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MOTHERING: BREAKING STEREOTYPES

No Justice in Bhopal News, Arts, Books, Women's Groups... Looking at Advertising

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Donna Hoffman

Correction: Issue 8's *Bile File* was written by Pauline McCann.

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Last November, the Council for the Status of Women invited Anne Neale from International Wages for Housework to speak at its conference *Women and Unwaged Work*. Here Anne details WFH's campaigning since the UN Decade for Women and about

The Road to Beijing:

Making Women's Work Count

Governments and many women's organisations are gearing up for the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (4-15 September 1995) and the overlapping Forum of Non-Governmental Organisations (30 August-8 September) in Beijing, China.

During the UN Decade for Women (1975-85), the UN held three international conferences. One issue which rose in prominence and which is increasingly appreciated as fundamental to changing women's subordinate position everywhere, is the need to recognise women's unwaged work. It was raised at the first conference in Mexico City, and again at the mid-Decade conference in 1980 in Copenhagen, where the ILO issued the figure that women do two-thirds of the world's work for 5% of the income and hold only 1% of the assets.

In 1985, at the Final Conference in Nairobi, governments agreed *Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,* which was the Decade's final decisions. The most far-reaching decision - Paragraph 120, which the International Wages for Housework Campaign (WFH) amended and lobbied for - calls on governments to count women's unwaged work in the home, on the land, and in the community in their Gross National Product (GNP). Once this passed, International Wages for Housework launched Time Off for Women to celebrate the 24 October 1975 anniversary of the Iceland Women's Strike, when Iceland came to a standstill as women joined together to take time off from waged *and* unwaged jobs. Time Off, held every year since, is made up of internationally coordinated actions by grassroots women. The International Women Count Network, which presses governments to implement Paragraph 120, grew out of Time Off for Women, and is represented in Ireland by Margaretta D'Arcy of Women in Media and Entertainment. Western Women's Link and the Council for the Status of Women have also been active supporters of this issue.

As a result of this international campaigning, several countries are moving towards legislation. *The Unremunerated Work Act* is currently in the US Congress, and legislation is also being considered in Trinidad & Tobago and in the Philippines. In 1993, the European Parliament adopted *The Assessment of Women's Unwaged Work*, a report which calls not only for women's unwaged work to be counted, but for social security and pension rights for those working unwaged in the home, on the land and in family businesses; employment protection for unwaged carers; an allowance for people raising children; and protection for the rights of mothers returning to waged work. It took three years for the Women's Rights Committee to consider and adopt this Report. We lobbied them constantly, including going to Brussels every time the issue was on their agenda, together with women from housewives' organisations in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and, of course, Ireland. We're now working on getting the European Commission to issue a Directive which would oblige Member States to implement its recommendations. Social Affairs commissioner Padraig Flynn insists that it is beyond the Commission's powers to issue a Directive about women's unwaged work. But if Parliament has passed it, how can the Commission refuse to act on this decision? We are continuing to press Flynn and others to act.

The Conference in Beijing will evaluate progress in implementing the decisions made during the UN Decade for Women. Each one of the regional UN conferences in the "Beijing process", from Africa to Asia, has prioritised counting women's unwaged work.

The world has changed for women and for everyone in these 10 years. On the one hand, more women are in positions of power, and on the other, most women are working harder for less. Women who have the least money spend more of their time, which happens to be their lives, doing unwaged work. Our workload differs depending on who and where we are in the world, on our race, nationality, income, religion, age, whether we have disabilities, men, children, money!

Counting unwaged work brings all women together on the basis of what we have in common, and at the same time quantifies the divisions among us. It is therefore the basis for an international movement which is able finally to address these divisions and to bridge them. Beijing is one place for the growing might of this movement to convince governments that the time to count unwaged work is now.



Changing Attitudes about Pregnancy, Sexuality and Disability

In an article in the newsletter of the Spina Bifida Society, Máirín Conroy writes "Anyone who has ever given a talk to a group about Spina Bifida or disability in general will have been asked if it is possible for people with disabilities to have a normal sexual relationship; to get married; to have children. It is a question asked too by parents of young people with disabilities and by teenagers and adults themselves. Not so long ago the model of adult life for a disabled person was that of institutional care...Seldom was it envisaged that the disabled person could or should make an independent life for him or herself including work, marriage and children." Conroy's interviews with members of the Spina Bifida Society demonstrate that such an attitude is a myth, and many people with disabilities do choose to have children. But society still resists the idea of people with disabilities having and raising children and indeed of them having a sexuality.

Sexuality and disability has been a topic of discussion for many years within the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and in 1994 the Swedish Family Planning Association organised a seminar focusing on people with spinal cord injuries, called *Sexuality, Fertility and Pregnancy*. The seminar stressed the importance of recognising the right of people with disabilities to lead a sexual life. Ninnie Westergren of the Solberga project, which supports people with spinal cord injuries, reported that a great majority of women in the project regarded themselves as well integrated in society after giving birth. Most were healthy, in full employment, managed a household and had a social network. Spouses of project members considered their family to be a family like any other.

This international experience corresponds with the experience of people interviewed by Máirín Conroy. Women with physical disabilities have the same difficulties as other people, such as the challenges of unemployment and single parenthood. At times, these difficulties can be compounded by social unacceptance of disabled people as sexual beings and discomfort with disability itself. This can range from medical personnel who don't treat a disabled mother as if her body is her own, parents who oppose marriages, people who break dates because they are uncomfortable with disability.

A new centre has been established in Dublin to challenge misconceptions about and discrimination against people with disabilities, including around issues of sexuality and pregnancy. The APIC Centre (Awareness, Publications, Information and Communication) publishes a magazine by and for people with disabilities, organises conferences, participates in campaigns such as the *National Youth Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Intolerance*, and runs school and arts projects. According to Anthony Newsome, one of the centre's founders, their recent conference *All Sexual* provided "an excellent opportunity to learn more about the diversity and complexities of sexuality and [made] a statement that we are all equal, and that people have a right to be sexual and express their sexuality freely."

For more information about APIC, contact Anthony Newsome on (01) 8729930.

This article was compiled from information in The Spina Bifida Society newsletter, Gay Community News and the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights newsletter.

Enriching Identities

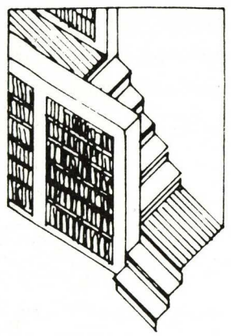
Marian Tannam is mother to an interracial child. Her experience raising her son gives her a strong personal base from which to analyse Irish racism.

In 1980, the birth of my son, whose father is from Ghana, was a joyful occasion. However, during the following months and early years, I experienced disturbing feelings when people made some comments: 'He's not that black'; 'he'll be a great dancer'. 'Is he from a home,' some children asked. 'Is he adopted,' a woman in a restaurant inquired. While in hospital after having Colin, the paediatrician asked if I had got pregnant while on holiday. Another friend who was married to a Nigerian man was approached by the hospital social worker shortly after having her daughter and asked if she had considered adoption. The social worker was rather taken aback when she replied that she didn't think her husband would think much of this suggestion. Here we see the assumption being made by two professional people that interracial marriages and relationships are not a feature of Irish society. As such comments continued I began to gain an insight into the reasoning behind them. The reality of it hit me when Colin came home shortly after starting school and said to me: 'is black not nice'? I knew then with certainty that if a four year old could pick up on such attitudes it would be a long uphill battle for Colin to feel confident with his dual identity in Irish society. I knew that society would try to define his identity (usually in a negative way), that he would be denied the right to explore his cultural heritage and identity at this own pace.

Almost fifteen years later I know that racism underlies all these attitudes and incidents. Over the years I have come in contact with many people who have experienced racism in Ireland. Their experiences have ranged from verbal abuse, being spat upon, graffiti on their homes, physical attacks on people and their homes to coping with institutional and cultural racism. I could continue giving examples of individual experiences of being made feel different but what might be more productive would be to look at the structures and denial strategies in Irish society that allow active racism at individual, institutional and cultural levels.

In her book *Anti-Racist Social Work*, Lena Dominelli main -

tains that racism consists of three main interacting elements. *Individual racism* is "made up of those attitudes and behaviours depicting a negative prejudgement of racial groups. Individual racist attitudes without institutional backing constitute racial prejudice. *Institutional racism* consists of customary routines which ration resources and power...relying on public power and authority for its legitimation, institutionalised racism pathologises these excluded groups for their lack of success within the system and blames them for their predicament. The reproduction of racism through the interaction between individual behaviour and institutional norms forms the dynamics of institutionalised racism. *Cultural racism* is centred around those values, beliefs and ideas endorsing the superiority of white culture. It provides the cement of popular racism which reinforces both institutional and individual racism".



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We can examine these elements in relation to Irish society. We have already seen above a number of examples of individual racist attitudes. Lack of antiracist legislation is just one example of our institutionalised racism. In 1968 Ireland signed the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination but has since failed to bring in the necessary domestic legislation in order to ratify it. Various government ministers have on occasions stated their government's commitment to the ratifying of this Convention. It could be argued that the time span of over twenty one years since the signing of this convention does not indicate a high degree of commitment towards the stated policy. The Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act (1989) came into effect in March 1990. Most interested groups saw this Act as 'a step in the right direction' but also as being very restrained in dealing with racism. One of the main effects has been to make illegal the publication of racist material by fascist and neo-Nazi groups. Ireland had in the past been used as a publishing and clearing house for such material. Successive policies towards Travellers has denied their ethnic identity and eroded their nomadism, which is the basis of their economic existence. Legislation alone will not change attitudes but it would be a public statement of policy.

For many Irish people, the only contact or knowledge they will have about people of another culture or colour are the images portrayed by development aid organisations. Images of starving 'Third World' children reinforce the concept of European superiority and the dependency of 'Third World' countries. Very seldom is there a balance of positive images or a questioning of the exploitation of these countries. Ireland has played a major role in perpetuating such Eurocentric/ethnocentric attitudes which form an integral part of our cultural racism. Many development aid agencies are now looking at their practices and the images they portray and are becoming more vocal in their criticism of media representations.

There are many records of the Irish who have emigrated being racist in America, Australia, South Africa and other countries. Examples of our treatment of the Jewish community at the turn of the century and in recent years leave a lot to be desired. In the past thirty years, there has been a visible increase of minorities residing in Ireland of African, Asian, Middle Eastern and East European origin, many of whom experience racism. There is also an increasing indigenous black Irish population which is often ignored. Yet we continue to deny that racism is a problem for the Irish and often 'blame the victim'. This denial is indicative of xenophobia and a wish to keep our country homogeneous while at the same time expecting special treatment for Irish citizens who emigrate to all corners of the world.

Exploring the whole of a child's identity can be an enriching experience. It can also give the child confidence and a positive self image. Perhaps if the Irish were more prepared to explore other cultures and recognise them as equal, and face up to the issues raised in eradicating our own racism, Ireland would be a more enriching place to live.

While government ministers hint at legal changes 'allowing' gays and lesbians to adopt and raise families, lesbian mothers have been doing what women always manage to do - they've been getting on with raising their children in a society that prefers to be oblivious to non-traditional families. **Elizabeth OShea** interviewed a number of women who talked about every aspect of child rearing and custody. Here, she focuses more particularly on family dynamics and raising up children.

Passing on the Good Things

"Make sure you tell them that it is possible to be a lesbian mother in Ireland. There was a time when I felt like that was a total impossibility, this feeling, how could this be, how could this possibly be what I am, I'm married with children and maybe I'm a lesbian.

When Joni Crone came out on the *Late Late Show* and became Ireland's 'first' lesbian, she precipitated a personal revolution for many women who suddenly found the impossible possible - and there was even a name for it. But for married women, the impossible was even more complicated, as the women I interviewed explained.

Like most women growing up in the 60s, Louise was raised to get married and spent years asking herself "how could this possibly be what I am?" Lynn left her marriage in Birmingham eight years ago. She has recently moved to Dublin to live with her partner, Phil. Lynn recounts, " I was married for twelve years; [the marriage] was only because I was never given the opportunity. I was the eldest of seven children and I was expected to meet someone, get married and set an example to my younger siblings. I went on a women's issues course at Birmingham Polytechnic and started learning all these things that I could really put a finger on. I came out when I became aware, completely aware of what my sexuality was." Phil and Myra both coped with violent relationships. Myra remembers, "because of the violence and the alcoholism I couldn't look at my own sexuality. I didn't have time to think."

Our society has enough difficulty with marital separation and provides no support for alternative families, although we have begun to recognize that they exist. Myra has been thinking about the consequences of this. "It's been difficult. If I feel lonely and isolated, how do my children feel, because at least I have some support. They don't have a support system because of the stigma and the shame attached to gay and lesbian parents. It's not something you can go talk to your friends about."

Mothers in the community

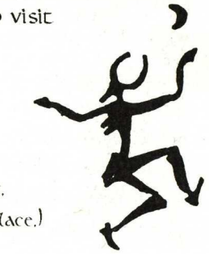
The support that lesbian mothers have from the lesbian community has developed slowly. Louise recalls that when she first came out, the lesbian/feminist community was notably rigid. You had to dress a certain way, not associate with men - this left no space for married lesbian mothers. Phil says, "the first disco I went to, when I said I was married there was shock, and when I said I had children they just froze me out, which totally put me off." Both Phil and Louise got involved with a lesbian mothers group. "I was surprised at the first meeting that there were that many lesbians with children," Phil remembers.

Phil and Louise agree that support for lesbian mothers is much better now. Phil points out that there's childcare at lesbian conferences, and "there's more lesbians having children anyway, who want to have them." But Lynn adds, "sometimes I think that the only problems lesbian mothers have got is childcare." There's not much structured support," agrees Phil. Louise feels there is a need for a lesbian mothers group because "from working on Lesbian Line and in First Out, I've formed the impression that half of the lesbians in the country are people who've been married and had children." Childcare for lesbians isn't organized enough, she feels, and this issue does cross the boundaries of sexuality. "[Childcare] doesn't cross anybody's mind, that just reflects the national situation. Nobody sees it as a particular pri-

Úa a flood, a deluge, a scream. Úa a stone, a great stone, esp. a standing stone, a monumental stone on which an ogham inscription was cut. úa a healer, 'a úa, teisigh cú fein' (physician, heal thyself)

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ority, everybody sees children and that people have children, but nobody cares to organize around that in the workplace or any sort of lesbian venues."

Living with lesbian mothers

"How do my children feel," wonders Myra. Children's feelings seem to depend on when they find out about their mother's sexuality. In general, children who are told their mothers are lesbian when they are older seem to have more difficulty accepting a mother's 'different' sexuality than younger children do. Perhaps this is because older children have had more opportunity to internalise society's values. From these interviews, it appears that children who grow up with lesbian parents deal with it well. This bodes well for Antionette's daughter. Antionette coparents a four year old, a child she and her partner planned. At a Lesbian Lives conference workshop, she wondered "how to approach the whole subject with a four year old about lesbians and homophobia. I feel quite tentative over it and I want to be sure that I introduce it in a good way." Antionette has been trying to find her daughter books which deal with the subject, but with little success.

About three years ago I came out to my children ... it's been difficult. To me it's a human right, it's not a gay right, it's rights as a human being, that I feel I'm being derpived of the right to be what I am, the right to be whatever sexual orientation I am is my right.
--Myra McGuirk

Lynn's daughter was five when she moved out of the house, and the daughter and her older brother lived with their father for the next three years. During that time, Lynn explained to her children slowly. She talked to them about sex and sexuality in general. She told them she was lesbian. "You can tell who you want about this, but you have to be careful because their responses might not be what you want them to be."

Myra's says her younger children haven't as many problems as her older children have with her sexuality. One of her daughters asked her if Myra's partner would want to join them for her confirmation dinner. This is a big change in acceptance for her children. But her older children have more fears. "My daughter who's 17, one of her fears was what if we're taken off you, your kids can be taken off you if you're a lesbian. I said, no, you can't, because I have a protection system. They do have difficulty. They're ashamed, they feel awkward in society. but I had a lot of that stigma and shame attached to me while I was separated. You become different in society, you become marginalized."

Lynn says mothers must negotiate what are children's real fears, what is parental paranoia about what parents and partners do, and what is teenage angst. Her daughter is 13. "If she walks down the street with my girlfriend and I and she sees any of her friends, she immediately picks up the pace and walks in front of us. Now whether she would do that anyway, I don't know. My experience [as a youth worker] is that they tell their parents very little and my concern for my daughter is that she will tell me very little." And does 'protecting' children do themselves and their parents more harm than good? "If the worst thing that happens to my daughter is she gets chided for her mom being a lesbian, then she might be very lucky."

"I can't change who I am just so you don't hurt," Myra told her children. "I can't protect the kids from the hurts of life. I had to say to them, my sexuality is a small part of me, I am who I am. I know the difficulty I felt, I grew up in an alcoholic home where I felt the shame of something that was difficult and not talked about and I don't hide behind dishonesty. I think the more honest I became, the more up front, it takes away the whole power of people to hurt."

"Probably when they get a little older, they'll respect and love your honesty, how straight you are about telling them how it is. That's a tremendous, lovely thing," one of the women at the Lesbian Lives conference told Myra. Of course there are children who will grow up unaccepting and remain so - but is this because of difficulties with their mother's lesbianism or because of other difficulties? Myra thinks that, despite the isolation and stigma she knows her children feel, they also feel they're a lot better off than they were in the 'normal' married environment of alcoholism and violence they lived in for many years.

In *Different Mothers* , Louise Rafkin's book of interviews with children of lesbians in the United States, seven year old Ishana says "I think in a family you need enough love, and enough food and enough clothes and enough toys." It's apparent in Rafkin's interviews that children who had 'enough' are more comfortable with themselves and their parents. Children who grew up with drug/alcohol abuse, child abuse, instability, were the ones who had difficulty. In this way, children of lesbians are just like other children.

Having read *Different Mothers* , I asked everyone I interviewed if they thought being a lesbian helps their children in any way. "They're more broadminded," Phil responds. "They understand choices," says Lynn. "I don't think it puts them at a disadvantage," Louise tells me, " I think they would have thought that. Ten years ago I thought it was a disaster, but now I'm very glad that this is the way I am. I think it makes me more human and probably a better parent."

Transcripts and copies of these taped interviews have been lodged with the Lesbians Organising Together (LOT) library. 'New Beginnings' is the lesbian mothers group organised by LOT. For further information and referral about custody and other legal rights, contact LOT at (01) 8727770 or Lesbian Lines around the country.

The Tortoise

Fiction

The tortoise had always been part of Norah's life. Long before she was born it had been an established member of her grandmother's household. And when her grandmother no longer ran a household but had retired to a bungalow by the sea, the tortoise remained with her, a constant and undemanding companion. Her other companion had been her sister who, like so many women of her generation, had never married, her young man having failed to return from the trenches of the Great War.

The two elderly ladies were passing their days contentedly in a state of gracious refinement when Norah entered their lives. Not that she disturbed the tranquillity of their existence in any way. She had always been a quiet, timid child who, from a very early age, came to regard her grandmother's home as a refuge in a threatening world.

She looked forward to the weekly visits they made as a family when she was very young, those quiet Sunday afternoons in the suburb by the sea. She loved the faded elegance of the place, the neatly clipped privet hedge that protected their privacy and the fragrance of lavender that filled the porch as the old ladies opened the door to welcome them. And above all she loved the tortoise.

While the adults drank tea and talked, Norah would always rush out to the sunny lawn with its patches of leafy shade and hunt for the tortoise. Sometimes he would just be there, nodding on the lawn, waiting for her. On other occasions, she had to search for him. His favourite hiding place was the rockery and she always looked there first. When she found him she would carry him gently to a sunny place on the grass where she would tempt him out of his shell with the sweetest, juiciest, young dandelion leaves she could find.

When the vulnerable, reptilian head and the scrawny neck with its grey folds of wrinkled skin finally risked abandoning the dark safety of the shell, Norah would feed the green stuff into the empty, cavernous mouth. Then the tortoise would let her stroke the top of his head with a gentle, chubby finger, as he submitted to her attentions with a combination of trust and contentment that caused her little heart to swell with love for the creature.

Schooldays followed, and with them Norah's entry into the world of her peers, a world of friendships and betrayals, intimacies and brutalities. This world was in a state of incessant flux, like a kaleidoscope of constantly changing perspectives, but out in the bungalow by the sea nothing ever changed.

The years passed and the old ladies welcomed every Spring with the same silk blouses and linen suits. In the Autumn they took their fur coats out of wardrobes that reeked with the smell of mothballs, to air them in preparation for the harsh weather to come. At the same time the rose-coloured satin bedspreads of the summer months were exchanged for fat, mustard-coloured quilts, and the tortoise was tucked away in the garden shed to hibernate for yet another year.

When Nora was seventeen her grandmother died. Her great aunt sold the house and moved away to an old people's home in another part of the country. Norah inherited a bracelet set with turquoise stones that she had always admired and the tortoise. It was all that survived of a way of life that had vanished forever.

The following year she met her husband, Charlie, at the local tennis club dance. They embarked upon a courtship that was as brief as it was intense and six months later they were wed.

They had not been married for more than a few weeks when Norah developed a gastric infection. She was queasy all the time for several days and on a couple of occasions she threw up after breakfast. But she refused to visit the local doctor.

"Could you be pregnant, maybe," asked Charlie, hopefully. She dismissed the idea and insisted that she must have eaten something that disagreed with her. When she began to thicken around the waist, however, she was forced to accept the fact that the thing she dreaded most in all the world was happening to her. She was with child.

Charlie was delighted. Norah was terrified. She had always known that she could not survive giving birth. They told her at the hospital that the expected date of delivery would be in the Spring. It was like a death sentence. Norah knew that she had only six months to live and that she must spend those last, few, precious months carrying the parasite that was swelling up inside her, preparing itself for its final assault upon her person.

The months that followed were the longest she had ever lived through. Each day she became a little weaker as the creature in her womb sapped her life force and grew in size and strength. She felt it kicking inside her, threateningly, and sometimes, when she lay naked on the bed, she could see what must have been fists and feet pummelling against the skin of her belly, like a little animal trying to fight its way out a paper bag.

Charlie would put his hand over her swollen belly in order to feel the child kicking. When it moved against his splayed fingers his face would shine with joy.

"It's a girl," he would say, "I can tell it's a girl."

"Don't say that," Norah would whisper, whitefaced.

"You know I'll love it just the same if it's a boy," he would answer, misunderstanding her. "A boy or a child, it's all the same to me," he would chuckle, trying to cheer her up.

As her time drew nearer, Norah's terror and misery increased. During the last few weeks of her confinement she passed the days in a stupor. Her doctor had prescribed a course of sedatives to help her through these latter days and relatives, friends and neighbours rallied to her support, mindful of the danger of an overdose. They brought her little gifts, delicacies to tempt her appetite, pretty things they hoped might kindle a spark of vanity. In the church they said prayers for her and lit candles in her name.

It was late Spring, and the tortoise had never stayed in hibernation for so long. Norah visited the greenhouse every day and sat for long hours staring at the cardboard box filled with straw and tissue paper. She willed him to waken from his

winter sleep. She wanted to say good - bye. He had become a symbol of her childhood, of all that it broke her heart to part with in this world.
One afternoon in the greenhouse she decided she could wait no longer. She groped around in the straw with trem - bling fingers until she felt the familiar shell and, gently, she lifted him from the box. The shell was strangely light in her hands and at a glance she could see that the tortoise was not sleeping, but dead. Her heart howled with anguish and she col - lapsed on the floor, clutching her dis - tended abdomen. The pains had begun.

At the hospital they told her that her cervix was almost fully dilated and that she was entering the second stage of labour. The pains were coming more and more frequently, but they were not intolerable. It was all happening so quickly.

"Isn't it well for you," said one of the women as an orderly wheeled her out of the antenatal ward. "I've been stuck in here for ten hours now. You only came in ten minutes ago and it's nearly all over for you."

"Nearly all over for you." The words rang in Norah's ears like a death knell as she was propelled down the corridor and into the labour ward.

"Push, push down hard now, love, that's right," urged the midwife.

"Stop, hold it there, breathe, now push again, that's right, good girl, come on, come on, here it comes, here come baby..."

Norah waited for the darkness to flood in upon her, for the pain to destroy her. But the darkness never came, she was still conscious and the pain was easing now. She felt a lurching sensation in the pit of her stomach and it was all over. The midwife offered her a little squalling bundle wrapped in a J-cloth. It was her baby.

"It's a boy," the midwife beamed at her. "A fine, healthy, baby boy."

She gazed in wonder at the infant in her arms, at the hairless head balanced pre - cariously upon the scrawny neck with it folds of wrinkled flesh.

A moment of recognition flashed across her mind, but before she could appre - hend it, it was gone. Shrugging the thought away she smiled down at her son. She slipped the nipple of her left breast into the warm darkness of the empty mouth and the child sucked con - tentedly as she stroked his head with a gentle finger.

Alexis Guilbride

Coming Up!

Ms.chief10
Focus:

Politics

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Please! Tell our advertisers you saw their ad in *Ms.chief!*

Jazz to the left of me and thrash to the right:



Zrazy talk about music:

"We used to have a band, we used to have three or four boys in the band, and we just ended up mothering them, dri - ving home after gigs, making them tea. Ah no, they were grand, but it was hard work, tough going, and ultimately they didn't make the sound we wanted them to make. We just said, fuck that, we'll get a computer and do it all ourselves," reminisces Maria Walsh about Zrazy at its beginning.

"We're really happy working as a duo," continues Carole Nelson, "But that doesn't prevent us from working with other people. We've just really settled into a good routine and rhythm with just the pair of us songwriting as a team. We're going to be working quite soon with a producer on some of our stuff and there's no doubt we'll bring in other people. We want to work with a gui - tarist and some of the stuff that is now drum programming will be live drum and live bass. I think what the plan is is to work on the next album as a studio album and then figure out how best to go on the road with it afterwards. There are plans to make our next album quite soon, we're just figuring out the details and the whereabouts and the wherewith - al."

Maria adds, "We're recording it in a small studio at home at the moment, and we've been travelling a lot anyway. We've been to the States, Canada, Switzerland and Germany, and we took a long rest over December, so we've been bouncing around material."

Zrazy played quite a few music festivals while travelling in support of *Give It All Up*. Carole reports, "some of the most interesting have been in Germany and Switzerland. There's a festival called *Wie Ihs Ihr Gefalt*, which is translated into 'how she likes it'. We found ourselves playing in a concert that would have real - ly extraordinary, avant garde, free impro - vising jazz at one end and hard core thrash and punk at the other and us somewhere between. That was very stimulating; you don't really find that so much in Ireland, such a wide range of expression. People tend to find their groove and stick with it."

Maria also enthuses about Zrazy's experi - ences in Switzerland and Germany. "The beauty of it is also that the music is not Anglo-American dominated, and that's just so refreshing to hear once again. There's a much much wider breadth of music out there that Irish audiences and English audiences and American audi - ences don't really get to hear that much. That was wonderful, refreshing and a real privilege to be amongst them and play."

"It's a rare enough phenomenon world - wide when you try and add up the num - ber of women who are really, strikingly out there, very strong and independent," Carole says, but Maria continues, "we came across them, on tour at these festi - vals, we came across brilliant female musicians, but they're not being played, they're not being supported by the record industry because the record industry is full of very conservative men who don't feel comfortable with women who are able to express themselves in a way that is not in the stereotypical way they would like."

Carole agrees, noting that marketing plays a large role. The Irish women that 'make it' are inevitably middle of the road (MOR). The strong women remain underground. "There's never been many, have there, I can think of Patti Smith, Chrissie Hynde, Marianne Faithfull, who would be really strong and who would speak very authentically for them - selves and who mostly weren't con - cerned about looking the part...Grace Jones, of course, she was great...but in Ireland I can't think of anyone, really."

Zrazy's first album, Give It All Up *, was released in 1993 on CD (VCD 2015)and cassette (VMC 2015) by Vélo Records,*

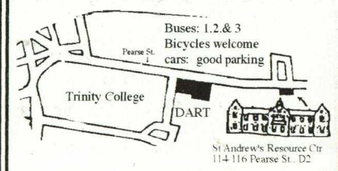
Carole Nelson and Maria Walsh talked with Elizabeth OShea.

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Here's Looking At you, Babe!

"In our society, men act, women are acted upon; men look, women are looked at; men have power, women are powerless." So wrote John Berger in 1972, referring to the ways in which men and women have been represented in art and advertising. While we might take issue with the extremely broad nature of his comments, what he does point out is the dynamics of power underlying the act of looking. Looking is not a neutral activity, a simple act of observation. It provides us with some of our most intense pleasures, whether through television, film, theatre, posters, concerts, etc. All of these cultural forms are organised around the activity of looking; they present us with a spectacle to be enjoyed and consumed. However, the pleasure of looking is loaded in favour of men. Everywhere, men look at women - on the street, in pubs (where women generally look away for fear of receiving unwanted and uninvited attention), on billboards (where women look invitingly back), in the cinema, on television - the list is endless. In general, power and possession are associated with the person who looks, passivity with the person who is looked at. Hence, men look at women who are displayed for their gaze. Images of women are constructed and presented in such a way as to connote, in film theorist Laura Mulvey's awkward but apt phrase, "to-be-looked-at-ness".

Pornography is the most extreme form of this visual imbalance, voyeurism pushed to its furthest limit. However, the display of the female body has always been intrinsic to advertising, indicating something to aspire to in products aimed at women (i.e., clothes, cosmetics), and something to be possessed in the case of products aimed at men (i.e., cars, after-shave lotions). Griselda Pollock points out that "a study of the transformation of the female nude in the history of representation shows how the (female) body has come to signify sale". So the juxtaposition of a woman and a product implies the saleability of both.

The emergence of the women's movement and the subsequent awareness of the blatantly sexist and stereotypical nature of most advertising has led to a decline of the woman-draped-on-a-car type of ads, though they're by no means dead yet. (My favourite are the puzzle books that are sold in newsagents, whose covers invariably feature a blonde, blue-eyed woman who looks as if she's strayed from a 1970s Sun-In ad. What on earth has she to do with puzzles? She doesn't even look puzzled.). What has happened in recent years is more subtle, more insidious, and ultimately, more damaging. Women in advertisements are becoming increasingly identified with the product itself, so that the woman and the product are interchangeable. Both can be possessed and consumed. This process happens in two ways. Either the woman is constructed visually to look like the product, or the product itself signifies femininity. Let me give some examples.

In the first case, we have the ad for Galaxy chocolate: "Why have cotton when you can have silk?". The woman in this ad is swathed in chocolate-brown silk. The ad for Samsara perfume which graces the back of glossy women's magazines features a woman in a red dress, the shape of which echoes the red bottle of perfume she holds in her hand. Ads for Tia Maria, whose slogan is "After dark...Tia Maria", have consistently used sensual black models who signify the dark exoticism (not to mention eroticism) that the advertisers want us to associate with the drink itself.

In the second case there are car ads, which are by far the worst offenders. In these ads, the car takes on attributes of femininity, and particularly of female sexuality. Of course, the association of cars and women is nothing new. Like boats, cars have the dubious honour of being gendered female (I say dubious because the little beauty with the lovely body-work can quickly become a wheezy old bitch when the car won't start). The best example of this type of ad is one which I haven't seen, but was described to me by a friend who saw it on Greek television. Firstly, we see a car with the windows steamed up, jigging up and down, from which we infer that there is a copulating couple in the back seat. Then, a man who has been watching the proceedings knocks on the window and asks the man inside, "how much?". In reply, the man inside the car writes the price of the car on the steamy window. The ad deliberately confuses the woman (a prostitute?) and the car - both women and cars can be bought and used for pleasure.

Nearer home, the situation is not much better. The series of ads for Renault 19 consistently link the car with a woman's body. In the first of these ads, the car is a Lady Godiva. As 'she' travels around the streets, people cover their eyes so as not to "give into temptation", as the slogan says. However, in this rewriting of history, the Peeping Tom is not punished by being struck blind. Instead, his voyeurism is rewarded by possession of the coveted object. The following ads feature a young, handsome priest who gazes in wonderment at the car before opening the door and running his fingers lingeringly along 'her' interior. finally, he too "gives into temptation", jumps into the car and drives off, watched enviously by his fellow seminarians. Call him, if you will, the Bishop Casey of car ads.

So inbuilt is this association of cars with the female body that it even occurs in ads which are ostensibly aimed at women. The new Rover is typical of the kind of car which is usually targeted at single, upwardly-mobile women - a small, compact 'run-around' which nips in and out of city traffic and has plenty of room for the Gucci and Chanel shopping bags in the back. The ad initially appears to be true to form. A single, upwardly-mobile woman drives the car deftly in and out of the aforementioned city traffic, parking in front of an expensive shopping mall. a uniformed doorman watches her (or the car?) admiringly as she gets out of the car. The male voice-over, which has been extolling the virtues of the car, talks of its perfect form and shape. However, as he talks, what we see is not the car, but the retreating back of the woman, mediated by the gaze of the doorman. It soon becomes clear that the car-woman is being praised for its/her understated elegance (she wears a classic little black dress) as compared to the vulgar ostentation of other cars/ women (the woman emerges from the mall beside a woman who is dressed in red and loaded down with gold jewellery and shopping bags). And you thought it was just another innocuous ad...

Advertising is one of the most creative and powerful media of the twentieth century. It constantly has to negotiate between what is safe and familiar (hence unthreatening) and what is new and exciting, always with the underlying economic imperative. So it borrows freely from ideas and issues floating around in the wider social arena and from other media (e.g., the seemingly endless spate of car ads inspired by *Thelma and Louise*). What results is a bombardment of images, of vignettes, many of which are pleasurable, all of which affect us fleetingly but accumulatively.

It's essential that women participate in the advertising industry itself, thereby creating new images, but it's also equally important that we take control of existing images by taking control of the reading process, the way in which we decipher ads. That way we can actively resist an industry which still, despite all the gains of the feminist movement, positions us as objects to be possessed and used by men.

Fidelma Farley

"Patriarchy will not make itself illegal":
Strategising against sexual exploitation

Dr Kathleen Barry is author of two major works on prostitution and sexuality. She published *Female Sexual Slavery* in 1979 and this year published *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, which revises and develops her earlier work, detailing and analysing prostitution as the cornerstone of all sexual exploitation. Kathleen Barry also founded the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, which has drafted a proposed Convention Against Sexual Exploitation. This is the result of ongoing consultations and conferences with nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), human rights and women's rights groups worldwide.

The proposed Convention Against Sexual Exploitation defines sexual exploitation as "a practice by which person(s) achieve sexual gratification or financial gain or advancement through the abuse of a person's sexuality by abrogating that person's human right to dignity, equality, autonomy and physical and mental well being". The proposed Convention includes more than prostitution in its definition. Sexual exploitation also entails female infanticide, wife and widow murder, battering, pornography, prostitution, genital mutilation, female seclusion, dowry and bride price, forced sterilisation and forced child bearing, sexual harassment, rape, incest, sexual abuse, trafficking, sex predetermination.

Human rights conventions do and don't work, says Barry. "Whether you were to propose a feminist family law on abortion, divorce, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse - all these things, or whether it's the civil rights ordinance on porn that [Andrea] Dworkin and [Catherine] McKinnon have developed or whether it's this UN Convention that we've been proposing - my view is that they're strategies for putting our agenda into the national and international arena and that there's probably more change that will take place in putting our agenda out than will actually take place once the law is realised and in place.

"It takes about ten years once a convention is introduced, it takes about ten years for it to grind through all the processes and for all the nation states to adopt it. Countries like the US won't adopt it because it doesn't sign any UN treaties, so that hegemony is still in place internationally. But in that period of time, we establish our platform. What this convention represents in terms of not just me or what I think but in terms of all the women's groups that we've met with and talked about - *it's what we want.* This is basically what we want and the more we put it out, the more we force discussion of it, the more that it starts to get articulated into, not just feminist discussions but into human rights and international discussions.

"I think that is the battle. I think that many people look at law as something that you accomplish and then you go back to what you were doing before you drafted it or before you signed your name to the petition or something like that. There's no group that's ever been oppressed that can afford to look at law in that way. Because as long as there's the potentiality for that oppression to be either reenacted or extended or imposed - we are going to be constantly in struggle, there's never going to be an end to the women's movement in terms of the need for it. So once this law is adopted then it's a struggle to get the states to recognise it. By that time there'll be new violations that this won't cover and we'll be on to something else. The struggle is the way we live and we might as well put our own agenda out. And this had provided us with a really good opportunity to say 'this is our agenda, this is what we're fighting for,' and right now we're facing tremendous resistence, not just at the UN but with NGOs controlling the Beijing conference - 'hear no evil, see no evil'.

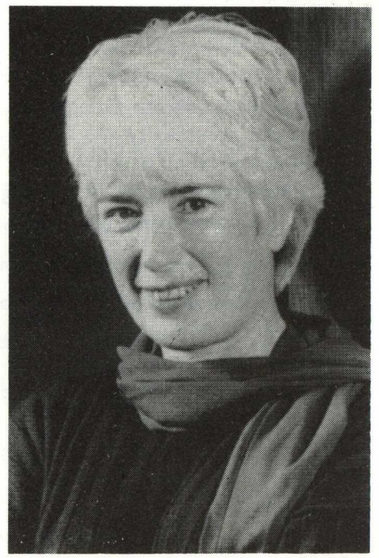
"There's a big resistance to keeping this from coming forward in Beijing on the part of the 'women's activists' who are organising things there. We have our own agenda and our own plan and we have a programme with UNESCO that will go on there. [But the convention raises] a different agenda than what would be seen within international human rights/women's rights contexts around the UN. But it's not just the UN, it's NGOs and individual women who basically want to keep the discussion within a framework that might be more acceptable to the UN; to their husbands or their girlfriends as the case may be. It will be discussed in the programme of the NGO forum, and UNESCO is going to be doing a session on it and UNESCO is a UN organisation.

Legal action is essential, but equally important are the projects which help women get out of prostitution. She details a number of such successful project worldwide in *The Prostitution of Sexuality* and recommends them as the models we need for women, rather than the patriarchal normalisation of prostitution through legalising it. "Patriarchy will not make itself illegal. It will not develop projects to undo itself. But if we know what works then we know what to demand and what to fight for."

Rosemary Gibney and Elizabeth OShea

The Dutch approach to prostitution is controlling the EC right now. It's a normalisation, a treatment of prostitution as just a job like any other and that you should give social welfare and health insurance. That's really the fundamental choice that we face right now - either normalisation of it and treating it like a job or getting women out.

--Kathleen Barry



Kathleen Barry. *The Prostitution of Sexuality*. New York University Press. 1995. ISBN 0-8147-1217-7.

books

Irene Diamond. *Fertile Ground: Women, Earth, and the Limits of Control.* **Beacon Press. 1994. £19.99. ISBN 0-8070-6772-5.**

Fertile Ground: Women, Earth and the Limits of Control questions a multitude of prevailing attitudes: feminist, ecological, liberal. It also suggests that feminism, in order to transform gender relations and alter women's oppression, must break away from the very Enlightenment attitudes that aided feminism's development. These ideas, such as property in one's person, science as a means of truth and control have also produced a commodified individual, society and planet which erases diversity and encourages environmental destruction, resulting in a heavier dependence on those same destructive technologies. Western feminism, as part of this discourse and ideology "systematically ignores the highly complex ecological, cultural and social webs that sustain all organic life" (p. 39).

In chapter 1, "Feminism, Fertility and the Living Earth,"Irene Diamond's detailings of the changes in understanding which led to this book, kept me scribbling quotations about her revelations, which dis-covered for her the complexity and intertwined nature of all issues. All of this, in turn, sent my mind following a thousand connective threads of thought.

I found the following, more academic, chapters less satisfying, in part because I am already familiar with many of the issues and dilemmas she talks about. I also found them less satisfying because she doesn't develop answers or prescriptions - and I think not doing so is an important part of what she is doing. Answers and prescriptions are integral to mechanised, masculine ecological movements and reproductive and food technologies which tell us, "If you do not already know, read this book or talk to this expert and all will be revealed". This attitude discounts the diversified and sustaining knowledge that we already possess. Irene Diamond does not reveal answers; she explores issues in order to point out the complexity and interconnectedness of our technologies, attitudes and behaviours. Her exploration provides the opportunity to introduce an ecofeminist perspective to these issues while emphasizing the value of non-Western ideas and practice which feminists and development workers in particular often ignore or discount.

Because *Fertile Ground* deals with complexities, I found it sometimes slipping away from me. I do not think this results from faulty writing or ideas; I think it the inevitability of a thousand different webs intermingling their threads. This may discourage non-academic readers, which would be a pity because Irene Diamond's critique of development in particular is too important, especially in Ireland, which has a large development industry. In may ways, while the book is complex, it is also initial. It provides an introduction to ecofeminism (chapter 2) as well as to a way of thinking, emphasizing connections, that many people do not undertake and may have difficulty with. For many, as it was for me, *Fertile Ground* will also be their first explicit encounter with the thought of Michel Foucault. There is so much to read and think about in Irene Diamond's book; it should not be ignored because it is, indeed, fertile ground providing for the future.

Dena Taylor, ed. ***Feminist Parenting: Struggles, Triumphs & Comic Interludes.*** **The Crossing Press. 1994. £11.99. ISBN 0-89594-690-4.**

I gave this book to a not-very-feminist mother to read, thinking that would be the real test. She liked it very much, especially some of the poetry. We agreed, however, that the title was poorly chosen. When I gave her the book, she said to me, "I'm not a feminist feminist." The title preaches only to the converted. My friend would never have picked this book off the shelf, but she enjoyed it and thought it was interesting, when she was asked to read it. Feminists will be happy to know there's a book out there that discusses and reinforces their parenting values, but surely the people who most need this book are not the converted. People who may be looking for parenting alternatives or who mayn't know there *are* alternatives will be put off.

It is very much a book for all parents, or for anyone involved with children. Even as a confirmed non-parent, I thoroughly enjoyed *Feminist Parenting.* It's divided into a number of sections: "The Proper Roles," "For Daughters," "To Lilith" (issues of religion), "What About the Boys?". Every issue gets covered: disability, race, sexuality, class, boys and emotion... It's also a very cross-cultural book for us here because it's very much of the United States, but I don't think that makes it any less appealing, affirming or valuable for Irish parents, particularly considering how much US culture Ireland consumes. My favourite contribution was "cross-cultural" - Gail Thompson's poem "For Daughters. She responds to Yeats' "A Prayer for My Daughter," which prays, "may she live like some green laurel/Rooted in one dear perpetual place". Thompson writes

Pull up your roots
and cultivate wildness,
a hungry vine
spreading runners
across borders.
Tell them you have done
with pruning.
shake custom from your branches
and seed yourself like ragweed
in tended gardens.
Learn courage
for there is danger
in movement
and this too
you should know.

Despite the uninspiring title, *Feminist Parenting* is definitely worth reading, whether or not you have or plan to have children.

Mná Mná
Rural Lesbian Irish Newsletter, 50p/£1 donation from Toma, Lahern, Ballydehob, West Cork.

"Here in Ballydehob, hippy capital of West Cork, a new generation of dykes have found a home in this infamous sixties hang-out for free-loving lesbians...We want the newsletter to be relevant and include all rural lesbians of Ireland."
Mná Mná plans to be a quarterly newsletter; issue two appears in mid May. So far as I know, this is the first ever newsletter for rural lesbians. *Mná Mná* celebrates rural lesbian life and provides a visible record of rural lesbian existence. The women include short stories, poems, and first person accounts to reflect their experiences and also lighten the tone with a butch/femme quiz and cross-word puzzle. There's also a cookery page featuring "Wild Food Recipes for Wild Womyn". This issue featured a mild curried chickweed.

Mná Mná is available both by post and in some shops, such as The Other Place in Cork.



Dublin 1996: The People vs. Europe

A major alternative to the European Union Summit, Dublin 1996, is being planned by groups across Europe. This Alternative Summit has the support of major groups within the European Parliament, as well as from political parties and lobbyists from a wide base within the EU. **Rosemary Gibney** gives a brief outline of plans already under way.

In December 1996, during Ireland's Presidency of the European Union, a major European Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) or Summit will be held in Dublin. The purpose of the Summit is to revise the Maastricht Treaty - the treaty they told us they couldn't revise.

So what will the boys be talking about? Well, it's hard to say exactly. If you ask the Department of Foreign Affairs what's on the agenda for the Summit they will send you copies of speeches by Gay Mitchell and Dick Spring in which the Ministers refer mostly to the expansion of the EU and to political, social and monetary union. (They steer clear of any reference to foreign or security policy.) The speeches are long on generalisation and aspiration but very short on detail.

Eurowatchers say that the timing of the British general election will have a big impact on the Summit - the British may try to stall everything if an election is imminent in the UK.

Whatever about the content of the official meeting, plans are already well under way in Dublin, Brussels and other parts of Europe to run a parallel alternative summit in Dublin, a major festival of community-based cultural events, discussions, demonstrations and information giving, gathering and exchange. The purpose of this alternative summit is to make European institutions more democratic and more accountable to the ordinary people of Europe by forcing them to take account of grassroots movements around citizens' rights - whether they be environmental or the rights of women or of minorities of any kind. Citizenship is now a major Euro buzz-word. The alternative Dublin summit (or the Other Dublin Summit as it's being called) wants to ensure that citizenship in the EU in the years ahead does not become exclusionary, the privilege of the strong and the wealthy with whole communities excluded or powerless. Part of the initiative is to have an antidiscrimination clause inserted into the Treaty.

If you want to know more about the Other Dublin Summit, call Rosemary Gibney on (01) 7068573.

No Justice in Bhopal

Ten years on, one of the world's worst industrial disasters continues to kill people. **Elizabeth OShea** reports on corporate impunity and Bhopal's fight for justice.

December 2, 1994 marked the tenth anniversary of a gas leak from the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, India. UNICEF numbered 10,000 dead in the weeks following the accident. The Indian government acknowledges 521, 262 people were exposed to the gas, and indepen - dent sources state that even now, 10 years on, 10 people die every month from diseases and disabilities resulting from the gas leak.

As with most engineered environmental disasters, women in particular have suf - fered the most from the effects of the Bhopal methyl isocyanate gas leak. The initial, general effects of the gas seemed to be on the eyes and lungs, leaving many survivors blind and/or with respiratory difficulties such as continuous shortness of breath. Other general effects were kidney, spleen and liver damage, neuro - logical and immune system damage and varieties of muscle weakness. Women, in addition, have suffered a huge range of gynaecological difficulties: dysfunctional uterine bleeding, chronic cervicitis, pelvic inflammatory disease, shortened men - strual cycle, and leucorrhoea (excessive white discharge). Effects were most severe in women of reproductive age, and this is where the insidious hazards of such engineered environmental disasters becomes apparent. Only 1/3 of the babies born to women pregnant during the disaster survive. There is genetic mutation in children born after the leak. In the year after the leak, 1985, independent researchers found the spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) rate ten times higher than it was before the gas leak. For the women involved, wilful bureau - cratic ignorance has compounded mat - ters. The Indian Council for Medical Research insisted they had no evidence to link any gynaecological problems to the gas leak, and the government dis - counted such complaints when filling out claim forms. Women reporting gynaeco - logical problems were often denied com - pensation money because the govern - ment claimed these problems could not be definitively linked to the gas leak.

Any illness or debility has social conse - quences. The shortness of breath and allergies which developed after the leak resulted in unemployment for many; for women it often meant they could not stand the smoke from their cooking. Women who had been sterilized and lost their only sons faced divorce and aban - donment. In 1985, Sayata Gothuskar spoke to Zeenatbee from Kazi Camp in Bhopal. Zeenatbee had five daughters and she reported the bleak situation for young women. "It is difficult...to get these girls mar - ried. Men are not prepared to marry them - they have the gas in them, they keep saying. People from outside won't marry our girls; they might die soon, they won't be able to work, they might produce deformed babies. But men from here are getting outside girls." Bhopal is poor even by Indian standards and women's role in India is strongly defined to be that of family carer and producer of sons. In such a situation, women like Zeenatbee's daughters have no future.

These appalling consequences are com - pounded by government inaction and complicity with Union Carbide and by the way Union Carbide has been let off the hook for the disaster. The accident in Bhopal was most definitely "engi - neered", construced to occur. The gas storage tanks were built at an already existing Union Carbide plant in the city rather than on land set aside for haz - ardous facilities because it was cheaper for Union Carbide, although much more dangerous for the poor of Bhopal. The maintenance supervisor position had been eliminated from the shift on duty during the disaster. The MIC unit staff had been cut from 12 to 6 workers over four years and workers were not proper - ly trained. The MIC tank was filled above recommended capacity, the cool - ing unit was shut down, the flare tower meant to burn escaping gas was not working because a faulty pipe had been removed and not replaced.

Despite wilful negligence, the company was allowed (as ordered by the Indian Supreme Court) to pay the Indian gov - ernment only US$470 million, which is insufficient to pay for even five years' medicines for the survivors. This con - trasts greatly with the US$4.2 billion paid to 650,000 women in the United States claiming damages from Union Carbide and seven other corporations for illness - es resulting from silicone breast implants. The comparison makes appar - ent the way poor, "nonWestern" people are systemically disadvantaged; they have no access to the lawyers and legal para - phernalia that women in "Western" countries have. They are disempowered from preventing dangerous industry being built near their homes, from preventing safety lapses, from obtaining the informa - tion that can help them protect them - selves, and from receiving due compensa - tion and bringing perpetrators to justice when the accident does happen because it interferes with corporate profit.

But it is important that, while recognizing the systemic disadvantages of poor peo - ple, particularly in "developing" nations, to not point at events such as the Bhopal gas leak and say that poor people have no power or redress. Ward Morehouse, writing in *The Ecologist*, points out that "the little positive treatment of those affected by the disaster has come about almost entirely as a result of the sur - vivors' protests". Women have been particularly active, out on the streets, marching and demanding their rights because "We've just come back from death. What have we to fear now," as one women told Sayata Gothuskar. Organizations such as the 14,000 mem - ber Bhopal Gas-Affected Women Workers Association have drawn up an 11-point list of demands for the tenth anniversary of the disaster. In part, they want Warren Anderson, chief executive officer of Union Carbide at the time of the disaster, tried for culpable homicide in India.

We must also recognize that while we are white Europeans, we are not protect - ed from such disasters, as Patricia McKenna MEP emphasized at a November meeting about Bhopal. For example, the 1993 Hickson's Pharmachem near-disaster explosion in Ringaskiddy demonstrated the interna - tional character of the chemical indus - try's wilfull ignorance. After the explo - sion, Hickson's admitted "they were not aware of the dangers of their production process". As with Bhopal, no one living in Ringaskiddy was told whether they should evacuate; at one point the Environmental Protection Agency stated that it was not possible to locate toxico - logical information on the Hickson's acci - dent.

Huge and lethal risk are a multinational phenomenon of multinational corpora - tions. But from a corporate point of view, these problems for people affected in no way outweigh the corporate bene - fits of their production and of the acci - dents. The people of Bhopal will be living with the effects of the gas leak for a num - ber of generations; such accidents pro - vide large scale cross generational human testing of chemicals' toxicologies that could never be legally undertaken. The illnesses and debilities which result gen - erate an expanding indefinite market for pharmaceuticals, for which companies such as Union Carbide and Hickson's produce. Because there are few reper - cussions for corporations, as was demon - strated in Bhopal, they can remain wilfully ignorant of the effects of their manufac - turing processes until the accident hap - pens. But they are not ignorant of what they are doing to the people that must live with their facilities. "Accidents" such as Bhopal and Ringaskiddy demonstrate that corporations know exactly what they are doing: they are risking the lives, health and livelihoods of the people around them and of future generations.

...world news...

Climbing Out of the Swamp

Last July, two Nepalese women cofounded the Feminist Dalit Organization, the world's first femi - nist group of "untouchable" women. Literally, the word *dalit* means "a per - son submerged in a swamp". The women must work to overcome two discriminations: society's sexism, and the class discrimination against them by higher caste women. The Dalit Organization said in a statement that the Nepalese women's movements have "not paid attention to our prob - lems, as all of those organizations belong to high caste people".

Sent Back to the Kitchen

Japanese labour ministry officials have announced that there is 'inequality' between women and men in the workplace. This is the conclusion of a two year investigation into the employment policies of Japan's top companies.

How is this inequality apparent? Recently, Nippon Life Insurance and Mitsubishi have frozen hiring in their clerical divisions, which are almost all-female, but not in their other divi - sions. Over the past few years, many employers have laid off women workers and denied married women promotions. In 1993, a labour min - istry survey of 1,000 companies found that top corporate manage - ment believes women are unreliable workers and will leave to have fami - lies.

Japanese women's groups say that these actions and surveys demon - strate that women were allowed into the workforce only because of the labour shortage of the 1980s. Now that the economy is declining, women are being forced out of jobs.

Mankiller Steps Down

Wilma Mankiller's election in 1985 as principal chief of the Cherokee Nation revived a pre-Colombian tra - dition of women in leadership in the Americas. She has announced that she will not seek re-election when her present term expires this year. Instead, she plans to set up a non - profit organization which will work for the advancement of girls and women in society and with Native American children. Her youth work will involve after school and daycare programmes, but it will also involve fun. Mankiller wants to revitalize tribal games in order to increase young Cherokees' sense of history and culture.

In an interview for the Women's International News Gathering Service (WINGS), Mankiller advised "society in general is out of balance because we are only hearing men's voices...Things are always going to be spinning out of control until we have women's voices in leadership posi - tions too."

Claiming Women's Health Rights in South Africa

The National Women's Health Meeting on December 1-4, 1994 in Johannesburg was the culmination of over a year of women's meetings about policy changes that are neces - sary for women's health. The confer - ence included women from all areas and backgrounds; rural, urban, les - bian, disabled, as well as medical per - sonnel, political campaigners and women of all creeds and colours.

The meeting developed a compre - hensive set of policy recommenda - tions covering abortion, occupational health, mental health, violence, age - ing, lesbian health and contraception. Government officials and representa - tives from political parties attended, so it is possible that these women-developed policies will be implement - ed.

While women work and hope for positive change in the new South African climate of reconciliation, South African lesbians are finding that their health issues lose out in the gay rights movement. According to Helen de Pinto of the University of Natal, homosexual health research and health education is over - whelmingingly directed at gay men. When les - bian needs receive attention, it is often inappro - priate or inadequate.

Lesbian health needs are overwhelmingly the same as other women's health needs. However, lesbians have a low uptake on gynaecological services such as pap smears because of fear of doctor's questions about their sexual activities.

Industrial Consequences

Mexican women working in the facto - ries along the Mexican-US border have a high rate of malformed chil - dren. Mexico has one of the highest rates worldwide of anencephaly, where a brain fails to develop and infants die immediately upon birth. According to a government report, anencephaly rates are several times higher than the national average in towns near the border. Carmen Valadez, a Tijuana labour activist, says that in some towns it is common for children to have the wrong number of fingers. Low birth rate, menstrual irregularities and miscarriages also plague the factory workers.

Seven out of 10 border factory work - ers are women: employers prefer women because of their willingness to work for less than men. US busi - ness sites factories in this area because they can circumvent US laws. Workers work in rooms with few fire exits, almost no ventilation, working with hazardous substances illegal in the US. Wages range from the equivalent of 70 US cents to US$1.25 per hour. Rivers of raw chemical waste flow from the facto - ries and trickle down to the worker settlements. Preliminary research has linked higher rates of defects such as anencephaly to this waste.

News Sources: Women's International News Gathering Services (WINGS), Ms., Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights Newsletter



SPEAK, 1994, in WGNRR Newsletter

This page is to let you know what women's gr oups/centres are out there, what they're doing, how to get in touch, and even encourage you to start your own gr oup! If you're involved in a women's group or centre, let us know what you're doing by sending contact details, a description of your gr oup, programme infor mation, or whatever tickles your fancy to *Women's Groups*, Ms.chief, *P O Box 3327, Dublin 8*, and we'll put you on the page.

The Fourth World Conference on Women

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women is happening in Beijing from the 4th to the 15th September.

The UN Platform for Action for the Conference has proved immensely difficult to draft, with 70% of it still in square brackets, meaning that it has not been agreed. This is largely due to the fact that the 184 countries which are members of the the UN have widely diverse views of the role and rights of women. However the broad framework of the document falls into several headings including
- the effects of poverty on women
- access to health and education
- violence against women
- the effects of armed conflict on women
- access of women to political and economic power structures
- women and the media

Many of these topics may be sum - marised in the saying that women's rights are human rights, and have essentially to do with concepts of equality.

The Council for the Status of Women will be holding information sessions on Beijing around the country. For further information, contact the Council for the Status of Women.

There will be a parallel Women's Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) Forum. In Ireland, the NGO Forum organisers meet every second Wednesday at 11am in the LOT offices. The Forum plans to produce an alternative report to send to Beijing, as there are deficiencies in the official report from the Irish government on the position of women in Ireland.

Lesbians worldwide have been campaigning for the rights of lesbians to be discussed at the Conference. The International Lesbian Information Service organised a petition, saying in part, "lesbians represent 10% of the world female population, yet protection of lesbian rights was never on the UN agenda."

Women's Contacts

Amnesty International Women's Network,
8 Shaw Street,
Dublin 2.
tel: 01 6776361

Banúlacht - Irish Women for Development
Rita McNulty,
DESC,
St Patrick's College,
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9.
tel: 01 371525

CAFE - Creative Arts for Everyone
The City Arts Centre,
35-35 Moss Street,
Dublin 2.
tel: 01 6770330

Council for the Status of Women
32 Fitzwilliam Street Lower,
Dublin2.
tel: 6615268

International Wages for Housework Campaign
King's Cross Women's Centre,
71 Tonbridge Street,
London WC1H 9DZ,
England.
tel: 00 44 71 8377509

Irish Countrywomen's Association
58 Merrion Road,
Dublin 4.
tel: 01 6680453
freephone: 1 800 652652

Irish Women's Environmental Network (IWEN)
Carmichael House,
North Brunswick, Street,
Dublin 7.
tel: 01 8732660

Lesbians Organising Together
5 Capel Street, Dublin 1.
admin tel: (01) 872 7770
24 hr Information and events line:
1550 12 2345

LOT General meetings the first Thursday of every month in the Capel Street offices. Groups include First Out, outreach, publishing, over 35s, mother & child

Parents Alone Resource Centre
Bunratty Drive,
Coolock,
Dublin 17.
tel: 01 8481872

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
20 Kenilworth Square, Rathmines,
Dublin 6.
monthly meetings - held at 11:30 am
1st Saturday of month
SICCDA, 90 Meath St, Dublin 8.
Buses: no 78A/ 123 to Thomas St from O'Connell St/Dame St.

Women's Political Association
Peg Sheehan, Chairperson
Evergreen,
Windsor Road,
Dublin 6.
tel: 01 4975105

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...noticeboard

Non Directive Pregnancy Counselling

Women's Information Network
Dublin (01) 6784700
Tue, Wed, Thur 6.30 - 8.30
Saturday 3.00-5.00

WIN Galway (091) 61079

Irish Family Planning Association
36/37 Lr. Ormond quay,
Dublin 1.
(01) 8725033

Lesbian Lines

Dublin Thurs 7 - 9pm	6613777
Belfast Thurs 7.30-10pm	238668
Galway Wed 8-10pm	66134
LimerickThurs 7.30-9.30pm	310101
Lesbian Line NW (Derry)Thurs 7.30-10pm	(0504) 263120
Lesbian Line SE Mon 7.30-9.30pm	(051) 79907

Rape Crisis Centres

Dublin (01) 6614911
Cork (21) 968086
Belfast (0232) 249696
Galway (091) 64983
Limerick(061) 311511

Women's Aid Help Line
1 800 341 900

Women's Bar
Ha'Penny Bridge Inn Top Bar,
Dublin 2.
first & third Friday of every month £1

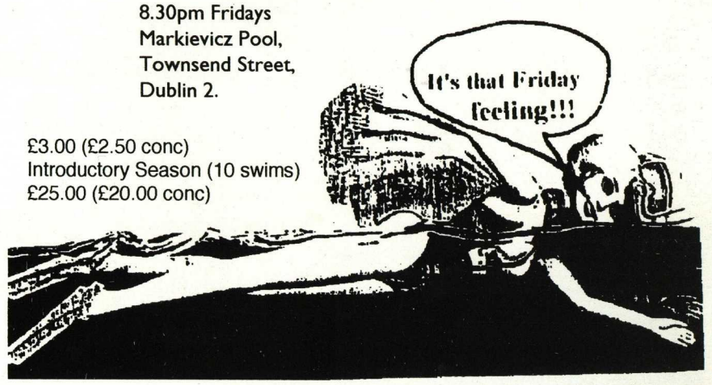
A discussion group about sexuality for women with disabilities takes place in Dublin at the end of May. For further information, contact The APIC Centre, (01) 8729930.

The Dublin Abortion Information Campaign meets twice a month in the Ha'penny Bridge Inn, Dublin 2. The Campaign reports:
The Supreme Court has found the Abortion Information Bill constitu - tional, which means the distribution of clinic addresses & phone numbers is now banned. The Dublin Abortion Information Campaign will be distrib-uting abortion information on **Saturday, 22 May** at the **GPO** at **1pm.** The Campaign will continue to fight for liberal information provisions and the repeal of the present Act. For info, contact DAIC at P O Box 3327, Dublin 8.

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"We didn't get pregnant so we could claim the Single Parents Allowance and live like queens"

Patricia Arias-Paz tells a real story about single parenting.

I didn't plan my pregnancy. It happened. After much thinking, I decided that I could cope with a child in my life. It never occurred to me that a child would change my life. I thought I would be able to do everything I did before. The reality came when Shay was born. I was tired all day. My money, although increased by £12, ran out of my pocket buying nappies, baby milk, baby creams, baby grows. I suppose my feelings at the time were the same as all the other women throughout the years, but I was (and am) a single mother without any family around me to tell me not to panic every time Shay sneezed or brought up his food, nobody to stop me taking him to the doctor every time I thought he was running a temperature.

My life has changed completely since having Shay. At the beginning it took me a while to accept it. I saw, with envy, my friends going out to the pub and I was left behind moaning and frustrated. Babysitters are few and expensive, so I don't see my old friends very often nowadays. The simple act of going to a coffee ship, cinema, shopping for food or clothes, getting into a bus, visiting friends or keeping my flat tidy got so complicated that I fell into a big depression (call it post-natal, baby blues, etc). It got so bad that at one point I didn't wash or change my clothes for days, I didn't go out or talk to anybody because most of my friends work or get up late and I can't go out visiting in the evening with a child. I would love to tell you that I have a regular sexual life, but unfortunately it's nonexistent!

My late mornings in bed finished. I have to get up early every morning, to keep an eye on Shay. Otherwise, he'll destroy the place or hurt himself. I am not a morning person, so it's the worst time of the day for me. It takes one hour for my brain to start functioning and to have a small child demanding, crying and screaming doesn't help much.

The older Shay gets, the more expensive our life is. Starting solids meant more money; the bigger the nappies the more expensive they are. When he started walking, emotions ran high - and so did the price of his shoes. Being on Lone Parents Allowance, I receive £74.20 every week, with an extra eight pounds a week during the winter months. The Health Board helps us to pay the rent with £54.90 weekly, and on the first Tuesday of each month we get £20 on the Children's allowance.

£129 sounds like a lot of money for an adult and a child, doesn't it? But between rent, shopping, electricity, by Sunday I'm left with £10 for milk, bread and play school. It's very rare when I have any money at all on Wednesday.

When I need clothes for myself, I go to the charity shops, where I can buy things for a maximum of £3.00. Shoes are another matter; I normally go to Henry Street, where I get them for £10 and they have to last at least one year.

By the time Shay was one we discovered he is asthmatic. Fortunately, he doesn't have attacks very often, but every time he gets an attack my heart goes to him. He has been in Harcourt St hospital four times in his four years of life. Every time I've slept on a chair, and every time I've been very grateful that we could go back home.

The job business is another problem. I would love to work, but I just can't afford it. I would have to earn enough to pay the rent completely, to pay electricity, shopping, buses and babysitter or a creche for Shay. I would have to get around £200 per week, which nobody would give me. So work is out of the question. But now that Shay is starting school I'm thinking of taking a FÁS course so I can start working parttime.

Being a single mother is not easy. I know plenty of women who claim to be single and alone when really they have their boyfriends with them. Who can blame them? But we all agree on one thing: we didn't get pregnant so we could claim the Single Parents Allowance and live like queens, as many people say.

And the love is something that I couldn't describe even if I knew how. Every smile, every step, every laugh leaves me so warm inside! I will never forget the first time he told me he loved me! I love Shay like I never loved anybody and, although sometimes I get very frustrated and depressed with him, I couldn't imagine my life without my son.

bile file