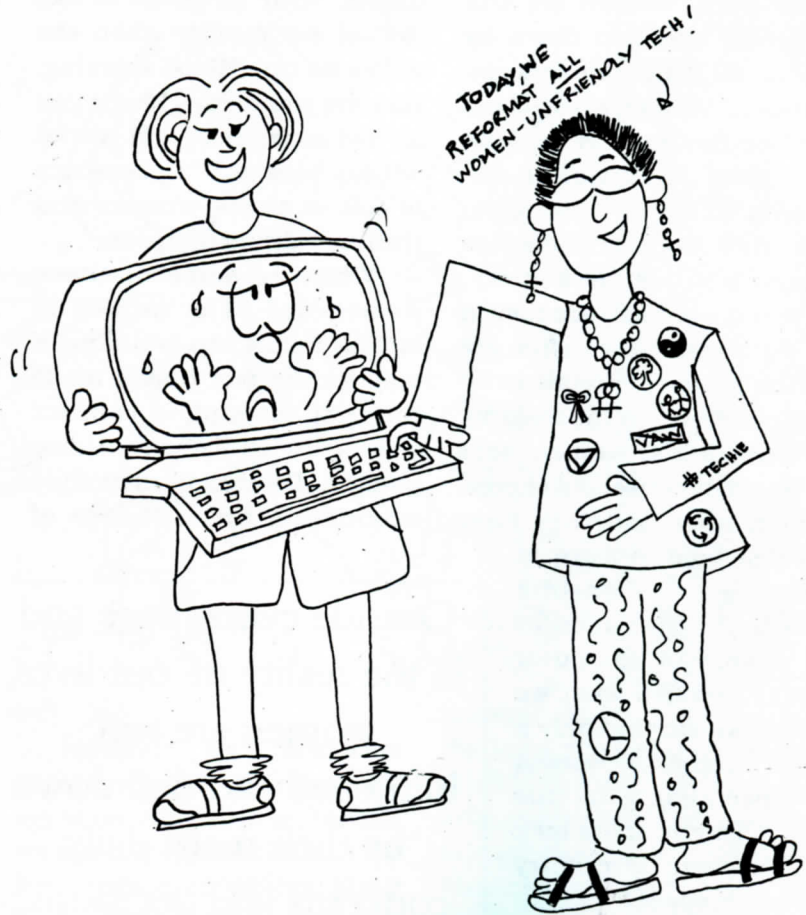
Wide Web and its attributes.

Yet, it is important to point out that these same young women who are professionals in this area may, in trying to advance professionally in the predominantly male arena of information, later find that doors are closed to them at conferences, workshops or marketing fairs and even at work.

Activist women distribute urgent appeals and organise women around a theme, ask for advice about politics and how to develop projects or problem-solving strategies, insert their database, write in the Internet a policy paper and debate with all sorts of people. They organise regional and international meetings, coordinate projects in remote areas and in their own homes and influence debates on gender. They are creating their own space.

Not only is cyberspace a space for academe-based women exchanging research, bibliographies and questionnaires. Today, both women academicians and women activists answer questions, publicise their work, discuss gender in all its complexity. More importantly, they continue to get to know each other through getting to know each other through fibre optics.

But there is still a lot left to do. Despite the 20 years that have passed since the first world meeting of women in Mexico, there are still millions who do not have access to these new technology. In fact, many still cannot



contact their immediate neighbours by mail or even by telephone. This is the case for millions of rural and working women.

Yet, in pushing for the use of cyberspace, we must also always remember that the South has always been inundated with information from the North and the Internet is not an exception. The Internet is filled with information that sometimes are not relevant to the experiences of women in the South. Information too is almost always in English.

This is why this new information revolution should be discussed much more by women of the South within the

South, a discussion between equals, in order for civil society and particularly for the women's movement to be able to take hold of the technology.

De cara al Sur. Face to the South. Lourdes Vázquez works with the International Women's Tribune Center. This article was culled from the paper she presented at the Women and Development Conference of the National Women's Studies Association, USA in June 1996.

De Cara al Sur also refers to the Mexican feminist journal FEM's new devoted page in the Internet.



Who Stole INCEST?

by Louise Armstrong

Incest was once a feminist issue, an issue of male violence against women. Over the years, feminists have been able to encourage women who have been victimized to come out and the increasing number of reported incest cases is a measure of the women's success. But there's a downside. Incest, now seems only to be about individual damage and personal therapy. Who hijacked the agenda?

In 1978, when people asked what I'd written about, I'd say "incest." And they would then most often ask: "Oh? Are you a feminist?" Now, when I say (with some reticence) that I have written about incest, people ask: "Oh? Are you a psychologist?"

Incest, the sexualization of children cast in Procrustean form has been transmogrified—hijacked. From a political issue framed by feminists as one of male violence against women and children—a sexual offence on the part of men, for which we demanded accountability, and censure—incest has, in these years, been co-opted and re-formulated by the therapeutic ideology, as an illness in women, to be treated. In children, it is a prediction of illness to be treated.

In 1971 we spoke of what caused child sexual abuse and its role in socialising women and training them for sexual submission. By now, you will hear few speak of what causes incest. Most speak only of what incest causes: sleeplessness, lack of trust, sexual acting-out, timidity, aggression, destiny itself. Children raped by relatives are said to be doomed—to become depressed, dissociated, drug-addicted, suicidal.

It is feared that
the response now
to incest is not a
call for change
but a call for
treatment.

The issue of incest is now one of illness. It is not social but medical. The response is not a call for change, but a call for "treatment." It is not that we were wrong. Far from it. We identified incest as something fathers and stepfathers had done throughout history and continued to do, not in spite of the fact that they knew it was wrong, but because they believed it was their right: justifiable.

And this is what the offenders said as well. "It's natural, it's perfectly normal." By 1980, men were helping our understanding still more, as academics and other professionals spoke to us as the "pro-incest lobby" of "positive incest." They told us that "children have the right to express themselves sexually, even with members of their own family." They told us, in any case, "the rate of incidence is so high as to make prohibition absurd." They told us that incest could be beneficial.

Well, we knew it could be, too. And we knew who benefited. We knew that incest was not

for anything anyway, the bitch.")

During the 1980s, we had further corroboration that incest was not confined to the rape of children, but one of the many male violence against women. Children, we learned, were now being abused by fathers in retaliation for divorce. And they were being abused with far less finesse.

Yet by then, what we knew, what could be seen from the evidence, had already been overridden, suppressed by male-protective forces. From the moment of our first speaking out, newfound experts on the rape of children had risen full-blown from the sea, pronouncing knowledge with the authority of mental health professionals. The oddest thing was even they knew that the rape of daughters was also violence against women. They said so. In their own language, of course, in their own way.

The mothers of incest victims, they pronounced, simply did not put out enough, were not attractive enough, were not nice enough to their men.

only the grotesque absurdity of men turning the full power of adult male sexuality against infants, toddlers and pre-teens. It was also a form of violence against women. Our fathers had helped us out here as well. ("This would kill your mother if she found out." "She's not good

They were rejecting or were frigid (or sexually rapacious). This, they said, is what drives men to the beds of their five-year-olds, this "incest mother." Well, this was not exactly the way we would have put it. But it meant these new experts saw what we did: that when men

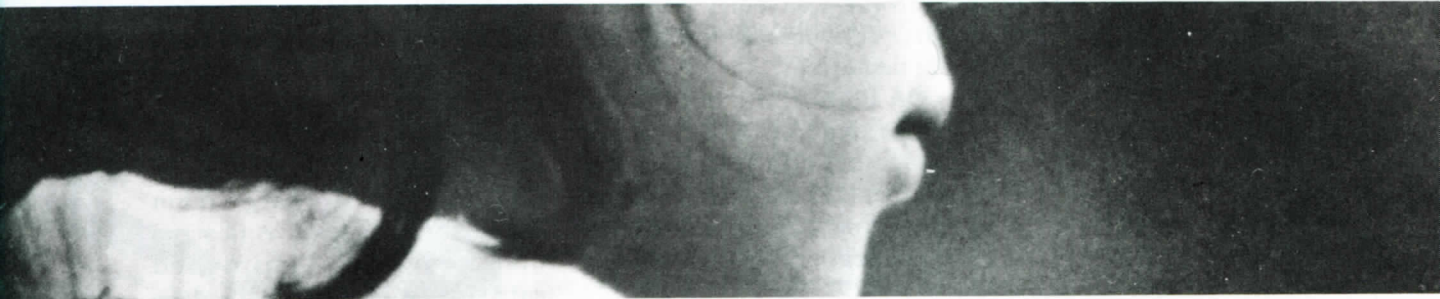
The US policy to decriminalise incest not only punishes women and children. It also diminished the impact of adult survivors' testimony.

sexually assault their children, it is often driven by rage at women.

There was a subtle but serious distinction between the "pro-incest" folks and the new experts. The "pro-incesters" wanted incest legalised, whereas the new experts wanted it "decriminalised." Legalised had the virtue of candour. But decriminalising incest won in the USA. That meant that as a matter of policy, incest was subject to state intervention: civil, not criminal. Incest is a criminal offence in the United Kingdom. Yet, as a formality,

choosing her husband over her child, denying what the kid said. You had to have her, alive or dead. ("Sometimes the incest mother is absent from the home, or terminally ill.")

So women, who, discovering the abuse, left and tried to protect the child, were simply not playing their role in the drama as now scripted. For this outrageous failure to read their lines as written in a script essential to defraying male accountability, the mothers had to be viciously punished. And so these "vindictive, hysterical" women lost custody of their



permission from the Director of Public Prosecutions must be granted before it goes to court—like treason, incest is treated as unpleasant and unusual. In the USA, in an intervention that would target, not rapist fathers, but "incest families", civil statutes were written that faulted the mother who "knew or should have known." Well, looked at generously, even that message was not so very different from our own: Women should know that men feel a liberty to rape children.

One problem with their way of putting things was that in order to have "intra-familial child sexual abuse" for which the woman was equally (or more) culpable, you absolutely had to have this "incest mother" hanging around in the picture,

children—to the alleged abusers. They were that dangerous. They threatened to expose the whole conceptual fraud. War on children and their mothers had been declared.

Another problem with the new experts' way of putting things was that in practice a policy of decriminalisation not only resulted in punishing women and children, it also diminished the import of adult survivors' testimony. It rendered individual survivors vulnerable to the newly emerging specialists in problem management—those in the therapeutic arena who, alone, assured survivors that what had happened to them mattered. Alas, in this medicalized world, survivors' experience mattered in direct proportion to the degree

Incest has been individualised and medicalized and incest survivors now seek personal—rather than political action.

of manifest illness. How sick you were proved how bad it was. Checklists offered expanding lists of expected symptoms, the display of which was said to be evidence of your past abuse.

Within this individualised universe, some individual survivors sought personal—rather than united, political—action. They did battle against statutes of limitation and instigated lawsuits against alleged perpetrators. Making incest a financial issue for offenders in the USA of course galvanised a spirited, quickly organised, political response. The oxymoronic False Memory Syndrome was born. War on adult survivors' credibility had been declared.

On both fronts of this war against children and mothers and against adult survivors, it was the other side that had the army. Individualisation and medicalization had precluded

political organisation. By now, friends in this struggle would say: "Things are not going well." To which I replied: "Things are going very well. Just not for us."

We have been re-silenced. Within the larger world. And within a world that is labeled feminist as well.

You cannot hear us anymore—those of us who have spoken out about incest as a licensed abuse of male power. Our voices have been drowned out by those who speak of incest as "gender neutral." Drowned out by those who speak of incest-as-illness, who would have us hear only that women survivors had been made fragile and helpless by the event in their childhood vaguely rendered by the word incest. Women are portrayed to us, in tones of great sympathy, as damaged, suffering from diminished capacity. And signs of damage, of diminished capacity—working backwards—are taken as "indicators" that they have been wounded by incest. Incest has become a metaphor for all the oppressions that feminism named.

What has happened in this brief 15 years since feminists first spoke out on incest as the explicit exoneration of fathers, the implication of mothers and the infantilization of women as survivors.

The personal is political. You may still hear the words but you can no longer hear the meaning behind them. You cannot hear that the point of speaking out was to identify commonalities that, once identified, could lead to political action for change. We spoke out publicly to break a silence—when there was silence to break. But speaking out was never intended to be all there was. We



courtesy of Deirdre McCartin of T.V. One



courtesy of Deirdre McCartin of T.V. One

Once, the point of speaking out was to identify commonalities that could lead to political action for change. Speaking out was never intended to be all there was.

endorsed help for individual women. But that was never meant to be all there was: the building of field hospitals to tend a predictably endless supply of wounded.

You cannot hear us anymore. Even though you cannot any longer hear silence on the prevalence of incest, you cannot anywhere hear what all this talk of incest means. You can't hear that it is about a license that is historical. Or that, until recently, what silenced women was not reticence or shame, but intimidation. You can't hear that, as recently as 1978, the law in Texas for instance held the complaining child liable as an accomplice-witness, a "participant," an instigator. For all the loose talk of the "crime" of incest, you can not hear that this male abuse of power continues to be quasi, semi, more-or-less legal in the USA. Or that where children and their protective mothers refuse to be silent, they will be silenced by the courts, and punished. And you cannot hear that these things are all connected, all part of the same weave. That the myth of the incest "triad" and the exclusive focus on victims' pathology are both tailored to protect the male offender. You can not hear this even within most gatherings of feminists.

Even the incest stories you now hear are selective. The stories of children yanked into the child welfare system are unheard. The stories of those placed under psychiatric surveillance, sometimes institutionalised, presumed according to mental health ideology to be at risk of emotional disturbance because their fathers raped them, are unheard. And yet we are

everywhere told that we are, at last, listening to children.

Nor do survivors' stories speak clearly of incest as male violence, nor of the deliberateness of that violence. Indeed, with the focus so heavily on illness, you can barely discern the fact of human agency: It is as though "incest" is a natural catastrophe—not rape by Daddy, who could just as easily have not done it.

What you can hear now is that we are at last—15 years after women began publicly speaking out, 10 years after the televising of the breakthrough documentary "Something About Amelia," five years after every talk show in the USA has routinised the airing of incest stories—breaking the silence.

Women continue to speak out but seldom in their own authentic voices. Rather, their speech echoes that of therapists; they speak the language of mental health—of their disorders and their path to healing. They speak of being in recovery, as though it were a geographical space. Their stories are absent of context, without larger meaning. In being framed as medical, incest has been rendered trivial.

Somehow, mental health ideology infiltrated and subverted feminist rationality. Once incest was re-formulated by treaters and healers, speaking out itself was transformed. Its meaning was changed. The personal became public but not political. It was not the abuse of male power but individual women and their symptoms who needed to change.

What we are speaking of here is not therapy, the private event. What we are referring to is the therapeutic ideology—

whose world enlarges the personal, with no agenda for the political. It is a belief system, a way of seeing the world that subverts the goals of feminism.

It promotes the personal to the paramount, sells belonging in suffering, offers consolation that what afflicts you is not politically engineered but an individual fate. When the therapeutic ideology triumphs, feminism loses.

Alas, it has proved very seductive. The therapeutic ideology infiltrated feminism through the issue of incest. It hijacked the issue from under feminism's nose. It pretended to feminism by hijacking feminist language. Combining that language with mental health credo, it offered to survivors something it called empowerment. All women needed was the courage to cede their power to experts. The language promised liberation, spoke of the struggle. By the early 1990s you could no longer distinguish what survivors were calling the survivor movement from what everyone else was calling the recovery movement. And all of

this in the name of feminism.

Speaking out, lopped free from all political foundation, was bankrupt. No more than confession. It was now said to be a "stage" in healing. But who would dare challenge such things? To speak out is to seem to be making rude noises on an

intensive care ward. Who among us is brutal enough to speak against healing?

We have been re-silenced.

Fathers and stepfathers continue to rape children. Children pay a high price for that. Their mothers pay a high price for that. The cost benefit analysis of incest remains the same. The fact of incest, the incidence of incest—routine, banal, non-exotic incest—is the sexualization of children in everyday reality: the expression of rage at women by wounding their children, in everyday reality.

Pictures in the media of children sexualized are signifiers of the licensed act. Images of women dressed as children, of children made up and photographed as little women, are signifiers, a warning of license. As long as the act itself remains uncensored, and the aggressors remain publicly unchallenged as a collective force, by a collective force, as long as feminist analysis and energy is submerged in and overridden by mental health doctrine, images of the sexualization of children are the "tip of the iceberg."

The iceberg remains the socially tolerated act of child-rape by fathers.

*Louise Armstrong is the author of *Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened When Women Said Incest*, Women's Press.*

Source: Everywoman, The Voice of British Women, 2:96.



courtesy of Deirdre McCartin of T.V. One



Made in the U.S.A.

by Helen Zia

Too many of the clothes made in the United States are produced by women working endless hours for a pittance in sweatshops. A Ms. reporter went undercover for the first hand report on the whole dirty business.

This is not the usual shopping tour of fashionable San Francisco. The small band of women dodge cable cars in the city's tony Union Square district, home to chic designer boutiques. They proceed along the bustling sidewalks with their handheld bullhorn, exhorting shoppers to boycott high-end, high-frill dresses made by Jessica McClintock, a designer who, until recently, maintained her flagship store in the area. "Jessica McClintock says 'Let them eat lace,'" proclaim their flyers, which

move like hot sale items. Near Macy's, a crowd of high school students gather around. "I just bought one of her dresses," laments a teenager. "You'll just have to return it," says her friend.

The demonstrators are activists from Asian Immigrant Women's Advocates (AIWA). McClintock first came to AIWA's attention when a manufacturer of her clothing owed US\$15,000 in back wages to 12 seamstresses. The workers turned to AIWA, which came up with something unusual in the garment industry: a highly visible consumer campaign directed not at the contracted manufacturer, but at a company that had hired it to make the clothes. Of all the

companies AIWA looked into, Jessica McClintock had the best-known label.

As a point of fact, McClintock had paid for the dresses and had no legal responsibility for a contractor's failings—a point that AIWA readily concedes. But in an industry rife with labor abuses, AIWA reasoned, the responsibility for violations against garment workers goes beyond that of the direct employer. "Jessica McClintock is one of many clothing manufacturers who abdicate responsibility for their workers' health, safety, and just compensation," says Young Shin, executive director of AIWA. "Their sweat and blood made her US\$145 million in gross sales.

She must be accountable to the women who make her clothes.”

It's hard to imagine a parent who wants the cute outfits she buys for her child to be made by exhausted women with children of their own whom they rarely see because they're putting in 16-hour days. Despite a campaign to “Buy American,” most consumers don't realize that much of the clothing bearing the proud label “Made in the U.S.A.” has been produced by women who work for pennies a garment in conditions that rival turn-of-the-century sweatshops. The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) defines a sweatshop as a business that regularly violates wage, child labor, health and/or safety laws. The clothing brands found in sweatshops include some of the U.S.'s best known labels: Esprit, The Gap, J.C. Penney, The Limited, Liz Claiborne, Patagonia, Ralph Lauren, and Wal-Mart.

The garment industry is like a pyramid, with retailers—department stores like Bloomingdale's, Macy's, Sears, and others—at the top. They buy their fashions from companies like Liz Claiborne and Guess?, who are known as manufacturers although they rarely make their own clothes. The majority farm out their work to thousands of factory owners—the contractors whose factories are often sweatshops. Contractors are the small fry in the pyramid; they are often undercapitalized entrepreneurs who may be former garment workers themselves, taking in a small profit per garment.

At the bottom of the pyramid is the worker, generally a woman—and sometimes her child—who is paid US\$0.50 or US\$1 for a dress that costs US\$120 at retail. As a general rule, prices within the pyramid follow a doubling effect at each tier. The contractors double their labor costs and overhead when quoting a price to the garment companies, which, in turn,

Most consumers don't realize that much of the clothing bearing the proud label “Made in the U.S.A.” has been produced by women who work for pennies a garment in conditions that rival turn-of-the-century sweatshops.

calculate their overhead and double that to arrive at a price to charge the retailer. The retailer then doubles this price, and sometimes adds still more, to assure a profit even after two or three markdowns.

Faced with continuous market pressures for lower prices, retailers maintain their profits by demanding still lower prices from manufacturers who, in turn, force the contractors to take less money. The contractors squeeze the workers by paying them as little as possible and reducing standards for working conditions. This practice of squeezing labor is known as “sweating”—which is where “sweatshop” comes from.

According to a 1994 GAO report, the number of U.S. sweatshops is increasing. A year earlier, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) reported that the number of sweatshop workers had increased dramatically during the previous 15 years—by more than a third in California alone. The increase in sweatshop labor has occurred as overall employment in the garment-industry has fallen dramatically.

Los Angeles and New York City are the largest apparel centers and home to the most sweatshops. San Francisco, Mi-

ami, New Jersey and Texas are not far behind. Most sweatshops are hidden away where inspectors never find them, but about 22,000 contract shops around the country do business openly, sewing clothing for approximately 1,000 manufacturers. Even among these seemingly legal shops, many operate in near-sweatshop conditions. A 1994 study of Los Angeles garment factories found that 90 percent of them were not in compliance with labor laws. Working in these contract shops are some 800,000 employees; about 650,000 are women. Latina and Asian immigrants, both documented and undocumented, are thought to be the

most heavily represented in the shops.

The sweatshop is just off one of the busiest streets in New York City's borough of Queens, near Shea Stadium and the tennis courts of the U.S. Open. To enter, you walk across a trash-strewn parking lot into a gray building, up two flights of cement stairs, down a cold, dimly lit hall to a double set of heavy steel doors and chain-link gates.

Beyond piles of pastel clothes in various stages of completion are two long rows of women, each hunched over a droning sewing machine. They have the dazed look of people who have been performing the same task far too long. It's Saturday night, and most of them have been working since morning.

Rising above the piles of clothes are tangled wires that power the sewing machines and steam presses. A single spark could turn the whole place, crammed with flammable fabric and lint, into a blazing inferno. No one seems concerned; in one section of the crowded room a few workers sit under the “No Smoking” sign, cutting loose cthreads and puffing away on cigarettes. The only open window

in the hot, stuffy room is by the huge steam press that fuses interfacing to fabric.

From out of the stacks of clothes, a smiling, gap-toothed woman appears. Bibi, perspiring and disheveled, steps gingerly over the ladies' blouses she has neatly folded and stuffed into plastic bags, now strewn in slippery piles on the floor. She is 56, but looks much older. Her husband, 65-year-old Kailung, works nearby, putting tags on the blouses. They greet me and introduce me to a few of the other workers, none of whom seem the least surprised to see me—an obviously Chinese woman—shows up, ostensibly to help Bibi and Kailung, and perhaps fall into a job for myself. The two are among the shop's few older employees—the sewing jobs are filled by young women, some in their teens. All of them have been working 14 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week, for the last three months. They put in the time because there is no guarantee that there will be more work once the current job is done. And because, with their limited English, they have few choices. "I'm so tired," says Bibi to no one in particular, "This job is going to kill me."

Overtime pay is unheard of. Everyone is paid a piece rate, determined by the garment and the task. A collar is worth more than a straight seam, for instance. In theory, piece rates are not meant to circumvent minimum wage and overtime laws, but to provide an incentive for more productive workers. In practice, however, low piece rates force everyone to work as hard, fast, and as long as they can to make the pennies add up. But no matter how hard they work, the pay almost never reaches minimum wage—a direct violation of federal labor laws.

For her 16 hours on this day, Bibi will take home about US\$50. In a good year, she may earn US\$13,000—about the norm among sweatshop workers.

Some, like Kailung, who brings home about US\$8,000 a year, earn much less because they can't work very fast. Good years have been few and far between for Bibi and Kailung who often end up out of work for long stretches. Since they never know if they will have work and money for the rent—from month to month, they live in substandard housing, putting dollars aside for the lean times. Bibi's only consolation is that she gets to keep everything she earns—no deductions for social security, unemployment insurance, or taxes. Bibi shrugs at the suggestion that the deductions could benefit her. "I need the money more," she says simply.

The increase in sweatshop labor has occurred as overall employment in the garment-industry has fallen dramatically.

When they finally leave the factory after midnight, Bibi and Kailung are so tired that they take a bus home. More often, they walk the two miles in order to save the US\$2.50 fare. Home is in the basement of a three-story house. The crudely finished space has been subdivided into a maze of three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. Each of the bedrooms rents for US\$250 a month. Bibi and Kailung's room, a 12-by-12-foot cubicle with dark wood paneling that makes it seem even smaller, is filled with broken-down furniture. The old bureau has several missing drawers; no matter, the couple use the space as shelves to store plastic bags, screwdrivers, and an ancient radio. Bibi hurriedly heats up a dinner of Chinese dumplings and soup while Kailung washes their clothes in the bathtub and hangs them by the water heaters. After

they gulp down their soup, the first meal they've had since lunch, they collapse on the tattered sofa bed.

In the 84 years since the Triangle Shirt-waist fire killed 146 women workers caught behind locked doors in a Manhattan sweatshop, the fundamental production relationships that control the lives of garment workers haven't changed much. If anything, the workers' lot has worsened in recent decades. Nowadays, U.S. sweatshops are competing with those found in developing countries, a situation that is directly related to the abuse of the industry's main workforce—immigrant women of color.

Wherever garment manufacturers have set up shop, the workers have been primarily women. "The whole subcontracting stratum lends itself to employing women, particularly immigrant women, because their labor is valued less," says Elizabeth Petras, a professor of sociology at Drexel University in Philadelphia.

During the 1950s and 1960s, apparel manufacturers led the mostly unionized shops of the northern U.S. for the South, which offered a non-unionized, low-wage, female workforce. By the 1970s, much of the work had moved overseas. Asia's "four little dragons"—Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan—began to build their economies with the help of the U.S. apparel industry. Compared to an average hourly wage of US\$3.79 for U.S. garment workers in 1975, women in South Korea earned US\$0.22, US\$0.29 in Taiwan, and US\$0.75 in Hong Kong.

When labor costs in these countries began to edge up, manufacturers sought even cheaper labor in places like Sri Lanka or the People's Republic of China. Sewing shops boomed in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America because of their close proximity to the U.S. market

and thanks to U.S. trade policies that offered relief on import tariffs for apparel. Hourly wages for sewing-machine operators in 1991 ranged from a high of US\$0.50 in the Bahamas to US\$0.45 in Guatemala.

U.S. clothing imports from developing countries have grown from practically zero in the 1950s to about US\$86 billion a year today. Half of all clothes bought in the U.S. are made overseas, often produced under wretched conditions. In Bangladesh, girls as young as 10 work as indentured servants, locked in garment factories for 70- to 75-hour workweeks. In South Korea, 22 teenagers died in 1988 when the sweater factory where they lived and worked caught fire while they slept. Conditions are no better in the Americas: labor organizers in Guatemala have been killed, while women workers who merely signed petitions at a Levi Strauss plant in Honduras have suffered mass firings—a violation of Levi's own corporate guidelines.

When U.S. factories shut down to move overseas, they were replaced with sweatshops using immigrants desperate for work, often under unimaginable conditions. In one of the worst recent examples, 72 Thai immigrants were rescued last August from a guarded compound in Los Angeles, where they had been confined behind barbed wire, some for up to seven years, sewing garments for brand-name manufacturers at US\$1.60 an hour.

With the world a candy store of cheap labor, apparel manufacturers can and do get contractors to agree to almost any price. "Retailers use the club of China and Bangladesh to drive the price down," says Seth Bodner, executive director of the



Isis photobank

Women sewers wear uniforms and get better wages in this garments factory. They endure the same physical pain suffered by women sewers in sweatshops from the long hours spent bending over sewing machines.

National Knitwear and Sportswear Association. "They come back year after year asking for the same garment to be made for less money. With companies like Wal-Mart and J.C. Penney buying in such vast quantities, there's always someone who will do it if he thinks he can get a foot in the door."

The result of this global sweatshop process does not, however, necessarily lead to lower prices for the consumer. Two Liz Claiborne jackets that retail for US\$80 and are exactly alike may have been made by different workers at different wage rates in any of a half-dozen countries. But whether the labor cost is five cents or five dollars, the price charged to the consumer is the same.

At 7:30 on Sunday morning, Bibi and Kailung get ready to go back to work. Their bodies stiff with fatigue, they move slowly about the kitchen area. Kailung's face is swollen from a toothache that is so painful he can't eat. Instead, he prepares an herbal concoction in a glass jar to take to work. As Bibi packs a lunch of leftover rice, vegetables and hard-

boiled eggs, she complains about her living quarters. "This place is very dirty. My home in China was much nicer," she says. "In winter there's no heat. But it's all we can pay."

A permanent resident, Bibi emigrated from Shanghai in 1992; Kailung came last year. In China, Bibi would soon be retiring from her office job, while Kailung had already retired. They came to the U.S. in the hope of saving enough money to bring their grandchildren over. Despite their own working conditions, they believe the children will have a better life here. But if the job runs out, they'll be on the street. Bibi does not speak English well enough to find work as a cleaning woman or in a fastfood restaurant. Even with her green card, she can't quit.

By 9 a.m. they're at the shop. As the workers filter in, Bibi and Kailung sweep up piles of trash and debris from around the work stations. The floor looks as if an explosion dumped pink, yellow, green, and blue fabric everywhere. Most of the seamstresses are from a rural area of China's Guangdong province. Since Bibi and Kailung's Shanghai dialect is

quite different from theirs, they can't talk with their co-workers. The shop owner, a fortyish man also from Guangdong, speaks some Mandarin, as do Bibi and Kailung. In any case, language ability is not critical to the functioning of a garment shop, where tasks can be readily taught nonverbally.

Conversation lulls as the cadence picks up. The pressers start feeding hundreds of skirts to Bibi, who dispatches them to hangers and the proper rack, sized from 8 to 14. Kailung is supposed to be hanging skirts too, but his tooth hurts so much that he is sitting at an unoccupied sewing machine with his head down while Bibi tries—with my inexperienced help—to keep up with his work as well as hers. While the pressers steam their way through bundles of skirts, the seamstresses work on the matching jackets. Because fabrics are pliant and are stitched into curved shapes, the work must be done by hand, ensuring that the sewing process remains labor-intensive.

Now that garment shops can be set up anywhere, closing plants and shifting factory locations overseas are commonplace. Garment industry officials charge that free trade policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) threaten the survival of domestic apparel manufacturing, while worker advocates expect that "free trade" will add to job loss and increased pressure on the remaining workers.

At the U.S.-Mexico border, the impact of these changes is particularly intense. On the U.S. side, El Paso, Texas, is a center for the production of denim garments. Its twin city of Ciudad Juarez sits across the Rio Bravo del Norte in Mexico. Under a program devised in 1965, denim

production was to shift to Juarez, while corporate offices would remain in El Paso. As the factories moved to Juarez, where they could pay workers as little as US\$2.35 per day, sweatshops, called *talleres de hombre*—"starvation shops"—have cropped up in El Paso, hiring people laid off by the plant closings.

The whole subcontracting stratum lends itself to employing women, particularly immigrant women, because their labor is valued less.

According to *La Mujer Obrera* (The Working Woman), formed in 1981 to organize El Paso's garment workers, in the first year after NAFTA's passage, 11 of the city's garment factories closed, leaving a trail of unpaid wages behind. "At first, people get angry at Mexican workers," says Carmen Dominguez, coordinator of *La Mujer Obrera*. "But then we explain how those workers do the same work for less pay. In Mexico, the cost of living is the same as in El Paso and people would rather sell soda on the street than work in a garment factory. So who works in them? Thirteen- to 16-year-old girls. Now the workers get angry at the factory owners."

Anger is exactly what workers in San Antonio feel toward Levi Strauss. In 1989, one month after posting profits of US\$272 million, the company announced the closing of its San Antonio plant where 1,150 workers were employed. Production was moved to Costa Rica. The Latina seamstresses who lost their jobs formed a group called *Fuerza Unida* (United Strength) and filed suit, charging that Levi Strauss cheated them out of their fair share of severance and vacation pay, profit sharing, pensions, and

bonuses, leaving behind women with carpal tunnel syndrome and herniated discs, thanks to the intense work pace. The suit was dismissed, but the women have persisted, mounting a national boycott of Levi Strauss products and setting up an organizing office near the company's San Francisco headquarters. *Fuerza Unida* organizer Lupe Galvan points out that Levi's made US\$557 million in profits in 1994, a record year.

Levi's is hardly the exception. The U.S. apparel industry is valued at US\$50 billion a year and generated domestic retail sales of US\$172 billion in 1994. Seven companies do more than a billion in sales annually: Fruit of the Loom; Kellwood, which owns numerous sportswear labels; Levi Strauss; Liz Claiborne; Russell Corporation, the athletic wear manufacturer; Sara Lee, which has bought up several clothing companies, including the makers of Wonderbra; and VF Corporation, the manufacturer of Lee and Wrangler jeans, JanSport, and Healthex, among others. And as Edna Bonacich, professor of sociology and ethnic studies at the University of California at Riverside, who has been researching the sweating process, says, "the garment industry is like a tale of two cities." CEO and executive staff salaries are in the six-and seven-figure ranges, fringe benefits are worth many thousands, and stock options millions; meanwhile, garment workers are lucky if they earn US\$10,000 a year, far less than one percent of the executives' pay. "For a buck more per garment, the whole problem of sweatshop abuses could be solved," says a labor enforcement official.

At the sweatshop, everyone is busy except the boss, who is eating a bowl of noodles. At 11:30 a.m., a small entourage ar-



International Labour Office

Migrant women workers are not limited to Asians or Latin Americans or women from indigenous groups. Maria, 23, is a sewer from Yugoslavia. Several years ago, she joined her husband and the throng of migrant women workers in Germany.

rives: the owner's wife, son, daughter-in-law, and infant grandson. The son, a cheerful-looking twenty-something, with gold chains on his neck and wrists, starts working a steam press. His wife sits at a sewing machine and also begins working. Holding the baby, the boss's wife strolls into a side room where the time clock sits unused, surrounded by posters on state and federal labor laws—all printed in English. She turns on a radio that's piped into the shop: music with a loud disco beat that gets the machines humming faster than ever.

As the jackets are pressed, Bibi and Kailung pair them with skirts, then button on a satiny front panel. They attach tags, then bag the complete ensemble. They'll be paid 15 cents for each outfit. In 12 hours, and with my help, they'll do 400 sets—for a total of US\$60 between the two of them. The pressers and the seamstresses get about 24 cents for each outfit they work on. The total labor cost for assembling the

Sunday suit: under US\$3. Each will retail for about US\$60.

The aroma of rice and Chinese turnips in oyster sauce begins to waft through the shop—the boss has been cooking at a hotplate in the back. At noon he clears off one of the worktables. "Eat, eat!" he says. The workers walk over, then return quickly to their workstations to eat in silence. "The boss is cooking lunch for us because it's Sunday," says Bibi. Nevertheless, it's not a regular Sunday event. Within 15 minutes, everyone is finished eating, except the boss and his family, who hover like hosts proud to have treated their guests to a fine meal.

Manufacturers and retailers have been able to use the contractor system to insulate themselves from the unpleasantness of sweatshops and the embarrassment of government raids. They demand that contractors meet their prices for work that can't possibly be done

at minimum wage rates, yet they deny knowledge of abuses and reject responsibility for them if they are found. In reality, manufacturers know exactly what's going on in their contractors' shops—company inspectors and other representatives routinely visit the worksites.

The typical life span of a contractor's business is less than a year. If caught for violations, the contractor is likely to go out of business, only to immediately reappear under a new name, performing the same work for the same manufacturers and retailers to evade government fines, possible legal action and, most of all, responsibility for working conditions from which they directly benefit.

Labor law enforcement officials have been limited by too few resources. But in 1993 the U.S. Department of Labor began enforcing a rarely used provision of the Fair Labor Standards Act—the "hot goods" rule, which prohibits the shipping or selling

via interstate commerce of goods that have been produced "in violation of minimum wage and overtime laws." "Manufacturers try to insulate themselves," says Maria Echaveste, the department's Wage and Hour Administrator. "What we've done is shift it back to them." Using the threat of a hot goods injunction, the agency secured a US\$530,000 settlement against Guess?, Inc., after finding its US\$60 jeans in a Los Angeles shop where workers made less than US\$1 an hour, and they've obtained agreements with other manufacturers to police themselves.

To get money from increasingly conservative legislatures, labor officials must argue that compliance with labor laws is good for business. Companies that operate illegally have an unfair advantage over legitimate businesses. Taxpayers also lose when these underground businesses evade taxes and payments to unemployment and workers' compensation, and Social Security. But conservative politicians have begun to link labor enforcement to anti-immigrant rhetoric. Because sweatshops rely so heavily on immigrant labor, many politicians assert that undocumented workers are to blame for the existence of sweatshops. In both 1993 and 1994, California Governor Pete Wilson vetoed legislation that would make manufacturers jointly liable for wage and hour violations of the contractors they hire, saying that "ultimately the fault for sweatshops lie with illegal workers who are willing to work at substandard wages and conditions." Blaming sweatshops on immigrant labor may be part of a larger political strategy: "There are more U.S. sweatshops now and a greater tolerance for them; the threshold of what is acceptable treatment of workers is lower, says Drexel University's Elizabeth Petras.

The temperature in the shop is rising as the afternoon sun hits the windows. Bibi takes advantage of a break in the presser's work to rush to the bathroom. First she reaches into the cardboard box near her work area, where she hides her lunch and the house slippers she wears at work. She pulls out a roll of toilet paper. "You have to bring your own," she whispers. We go through the steel

With the world a candy store of cheap labor, apparel manufacturers can and do get contractors to agree to almost any price.

doors that are the shop's sole entrance and exit, back into the dark hallway strewn with refuse. To get to the women's room, we walk down several corridors, past other garment sweatshops. "That one is owned by Americans," she says, meaning Caucasians. "Americans work for them," by which she means non-Asians. All the factories in the building share the women's room. The doors on the two grimy wooden stalls don't shut. There is neither toilet paper nor paper towels, not even a trash can, so used paper products, including sanitary napkins, line the floor. The sinks are encrusted with food waste, dirt and grease. Bibi just shakes her head and leaves as fast as she can.

Back in the shop, the boss's son is picking up the bagged blouses that Bibi folded yesterday, and packing them in boxes. He looks furtively at boxes near Bibi that hold neatly stacked plastic hangers. When he thinks she isn't looking, he dumps out her hangers and takes the box. Bibi starts yelling at him. The son ignores her, until his father makes him put the hangers back.

Late in the evening, Bibi goes to an area piled high with linen vests. Each one has six tiny buttons. Her job is to button and sort them, for which she gets three cents per vest. The buttons are so small that it's hard to work them through the buttonholes. After doing several hundred buttons, Bibi's fingers are stiff and sore. Bibi and Kailung are expected to stay until all the vests are buttoned, pressed, hung, tagged, and bagged. But Bibi is so tired she's thinking of quitting.

"I don't want to die in this job," she says. Kailung, whose jaw has been aching all day, is also eager to leave. The boss talks them into staying by offering to drive them home when they're done. Reluctantly they agree. Bibi returns to the vests that bear two labels—one, the name of a popular mall retailer; the other, "Made in the U.S.A."

After 20 years in the garment industry, Katie Quan, manager of the Pacific Northwest District Council at the Union of Needle Trades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE), is the first to acknowledge that these are challenging times. Quan is working in a consortium of California manufacturers, contractors, government officials, educators, and workers called Garment 2000—a US\$2.3 million project designed to reinvent the garment industry. They are teaching new management techniques like the Japanese "just-in-time" quickresponse systems, to help U.S. companies take advantage of their proximity to the U.S. marketplace. "U.S. workers have to define a niche in the global economy where companies can make money and workers can make a living. U.S. workers can't win in a competition based on the cheapness of labor," says Quan.

Growing consumer concern over the social cost of clothing has

Groups working for women and workers' rights and to improve work conditions in the garment industry:

Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA)

310 8th Street, Suite 301
Oakland, Calif. 94607
(510) 268-0192

Bilingual and bicultural organizers who promote leadership and empowerment among low-income immigrant women.

Chinese Staff and Workers Association (CSWA)

PO Box 130401
New York N.Y. 10013
(212) 619-7979

Nonprofit association controlled by workers who organize for rights on the job and in the community at large.

Common Threads

PO Box 962
Venice, Calif. 90294
(310) 967-5122

A coalition—primarily made up of women—that attempts to educate consumers about sweatshop conditions.

Fuerza Unida

3946 S. Zarzamora Street
San Antonio, Tex. 78225
(210) 927-2294

Organized by women laid off from Levi Strauss, to “educate, activate and empower” the families and communities of low-income Mexican and Mexican/American women.

La Mujer Obrera (Centro Del Obreto Fronterizo)

PO Box 3975, El Paso, Tex. 79923
(915) 533-9710

Organizes against the deterioration of working and living conditions. Also operates a workers' school.

Latino Workers' Center (aka Lower East Side Workers' Center)

PO Box 20329
New York, N.Y. 10009
(212) 473-3936

Seeks to unify Latina/Latino immigrant workers through education and outreach. Operates the Latina Women's Development Project.

Sweatshop Watch

c/o Asian Law Caucus
468 Bush Street, 3rd Floor
San Francisco, Calif. 94108
(415) 391-1655

A coalition of labor, women's civil rights, immigrant rights, legal, and other organizations that work to eliminate sweatshop conditions domestically and globally.

spurred a number of recent developments. A women's group called Common Threads, based in Los Angeles, is linking middle-class and working-class women through consumer campaigns to support workplace organizing. “Two-thirds of the clothing purchases are made by women, who are manipulated a million ways as fashion consumers,” says sociologist Bonacich, one of the organizers of Common Threads.

Another group, called Sweatshop Watch, a coalition of workers' and immigrants' advocates, women's organizations, and legal and civil rights groups across California, is starting a newsletter to inform consumers about the clothes they purchase, providing “Buy” and “Don't Buy” lists. “Our approach is three-pronged,” says attorney Lora Jo Foo, an organizer of Sweatshop Watch: “making manufacturers liable through legislative change and legal action, empowering workers through

workplace organizing, and enlisting consumer support.” Around the country, workers' centers like Fuerza Unida, La Mujer Obrera, and AIWA joined this year in a national consortium to build a community-based workers' movement.

Consumer consciousness has caused some manufacturers and retailers develop guidelines, which often set forth high-sounding principles that support fair wages and environmentally sound practices. Yet even these companies continue to get caught in sweatshop violations. And ethics codes rarely cover the new and creative ways that employers come up with to transfer costs to workers. Earlier this year a California contractor was found to be charging seamstresses US\$126.75 plus tax, each month, for the needles and bobbins they used at work.

And the boycotts against Levi's and Jessica McClintock continue. McClintock attempted

to resolve the dispute in 1993 by offering an unspecified amount as a “charitable contribution” to the 12 seamstresses. Five women accepted the offer, while the rest decided to continue their battle for “corporate responsibility.” In the wake of the rejection, McClintock's company is waging its own battle, having hired one of San Francisco's biggest labor law firms to file lawsuits against AIWA.

“We don't expect Jessica McClintock to change the garment industry,” insists AIWA's Young Shin. “But it can be done—U.S. consumers have the bargaining power to tell the multinationals what their concerns are, to rid the garment industry of inhuman practices, and make it a humane place to work.

Helen Zia is a contributing editor to Ms. The names she used in this story are not real.

Source: Ms., January/February 1996

WHAT UNIONS MUST DO



Sandra Torrijos

The Australian trade union movement has started the process for critical evaluation and direction of its mode of operation. One of the central issues which has risen during this critical evaluation process is that unions need to expand their service provision in a relevant and appropriate manner. Most of the discussions generated from the union movement during the evaluation process has centered on the issue of providing more services to members. The provision of discount telephone calls and health care insurance are some of the services that are being provided as a way to encourage workers to join unions as well as for existing members to renew their membership. While service provision, and in particular relevant service delivery, is an important component of trade unions in Australia, it is also important

for the union movement to address the social and political aspects of their structures and work. The social focus and political structures of the union movement have been a peripheral issue during the critical evaluation discuss-

One pertinent issue is the under-representation of migrant women in key union positions when they are the majority of workers in certain industries.

ions. Indeed, the traditional Anglo or political framework of the union movement has not even received a critical analysis or even discussion. This reveals that the union movement is politically reluctant to change its structures. The political issues of ethnicity and

gender have been excluded and not considered as important issues to address. However, a consideration of these political issues would make the union movement more appropriate and accountable to its membership.

In Victoria, almost 24 percent of all unionists were born in non-English-speaking countries. The national figure for Australia is 16 percent. This large minority of non-English-speaking members should raise important issues for the trade union movement to consider when developing political and social strategies. Unfortunately, such information is ignored and assigned to the dusty bookshelves of union bureaucrats, so much so that during the restructuring process the specific interests and needs of non-English-speaking background (NESB) workers were ignored and not addressed appropriately by union officials.

Various studies have documented the discontent

that NESB women have with unions. Their complaints include:

- ♦ the lack of special services to meet the specific needs of immigrant women
- ♦ non-pursuance by unions of the issues that are important to immigrant women
- ♦ the low level of participation in unions
- ♦ the negative perceptions held by immigrant women of their trade unions, and
- ♦ the underrepresentation of immigrant women in official union positions, relative to their membership.

Indeed, one of the pertinent issues raised is the underrepresentation of immigrant women in key union positions compared to their overrepresentation in certain industries. One such industry where NESB women are predominantly represented is the manufacturing industry. The manufacturing industry is covered by the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union (TCFU) in Melbourne. Women in Industry and Community Health (WICH) visited the TCFU and spoke to the assistant secretary, Nurcan Ozturk, on a wide range of issues concerning NESB women workers and the union movement.

Nurcan Ozturk migrated to Australia with her family from Turkey. Nurcan worked in the clothing industry, making male and female garments. While working as an industrial worker she was

Australian unions, where 16 percent of members are from non-English speaking countries, need to consider political issues of ethnicity and gender. Addressing these issues would make the union movement more appropriate and accountable to its members.

elected as the shop steward. After serving as a shop steward she was employed by the TCFU as the Occupational Health and Training Officer. Nurcan was reluctant to undertake this position as she had no prior training or experience in this area. However, the union convinced her to accept the position. Nurcan has been in the position of assistant

secretary for two years.

According to Nurcan, the clothing division of the TCFU is predominantly made up of NESB women. Nurcan believes that her branch did not make a conscious decision for the union to employ NESB women but rather it is the result of the predominance of NESB in this industry. Nurcan believes that this is an appropriate way for the union to operate. She stated that the union hierarchy had to be a representative of its membership or else it would lose contact with the membership and issues relevant to them.

Nurcan pointed out that the TCFU was in a unique position in terms of being representative of its membership. She pointed out that many unions are still white, Anglo-dominated and many are resisting change.

WICH believes it is important for the trade union movement to provide linguistically and culturally appropriate representation for their membership—in particular to, NESB women. This is crucial if the union movement is to increase its relevance to migrant women. *Source: Women in Industry and Community Health, 1995*



Cruel Land of Honey

by Lilian S. Mercado Carreon

Yoly is a woman driven by instinct. Instinct has led her to some of the most difficult and perilous paths but it has not led her astray. So she does not see why she should not trust that inner voice this late in her life, even if everybody around her says she may be courting danger.

And danger may very well be what Yoly is facing, along with a few others like her in the underground support network that they established to help abused overseas contract workers flee from cruel masters. The employers of some of those who escaped had the visas of their former servants cancelled, making them, in effect, illegal aliens. Yoly and her group who are all contract workers themselves run the risk of losing their own jobs if the United States State Department finds them guilty of sheltering these people.

But for Yoly, helping these people is nothing more and nothing less than a moral act. It is but a favor she is returning for the many past favors she herself received as an illegal working as a cleaning woman in Europe. Yoly went there in order to get over some very sad experiences and, at the same time, earn for her three children whom she raised, albeit absently, as a single mother.

Yoly travelled from one European country to another, often working as a housekeeper. In Heidelberg, she cleaned homes in American bases. Yoly's traits endeared her to most of her employers and there was one rich family who loved her enough to send her to school.

From being a domestic helper, Yoly has come a long way. She is now the receptionist of a prestigious international organization in Washington, D.C., USA. The four languages she has learned and

mastered include French which she studied at Sorbonne University on a scholarship. "I have managed to get through life because I have always kept my self-esteem. I have always believed that I was worthy of respect."

But Yoly realizes that conditions have changed since she left the Philippines more than 20 years ago. She knows now that recruiters do not actively cultivate self-confidence and rights awareness among contract workers and that part of the preparation of illegal recruits leaving for abroad is to practice assuming a false name. This plus the knowledge that one is entering a country illegally and is therefore totally dependent on an employer are more than enough to break anybody's sense of identity.

THE SLAVEMASTERS

Most of the employers of Washington D.C.'s runaway servants are diplomats or executives with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization of American States, Interamerican Development Bank or other international agencies. Having foreign household help is one of the privileges enjoyed by Washington's international elite. The *Washington CityPaper* says World Bank and IMF salaries average at \$65,000 tax free, an amount meant to "keep pace with the labor markets" where the Bank and the IMF recruit their staff.

In contrast, these bureaucrats get their workers from the labor markets of poor Asian, African and Latin American communities. Many of their servants are single mothers who came to America to earn for children and parents back home.

These "imported" househelp were allowed by the State Department for bureaucrats and diplomats under a special program that requires employers, following US law, to issue a contract that provides

reasonable working and living conditions. This includes a minimum wage and overtime pay, fixed hours and time off. In 1995, according to the *CityPaper*, the State Department issued 3,400 visas for domestics, 875 of which were for servants from the Philippines.

Documented cases show that these domestics are made to work illegally long hours for below minimum wages, sometimes for as low as \$50 a month. In other instances, their salaries are withheld or sent to a bank account. A few reported not receiving any pay for more than two years. The employer also takes their passport and other legal documents. They are forbidden to leave the house alone, make friends or use the telephone.

There are no records of these abuses so it is hard to keep track of the extent of the problem, which could very well be more widespread than reported. But as early as 1981, the State Department, perhaps already conscious that foreign servants are being mistreated by diplomats, required employers to have written contracts with their workers to ensure them protection. But this policy was later dropped and foreign employers are now only required by US embassies in the workers' home country to provide verbal or written assurance that they will adhere to American labor laws. Since then, servants for diplomats have been arriving in the US without a written contract.

The World Bank and IMF still require their employees to sign a written contract before visas are issued for domestic help but they and the State Department do not monitor compliance.

International officials tend to employ a distant relative or a tribe member as domestic servants. Those from the Middle East and Asia, according to the *CityPaper*, often hire from the Philippines. These employers are willing to go through the bureaucratic hassle and expense of getting overseas workers because they are more "controllable, more likely to endure long hours and low pay; less likely and able to quit, sue or run away."

DARING ESCAPES

But run away they do.

Marta, one of the runaways that Yoly and her friends helped, was being mistreated particularly by the wife of her diplomat employer from the Middle East. One day, Marta was waiting for the wife to finish fitting clothes at a department store when an American saleswoman, after starting a conversation with her, asked whether she was being treated well by her employers. When Marta said no, the saleswoman told her to wait and left.

Instead of the American, two Filipinas came back and asked Marta if she wanted to escape. When she said yes, they told her that she had to do it right there and then, while her master was still in the fitting room zipping her new cocktail dress. Marta was told not to worry about her passport or personal belongings. These will all be worked out later. Within seconds, Marta made up her mind and escaped.

Marta was then brought to Yoly who did what she usually does in these cases: find temporary shelter, get legal help and, if possible, apply for new visas and seek new employment.

SHARED COMMUNITIES

Yoly is quite aware that their underground network cannot remain underground forever if they want to be of greater help to abused contract workers. At this point, Yoly's group is helping Filipina runaways but they can already see that the need to expand their support to servants of other nationalities, most especially other Asians. Their predominantly Filipino network is also being joined by other Washington-based non-Filipino professionals. There is a Thai lawyer who provides legal help, an Irish-American who works out the workers' insurance, a Filipino-American who teaches the workers English and a Filipino-Portuguese who takes care of education and outreach activities.

This coming together has inspired Yoly to call their group Shared Communities. From a simple gesture of help, their actions have evolved into a long-term plan to assist all contract workers coming into Washington D.C. through crisis intervention, legal and health services, empowerment workshops on leadership, and gender sensitivity, group therapy and peer counselling, skills training, English-as-a Second-Language training, rights awareness and education, and advocacy for fair working conditions. Even now, when Shared Communities is still in the process of incorporation and registration, they are already reaching out and linking up with organisations in the US and Asia with similar programs.

Yoly, the reluctant leader, is in the middle of all these and she is orchestrating things with the same creative organizing skills that she used in managing all those European homes and palaces. ☺

The names of people in this story have been changed to protect their real identities. We wish to acknowledge "Capital Slaves" written by Martha Honey in the 12-18 May 1995 edition of the Washington CityPaper for some of this story's information.



Irene R. Chia

OUT of the CLOSET

Sharifa 'Ifa' Sabarudin is a 46 year-old lesbian feminist who teaches criminology at the University of Indonesia. Ifa is a founding member of Kalyanamitra, a women's resource center, and Serikat Perempuan Ante Keberuan (SPeAK) or Union of Women Against Violence, a women's crisis center. In this interview with Irene R. Chia, she speaks about her views on lesbianism and feminism.

Irene: How did you become a feminist?

Ifa: I was a lesbian before I became a feminist. In 1981, I went to the Netherlands where I met a lot of lesbian feminists who shared their ideology, feelings, and experiences as lesbian feminists. It gave me a different kind of impression so when I returned to Indonesia in 1984, I and four other women formed Kalyanamitra. We saw the need to have a women's information and communications center for women, especially grassroots women. Up to now, Kalyanamitra is the only women's organization in Indonesia which offers this service. I first worked as the library coordinator and then moved to the research division. I left Kalyanamitra in 1993 because I've been there

for a long time and I have to give a chance to other women. I felt it was time to leave. I do not believe in staying with an organization for so long because then you might develop vested interests and you tend to treat the organization as your property.

Q: What does feminism mean to you?

A: Feminism is an ideology where women work towards the betterment of the lives of women. In feminism, we want to break a male-defined society and put women on an equal status with men.

For me, feminism means eliminating all forms of discrimination. As a woman, I am very vulnerable to many kinds of oppression, like

sexual harassment for example. Men think of me as a sex object. No woman can be immune from any oppression because we are treated the same as women. That's why I say feminism is a way to free people from any oppression. It is not only anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism or anti-colonialism.

Q: As a feminist, what issues did you take up during your work? What issues were you most passionate about?

A: My main interest is sexuality. When I was in Kalyanamitra, rape, prostitution, and lesbianism are the issues that I worked on.

internal discussions on lesbianism. We never tried to launch it publicly because it's very difficult. I really get angry about this situation sometimes.

Q: Is there a lesbian organization in Indonesia?

A: No, there isn't one because the lesbians are still in the closet. We have an informal group of about five lesbians and we know some other lesbians in the university. My friends do not want to come out because they can lose their job, their friends, and their parents. Coming out can be dangerous because it may subject them to violence. It takes time. No one can force you to come out, it must be based on your own terms and consciousness. It's your business. I don't force my friends to come out because they also have the right to choose to be in the closet.

No one should force a lesbian to come out. Coming out must be based on your own terms and consciousness.

Q: Are you out as a lesbian?

A: Yes. I'm out with my family, my friends, and the women's movement. The women's movement know my political identity. Lesbianism is not only a sexual preference. It is also my political identity and political commitment. Lesbianism is a personal issue if it is a sexual preference only but I don't want to look at it that way. It is a political, cultural and social issue because we are struggling for our right to choose our own identity.

Q: Is there a family member who's significant to you?

A: My mother. I find her a very radical person



Irene R. Chia

Ira, now on sabbatical, clowns around.

Sometimes I wonder why feminists can talk about rape, sexual harassment, incest, wife battering, and prostitution so easily. However, they don't talk about lesbianism as openly. Perhaps, they do not consider lesbianism as a feminist issue. When it comes to lesbianism, the lesbians are the ones who have to talk about it. I see this as some kind of discrimination among feminists because if lesbianism is seen as a feminist issue, heterosexuals should also talk about it. In Indonesia, we have small

because she accepts and understands me. She knows I'm a lesbian. I'm very close to my mother and I love her very much. I cannot imagine living as a lesbian if I have very traditional parents. She would like me to get married and have children but she would never force me. She doesn't ask me if I have male lovers. I introduce my women friends to her.

Q: How do women in the women's movement see lesbians and lesbianism?

A: I'd like to speak about it in my context. The women don't take it seriously, sometimes they are afraid of lesbians and lesbianism. I feel discriminated by the feminists in Indonesia. They can tolerate me but that's not what I need. What I need is for us lesbians and heterosexuals to come together and talk about lesbianism. We cannot put lesbianism as a minor issue, it should be equally important to other issues.

Lesbianism is not only a sexual preference. It is my political identity and political commitment.

Q: How are you being discriminated by women?

A: For example, whenever they see me they always ask me when am I going to get married to a man when they know I am a lesbian.

I tell them it's against my ideology and I don't have that kind of energy. It's like spending my energy for nothing because I don't find any satisfaction in relating with men. I felt harassed by those questions.

They also keep asking me about the way I dress. I usually go to the office in jeans and shirts. Then women will ask me "Where is your lipstick? Where is your eyeshadow, eyeliner?" I also feel harassed when women ask me these questions. If they don't know that I'm a lesbian,

at least they know I don't like to wear makeup. I think these women are afraid of lesbianism.

Q: Why do you say that?

A: They think lesbianism is just about sex. For me, sex can be or may not be a part of a lesbian friendship.

Q: Are there other issues you are passionate about?

A: I studied female spirituality for a long time before I became a feminist. I studied and am still studying female spirituality.

Female spirituality is an issue that is very close to me. When I open myself to that kind of power, I don't feel threatened. It feels different. I feel close to female energy because it's non-violent. When I'm angry or depressed, I open myself to it and I feel peaceful.

In Indonesia, they believe the male spirit is higher and more powerful than the female spirit. They think gender relations exist in the spirit world. I don't believe it, I think female and male power are equal.

Some of my friends think female spirituality is irrational thinking, that it's just my hallucination. But I have a lot of experience when it comes to this matter so they cannot just dismiss it.

My parents believe in spirituality. I asked them a lot of questions when I was a child and they never discouraged me from thinking about it.

Q: What controversial or popular issues are women taking up in your country?

A: One is marital rape. There are many women who cannot assert their rights in the institution of marriage so very few will say that marital rape happens. Another one is family planning, there is a current debate on whether the family planning policies of the Indonesian government are safe and beneficial to the women.

Q: What difficulties did you experience in campaigning against rape among other issues?

A: It is difficult to challenge the myths on rape. Myths like men get sexually aroused more easily and that women invite men to rape them

are predominant.

Q: Is the feminist movement in your country widespread? How do women in general understand feminism?

A: Feminism is not popular in Indonesia. Even among women in the women's movement, feminism is seen as a western concept and therefore, irrelevant. This is the first barrier in popularizing feminism. They think feminists are unnatural, are man haters and that feminists want to be like men. They understand feminism as women working outside the house. Generally, women still believe that they should get married to and serve men.

There are many women's organizations in Indonesia but you have to differentiate between the mainstream and the feminist organizations. There are a lot of women's organizations who support the mainstream ideology.

Q: What do you think has the feminist movement in your country achieved for the past 10 years?

A: More people are now paying attention to issues like rape and reproductive rights. We criticized government policies on family planning and the government is becoming sensitive to women's needs.

Q: Are young women being attracted to the women's movement? Are there more and more young women joining the movement?

A: There are young women joining the women's movement but not a lot. Usually, they are students, around 21 to 26 years old. They prefer joining mixed groups.

I talked to one of my female students once, she was an activist and a leader. I asked her if she was interested in joining a feminist organization and she said she wanted to be involved

in a group which deals with social issues. By doing this, she is serving both men and women.

Q: What do you think are the advances, accomplishments and contributions that feminist ideas have had socially and culturally in the last 20 years worldwide?

A: More women now have a new consciousness about their identity as human beings. There are more women who realize that they need to be more economically independent. More women are now rejecting arranged marriages.

Q: Working in the women's movement can be very tiring and stressful. How can women prevent burnout so that they can stay and work longer in the women's movement?

A: Just go and take a break. Doing other things help a lot. It doesn't mean that you're leaving the movement. In my case, I don't get involved in any women's organization at the moment. I am not leaving my feminism, I am just working on it in a different way. Taking a break is good for the soul. I don't think people should stay for such a long period with all that kind of frustration and depression. We need a break. We need to laugh and refresh our mind and our soul. ☺

Irene R. Chia is a Communications Program Associate of Isis

International-Manila.



Spirituality is an issue I
is most interested in.

Irene R. Chia

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Working for Health

Melody Kemp Speaks to
Luz Maria Martinez

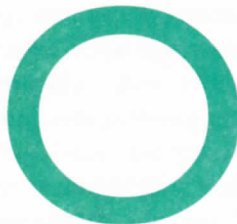


Luz Maria Martinez

Melody Kemp is a most engaging woman. An Australian, she has spent a lot of time of the seven years she lived in Asia in working to make life for women workers in particular better and fairer.

A year ago, Melody retreated to Bali to write a book. Despite splitting her time between writing and working part time in public health, her allegiance is to occupational health, and she continues to battle anybody who gives women and workers a raw deal.

*Melody has written training programs for women industrial workers, and her latest offering is *Working For Life*, a book that contains the knowledge, both technical and strategic, that she gained from many years of practicing occupational health. Here, listen as she speaks.*



Occupational health is the art of prevention. It is the art of preventing illness and injury arising from the process of work and the materials used.

The emphasis is on health and not on illness. We cannot underestimate the seriousness of work as a cause of death and ill health in any community. I recently read that the number of workers who died in Australia due to occupational factors was much greater than the number of those killed on the road in any one year—think of

all those lives lost!—and in this country which has excellent legislation, work practices and trade union involvement. I hate to think how many workers are killed or injured in this part of the world—there they are, supporting economic growth. How many die for progress?

As women's roles have changed in response to economic change, development assistance has not kept up. Women's health is still largely defined by the development agencies in light of their reproductive role—a sort of uterus on legs approach—rather than by their needs changing through their economic life cycle. Increasingly, women's health and lives in general are being influenced by occupational factors. In fact, a lot of reproductive outcomes are also influenced by occupational factors, but the emphasis is still on public health and not on what the hippies would call a holistic model.

This "monster" called development calls on governments in the majority world to focus on industrialization and participate in the globalization of trade. This is the way out of poverty we are told, though the data shows this is patently false and only results in the polarisation of society. Everyone talks about the importance of structural adjustment but no one talks about the implication of all these changes. Capitalism, as you know, has no ethics.

Suddenly, we are moving people from an agrarian economy into an industrialized economy without any of the controls that Europe took over 300 years to develop. Countries of Asia are making the mas-

sive industrial leap without any of the history, models of class warfare or any of the learning about industrial culture that Europe, the Americas and Australia have had to deal with. In addition, the labor movement in many of these Newly Industrialising Countries is repressed and fragmented. There are few checks and balances.

At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, health hazards were pretty simple. But now the hazards are very complex. The difference between the chemicals used by 17th century workers and the chemicals used by workers today is hair raising! The same is true with modern industrial technology. In the early days of the Industrial Revolution, they were dealing with things they pretty much knew, and they had time to discover things like cancer of the scrotum in chimney-sweeps, time to discover radium and the cancer hazard to the women watchmakers who painted it on watch dials. But today, estimates say that 2,000 new chemicals come into the market everyday. What I'm saying is industrialization is not a theme park out of Disneyland. It hurts and injures people. It's time we started paying attention to it.

♦♦♦

It is telling that I, as an occupational health expert, cannot find work in one of the most rapidly industrialising regions in the world. Some of that is due to the lingering gender divide and the fact that donor nations do not want to involve themselves in anything that is political, though development itself is political. Development is about change, power and the creation of a stratified society of haves and have-nots. But the major development agencies don't give this issue any attention. It's so sad they don't have the courage of the women workers.

When women workers ask me why Australia does not support their struggle, what can I say? The World Bank gives millions of dollars for roads while Yasanti, an Indonesian NGO, received Australian \$700 only for the first ever educational program for Indonesian women factory workers. Sure, they gave an additional million or so later for a collaborative scheme with the International Labor Organization (ILO) but those sort rarely benefit women. ILO projects, as I learned from my own experience, separate you effectively from meaning. You spend all the time trying to please the host government and the ILO. Those needs are unusually at odds with what the workers need. It's all sleight of hand. But you get a hefty salary and a good pension if you stick at it long enough to lose your soul. So they don't want you to rock the boat.



International Labour Office

Women are now employed in heavy industries. This is a scene in a shipbuilding yard in Yugoslavia.

♦♦♦

The body is fundamentally a strong organism, but a lot of occupational diseases and injuries can be quite debilitating. They can keep people out of work for many months and, of course, can kill. People fall from construction sites or are buried in mines, or lose bits of their bodies in machines. A lot of women work on construction sites in Bali where I now live and in places like India where women are doing what had once been regarded as men's work. These women are vulnerable to the severe injuries that are characteristic of the construction industry.

Women's work is mistakenly thought of as "safe." But women suffer a wide range of low level chronic occupational illnesses: muscle strain injuries, birth defects in their offspring, infertility, cancer you name it. Then there are the psychological stresses. Sexual harassment for instance is a major source of despair and humiliation for women workers. It is another part of the commodification of women as industrial components—so many women I have spoken to are ashamed.

But it's not all gloom. I heard about a group of Javanese women that are fighting back, ridiculing

men who sexually harass and taking deliberate go-slows. They are protecting their dignity and respect. That is the bottom line.

Our health and dignity should not be compromised just because the person we work for wants to purchase a new Mercedes Benz. Occupational health is about human rights, meaning we all have the right to health and we all have the right to leave the work place in the same condition we entered it.

Occupational health is about social justice. It is how I can most clearly express my own interest and belief in social justice. Beyond saying "Oh, isn't this terrible," I am actually able to do something to redress some of the imbalance."

BLURRED LINES

Women will work inside a factory and may get a very concentrated dose of a particular nasty sol-

vent. At the end of the working day, they will go home to a community that is quite often next to the same or another factory. Usually, if a factory per-

forms badly in occupational health terms, invariably, they are also poor in environmental protection. Women are therefore susceptible to the fallout from that factory and the pollution which enters the community's water supply. In this case, disease factors are very blurred and the environmental factors overlay those from the work place.

As far as I am concerned, there is no separation between

a worker's physical health and their occupational health. If you are ill, if you have parasites, if you are pregnant, if you have chest disease, you are going to be more susceptible to things at work. If you have asthma, you are going to be more susceptible to cotton dust or wood dust disease. If you have anaemia, you are going to be more suscepti-

Industrialization is
not a theme park
out of Disneyland.
It hurts and
injures people.

Unemployment: An Occupational Health Problem

Women's participation in seasonal agriculture is wide spread. Their patience, dexterity and speed make them particularly competent for harvesting and packing export crops. In Latin America, employment in seasonal agriculture is one of the most common ways of making a wage.

But unemployment, referred to as "months of silence" in Central America and "blue months" in Chile, form the other side of the coin in seasonal farm work, especially in areas where few other job options exist. But joblessness is not seen as a factor affecting women's health.

Studies of unemployment demonstrate how being without work can damage health. Not only

does unemployment bring economic consequences. It generates mental health problems as well. One reason for this is that the unemployed person loses her role in society. The jobless person is denied participation in public life.

Yet, unemployment and its consequences are considered a male problem, despite the fact that it also affects women. Studies on this topic focus on men who are still seen as principal providers for the family.

At the same time, although unemployment affects both men and women, it differs in significance. The roles assigned by society to each sex give different values to the unemployment of each sex. For men, employment or unemployment are viewed as the only possible alternatives.

Women, in contrast, are given a third option—to stay at home as full-time "housewives," an occupation that draws a curtain over their need to be employed. Domestic work, which is largely invisible and socially undervalued, isolates women.

"When I am working, I feel relief, economically and in all other ways," says Patricia, a Chilean worker interviewed by Chile's Centro de Estudio de la Muher (CEM) researchers. "At home, I'm alone or with the children. With my husband, I talk about the children, money, problems. At work, it's different. You get the problems off your back."

CEM's investigation into the situation of seasonal workers on Chile's vineyards showed the extent of unemployment. Women

ble to benzene. If you are a construction worker riding on a scaffold high up on a construction site, and you are weakened by severe diarrhea, your chances of falling off that scaffold are very high. I think the divisions that the technocrats make in the developed world are very false.

Occupational health has a long tradition, some of it honourable, some of it not. The *founder* of occupational health is a 15th century Italian physician called Ramazini who first described illnesses related to occupations. Paracelsus in the 16th century then put together the first detailed notes on the nature of poisons. He was in fact the world's first toxicologist. Since then, occupational health has always been dominated by men, mainly male doctors and engineers. It is only in the past 10 years that women have started to make their mark.

Because of male domination, occupational health information base has been biased towards

Occupational health is about social justice.

the male experience. Exposure standards were established based on the experience of healthy white males.

But as a woman, I am much more interested in what happens to women. Only recently has research begun to look into the different experiences that women have of occupational injury and diseases. I couldn't believe my eyes when I was in Perth researching the technical literature for a book. When I looked up breast cancer on the CD ROM system, I found that 85 percent of the 20 or so recent references were about breast cancer in males!

A WOMAN'S CONCERN

When I first came into occupational health, I was usually the only woman in any technical consultative meeting.

But my father taught and gave me the technical confidence in a masculine world. My father was



Peyton Johnson World Food Programme

To be a mother and unemployed is to be anguished.

workers were employed for an average of six to seven months a year doing various tasks. Half of the women interviewed were unemployed for the rest of the year although they had sought work. Only 14 percent of the women interviewed combined agricultural and other jobs to be employed all year round.

The perceptions of these women concerning their health varied significantly between the

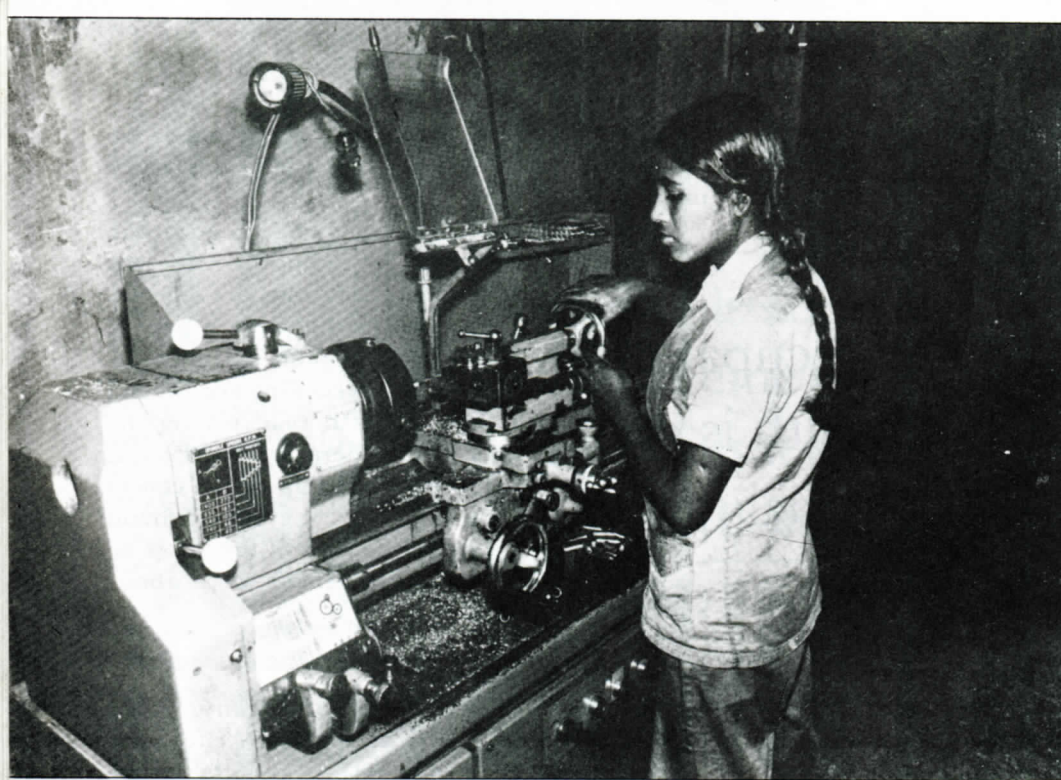
work season and the unemployed period. When working, the women feel exhausted, experience aches, pains and other work-related illnesses. They complain of bad relations with their bosses, long shifts and the additional burdens of domestic chores. They fear exposure to toxins and dismissal. Fifty-two percent of those interviewed said they felt poorly or bad while working.

However, the number of

women who judged their health to be poor rose to 65 percent during periods of unemployment. While complaints related to work conditions decreased, the women reported a drop in their moods. Bad humor, listlessness and feelings of depression increased with unemployment. Without jobs, the women complained of reduced income, isolation and loneliness.

Thus, despite the poor conditions that wage work brings, women laborers value the social space and friendship that work offers. Having health has health benefits. It lessens stress and increasing feelings of self-sufficiency and self-esteem.

Source: *Women's Health Journal* 1-95, *Latin American & Caribbean Women's Health Network*



Enrique Berrios/Christian Aid

Women workers tend to have more chronic, long term, disabling diseases.

the first feminist in my life. He was really a wonderful man who taught me how to weld and to lay bricks, not because he wanted a boy but because he really felt a woman could do anything. He would say there is no limit to what a woman can do. Just because you have a vagina and not a penis does not suddenly mean that you can not use a hammer and chisel. He gave me the technical confidence to work in a masculine world.

On the broader industrial front, I believe that women are much braver than men. I look around and see what female workers have done in comparison to male workers and see that the women are miles ahead. In Indonesia, it is the women who take the risks, who go out on the streets and wave banners and go out on strikes. They are so courageous. Women care about health, it is part of their spirit to be interested in health. Women are the healers, the curers, the hope.

♦♦♦

The medical profession, at one time, was saying that RSI (Repetitive Strain Injury) was a hysterical illness that had no basis on fact—this and the asbestos cover-up were some of the more dishonourable points of occupational health history. This was the time of massive technological change, when computers were beginning to come en masse. One of the major selling points for computers was that these machines can go so fast. But no one had bothered pointing out that humans can't.

The human body has a certain finite capacity and is an object of beauty that is designed to do smooth rhythmic work, not static repetitive movements. But with the advent of computers and process line technologies, the human body was being pushed to work faster than it ever had, and this brought on stress and strain. When workers are stressed, both physically and psychologically, they become tired. Their muscles are not able to refresh and gain

nutrients and oxygen. The waste products build up and pain happens.

In those days, before we knew better, women with RSI were given plastic splints to wear to immobilise the joints. We said to them: "Wear your splints. Wave them like artificial arms. Hit people with them (just joking). Be obvious. Show people how many of you there are. Show people you are all injured workers. We need to confront the community with this."

Women demonstrated in the streets in hundreds. Women in this enormous street demonstration, waving their splints—it was amazing—and bit by bit they were successful in gaining recognition that the complaint was legitimate and in getting workers compensation. Later, they formed independent groups to fight for their rights.

But that was just the beginning. Later it was hell! Insurance companies behaved scandalously. They actually had investigators sticking video cameras over back fences to photograph women hanging up their washing. There was even evidence of tapes being spliced together to show that women were doing things smoothly rather than taking a quarter of an hour to hang a pair of knickers on the line!

At this stage, blue-collar male workers in particular also started coming out of the closet to say: "We have it too." RSI had previously been dismissed as a female disease but once the boys got it, occupational health bureaucrats took it seriously.

But what made RSI a legitimate occupational health issue was the courage of the women who, in the face of cynicism and attacks on their integrity and dignity, just hung in there.

♦♦♦

In Asia today, women more increasingly than men are being employed in the export industries. If you look at economic data, more and more women are economic heads of households. This is why women have to hold on to their health—for the sake of their own health and the viability of the family. If they are injured or disabled by work, it can throw a family that is just surviving into the hole called poverty.

Women's experience of work and the occupational risks they confront, on the whole, are different to men's—not because they are women but because of the gender segregation of labor. Women are more at risk of soft tissue injuries because they do a lot of the repetitive assembly line work. They get a lot of cancer because the industries they work in, such as the dry cleaning and electronics industry, routinely use carcinogens. In the majority world, the regulation of workplace cancer causing agents is much more lax.

At the risk of making broad generalisations, men tend to have a lot more lacerations, amputations and transportation injuries. Women tend to have more chronic, long term, disabling illnesses.

MAKING IT SIMPLE

One of the important things for those who teach occupational health to women workers is to make it easy. Not that women can't deal with complexity, but because they have so many other things to do and their available hours are limited.

One of the beauties of what happened in the province of Leyte in the Philippines was that it was so easy. Imelda Marcos had a new copper smelter built as her gift to the people of the province. Copper smelting draws a lot of power and this one was linked to a local geothermal plant. When the power supply could not keep up with the smelter's demands, it shut down. When it did, for some strange reason, the pollution control mechanics, would open and heaps of sulphuric acid would pour into the bay—so much that the pH (a measure of acidity) of the seawater was 2.3—that's as acidic as vinegar.

The sulphuric dioxide emissions caused a lot of chest disease in the nearby community and amongst the workers. The smelter had passed the environmental impact assessment and the community felt that they could not do anything without complex

Working for Life

Melody Kemp's *Working for Life* is a basic text for women workers, labor activists and trade union workers. It is meant to serve as a source book for women workers, just like occupational health workers have their 10-centimeter textbook of chemicals as a back-up.

The book originally started as a handbook for labor inspectors, a simple handbook that could be stuck into back pockets. Melody was chief advisor on a project that was to improve the conditions of working women in Indonesia. After visiting about 125 factories, it became very clear to her that the labor inspectors had no idea of the way in which women were differently affected by occupational hazards.

Melody was staring out the window one night when she realized that the people who really needed these information were the women themselves. Most of them are not members of unions and there is hardly any workers' education programs for shop floor workers.

Materials coming from the trade unions in the industrialized world assume that readers are technically educated and understand the language of legislation. But women in the developing world do not have formal education. Where would women get information?

Wanting to use her experience as a woman in occupational health, and being a former trade union member, Melody wanted to speak with women workers to encourage them to know and become familiar with the language and "alchemy" of occupational health. She firmly believes that information is power and that with information, women workers can feel the courage of the informed.

Working for Life is simple without oversimplifying things and without being patronizing. It actually speaks with women because they are the ones who get totally left out.

"*Working for Life* is not the only book in the world on occupational health but it maybe is the only one that is for women directly. It is a practical handbook, a how-to-do guide, a bit like *Where There is no Doctor* for workers," declares Melody. "I hope women will be able to pick it up and use it."

scientific equipment.

But my own understanding is that people and workers experts in their own environment, including the place they work in. They are an enormous well of unused expertise. They intuitively note changes in their living environment.

So, what we did was we got a simple map of the area and drew circles around the plant at one kilometer intervals. Doctors in Leyte were each given a copy of this map. They then asked every patient that came in where they lived in relation to the smelter and marked it on the map.

Then the patients were asked how long had they been sick. The smelter was built around the time Cory Aquino came into power so that was used as a time indicator. Coloured pins marked various types of illnesses. At the end of each month, doctors would take a polaroid photograph of the map and send it to the Environmental Management Bureau in Manila.

This was done over a period of six months. Then the winds changed, so did the distribution of illnesses as indicated by the distribution of the pins.

We showed there was a positive relationship between what was coming out of the factory and the illnesses being experienced by the community.

It doesn't have to be complicated. The doctors did not have to get involved in any heavy data collecting. All they had to use were maps and the maps were very graphic. The whole thing involved the entire community and it energized them.

After I moved to Indonesia and had been there for nine months, I got a letter saying that the copper smelter's environmental impact assessment had been overturned by community action. Wowee!

♦♦♦

To some degree you have to be an "occupational detective." You have to find clues, build up the case. You have to relate one thing with the other, put all those clues together and then prosecute management ultimately.

One of the things I tell people is to organize their information, to start doing things like work place surveys. These can be very simple exercises that establish the relationship between what's going on in the work place and workers' injuries and illnesses. Workers become ill if they are exposed to a dangerous thing—whether a process, a chemical, radiation, noise, vibration or excessive heat—and the degree to which they have been exposed affects the body. This classical principle is called "dose response."

The way in which the relationship is established is for workers to investigate illness in their own

workgroups. They need to notice things that might have changed. For instance, a shoe factory may have changed from a water-based to a solvent-based glue. Around that time, women noticed that they felt dizzy and nauseous. You might suspect that the glue is the culprit.

To make sure that this the case, you would need to look at two groups of workers: those that use the new glue and those that don't. Check for instance on women doing the packing and then look if the dizziness started happening at the same time that the glue arrived.

If the two groups do not have the same illnesses, then you have to start looking at what else is going on. It could be the chemicals being fed through the ventilation system. That's why I say it's like detective work. It's not for everybody. It's not an interest that I would expect all women to suddenly say "yes!" to. You have to be prepared for the complexity.

And you have to remember that there are always people around to give help. There is the department of labor and the ministry of health. There is the International Federation of Trade Unions. There are International Labor Organization (ILO) offices distributed throughout most of Asia. Help is available through the international trade unions system and the regional labour groups. And we should also work towards creating and strengthening the solidarity among women here in Asia and overseas.

In Indonesia, it is so repressive that workers can not take a lot of action and there is no real trade union movement. So workers there use theater to explore the issues and develop solidarity. There are skits where workers behave like machines. They stagger around coughing and gasping and falling about doing high drama stuff but it works in terms of getting their story across and is very cathartic for workers and the audience.

I use songs to help women remember the names of chemicals. Chemicals or toxicology is a very difficult subject to teach because of the hideous words. So I often ask women to make up songs about these chemicals and this takes the pressure off them to have to remember ghastly chemical names. And it's exciting because it sticks. They would say "Ah, karbon disulfida (carbon disulphide). We know that one.")

The Black Women's Movement in Brazil



Eduardo Simoes/Foto F4

When speaking about the situation of women in Brazil, it is necessary to define whether one is speaking of white women, black women or indigenous women. Each one lives a different reality, with distinct challenges and achievements.

Alzira Rufino, founding member of The Black Women's Collective of Baixanda Santista in Brazil, spoke in London at the Fighting Sexism: North and South conference organised by War on Want. Alzira speaks to us too in these following pages.

Violence against women is a world-wide phenomenon and is found in all cultures, races and social classes. In Brazil, violence against women is particularly serious because Brazilian society is very conservative in relation to women, and maintains patronising attitudes and behaviour towards black women especially.

Approximately 30 percent of Brazilian families are headed by women who, alone, support their children and other relatives. This reality is particularly true for black women who are in the lowest position in the income scale and are undervalued and discriminated against in relation to white women.

For centuries in Latin America, black and indigenous women have suffered from belonging to a crushed ethnic group. They are brutally exploited by colonisation, deprived of their

culture and beliefs, and subjected to a racial ideology that classifies them as primitive and inferior according to white cultural and racial standards.

Yet, Brazilian women are repudiating the social, economic and cultural disadvantages that they have been subjected to. They are denouncing the violence done to their human rights by sexism and racism. Women are also denouncing the material and spiritual evils caused by economic elites who keep the world in a state of war and in permanent



Black and indigenous women in Brazil have found their voice.

Marka Eldiario

disequilibrium. Like in other South American countries, the women's struggle and the struggle against racism in Brazil are also struggles against poverty, which increases women's vulnerability to all kinds of violence.

Although slow, the mobilisation of Brazilian women has been able to positively affect the country's politics. In recent years, women have been elected to decision-making positions. In 1988, 107 cities were headed by women mayors. In 1992 in the following election, this number rose to 171 and included three state capitals. In the 1994 elections, women made further advances. There were two women candidates for the vice-presidency of the Republic, 10 contenders for the position of State Governor and 12 for the Senate. The biggest revelation came with the results of the Senate elections: 40 women, two of whom are black and belonged to the Workers Party,

won. One of the elected black senators is a former domestic servant, one among the Brazilian black women that make up almost 80 percent of Brazil's domestic servants. Most black women work as househelps because they are excluded from so-called female professions. The black women's victory means that historic obstacles that have kept the approximately 32.4 million black women at the lowest level of education and professional achievement could be overcome.

The problem of access to the different levels of education needs to be analyzed if the position of black women in Brazil's employment market is to be understood. Attempts to make such an analysis is however hindered by the limited data available on Brazilian women. These data do not take into account the differences among white, black and indigenous women in Brazil so there exists no statistical

analysis concerning black and indigenous women.

Nevertheless, the 1982 census showed that in contrast to 78 percent of white women completing elementary education, only 22 percent of black women achieved this level. Of this number, only one percent entered the university. What is sad though is that despite higher education, many black women still end up as servants, unable to find other types of work.

If only for the fact that half the female population in Brazil are black and indigenous women, the political and economic progress of black and indigenous women could represent a democratic revolution. One cannot claim to embrace democracy for as long as black and indigenous women are excluded from power.

In this context, the organizations of black and indigenous women play a very important role. They are the mouthpiece that speaks of the reality of the excluded millions. Black and indigenous women's organisations are putting pressure on government, bringing awareness to society, making black and indigenous women qualified for decision-making positions in politics and the economy. Even now, many female leaders in Brazil's politics are products of the women's movement. The feminist experience they gained there contributed greatly to their assertiveness and visibility in Brazil's political arena.

Source: *Trouble & Strife*, Nos. 29/30, Winter 1994/95

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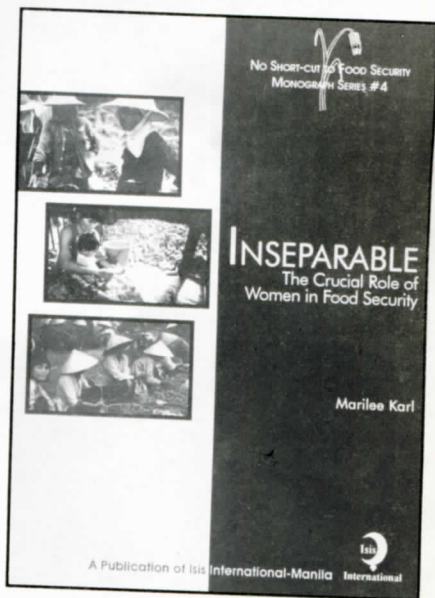
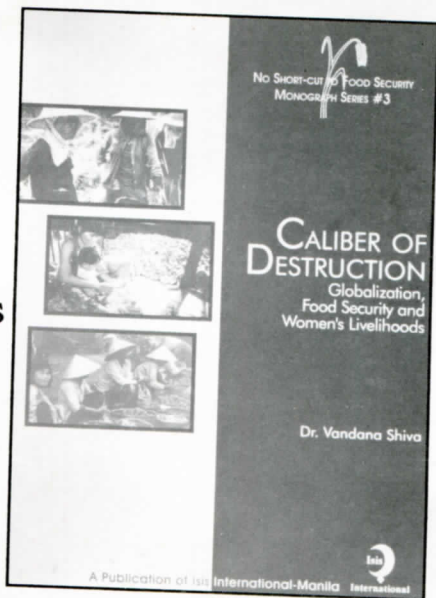
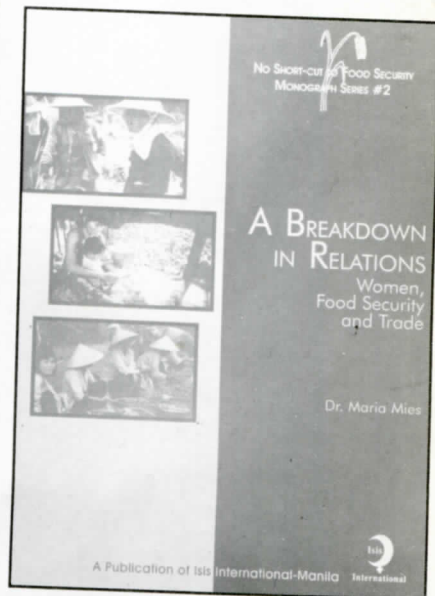
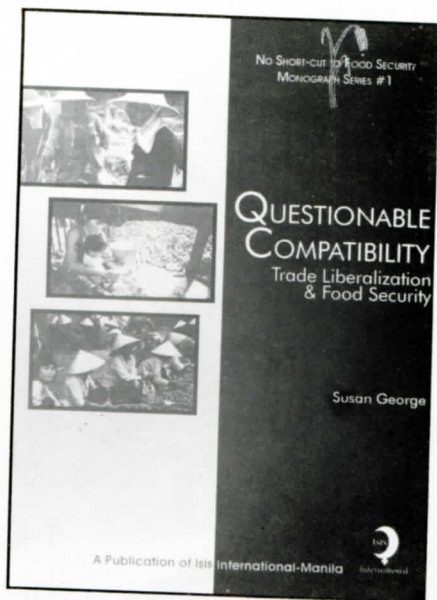
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