

THE OTHER WOMAN

CANADIAN FEMINIST

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國際婦女節
(國際婦女節)

MIĘDZYNARODOWY
DZIEŃ
Kobiet





FRENCH PROSTITUTES ORGANIZE

REPRINTED FROM NEWS FROM WOMEN'S LIBERATION

7th Sept. 1974 Paris: Some women prostitutes revolt in a police van and are charged for it. Other prostitutes organise a solidarity meeting, along with social workers, lawyers and women from the MLF.

Spring 1975 Lyon: Prostitutes occupy a church, mainly to protest against fines which are constantly laid on them and against police repression. Then the movement is still at a stage where it only tries to preserve the right to prostitution and to improve the working conditions of the prostitutes. The Cercle Dimitriev (tendency in the MLF) helped in that struggle.

Beginning of summer 1975: The movement spreads to Paris and Marseille.

June: Occupation of churches and creation of prostitutes' collectives in both towns. The prostitutes establish their demands:

1) We demand the abolition of Article 34: Incitement to "debauchery". No more fines, no more charges. We propose: reasonable taxes with right to National Health Services and old age pensions, as any French mother.

2) We declare that prostitution is a job as any other job, due to the sexual needs of a part of society.

3) We want to be considered as full citizens.

We refuse firmly:

1) the re-opening of brothels even as modern and luxury Eros Centres.

2) to be sex civil servants with no freedom at all.

3) to be nationalised.

4) to be put under control of Town Councils.

Our immediate claims are:

1) that the jail sentences against certain people in Lyon be dropped.

2) the suppression of the law concerning jail for recidivists.

3) to meet a representative of the government able to understand the prostitutes' problems and reach an agreement on these questions.

4) the re-opening of hotels only in prostitution areas.

5) the proper application of the laws allowing prostitute women to be re-integrated in society.

6) in solidarity with the prostitute women in their struggle, the transvestites demand the suppression of Article 26 to 15 ordinance of the 1/2/49, concerning the wearing of feminine clothes, taking into consideration the rights and evolution of sexual mores.

Signed: Women and transvestite

There are now several organized groups of prostitutes in the United States. These include COYOTE ("call off your old tired ethics") at Box 26354, San Francisco, California, 94126. COYOTE has its own newspaper, Coyote Growls (\$5.00 includes mem-

prostitutes of Paris.

The MLF started then taking the prostitution's movement as a women's issue which brought a big change for both the prostitutes and the women of the MLF, widening the scope of the movement and extending it to the questions of work, marriage, contradictions of women's role in the capitalist society, role of the pimps, etc....A political class split started appearing between luxury prostitution and cheap prostitution.

July: Congress in Lyon--a group of prostitutes, returning to Marseille stopped in Chanonat, residence of Giscard d'Estaing, and put posters on all the windows and walls of the castle, obstructing the entrance for a whole day.

19 November: 4-5,000 people attended the first national conference. Doctors, lawyers, social workers and political leaders had been invited to talk and the women themselves voiced their anger and their fears. All the decisions were taken by the whole conference. Following the conference everyone decided to march to Parliament; police cordons blocked the streets and the CRS (anti-riot squad carrying riot shields and tear gas and wearing helmets) beat up people at random. Some women were arrested and dragged to a police van, one had to be taken to hospital with head injuries. Here is a statement expressed by the French prostitutes collective and feelings stated in the media:

"We ask the government to listen to us as women. A truce was promised but not respected and police repression is now hitting us even harder. We are absolutely unable to have any activity so now we say: No to brothels, no to fines, no to prison sentences. Yes to more humane justice, yes to being fully considered as women. We want to discuss the prevention of prostitution. When we want to stop we can't find a job.... Prostitution means no to good conscience but yes to the Minister of Finance.

So far history has been the history of trade in women: exchange in women, speculation over women's bodies....In the eyes of justice the scapegoat is always the woman. Refusing a sexual service is called rape and is also penalised. In all rape cases the private life of a woman and her sexual past is exposed

bership in COYOTE). COYOTE'S sister organizations are: DOLPHIN (Dump Obsolete Laws; Prove Hypocrisy Isn't Necessary), Box 4109, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96813; PONY (Prostitutes of New York), c/o Jean Powell, Box 900, Madison Square Station, New York,

and questioned so that man's justice can rule on her authenticity. Women are oppressed as a class and as a race. If a woman openly wants to make a living out of the sex-state system she has to be jailed and heavily taxed. If prostitutes accept being part of the present system, it means they accept the assumption that prostitution is inevitable and will always exist. We are all prostitutes because we have always been sold. They sold it cheap for a wedding ring but that ring is legal and the law prevails when a man receives a woman from another man. A prostitute who wants to make a living must pretend all the time. She cannot be a woman. The customer only sees eyes, a bust, buttocks. He does not see a woman. We do not want prostitution to be legalised because legalisation is also penalisation. It's taxation and exploitation. We do not want the right to sell ourselves or to buy ourselves up. We are political prisoners of the state, prostitution is the acceptance and the assurance of a society where women can only be mothers or prostitutes. Emma Goldman says, 'It is merely a question of degree whether a woman sells herself to one man in or out of marriage or to any men. In both cases she has to sell herself.'"

An interesting statistic: 65% of prostitutes are women with kids but society considers them as prostitutes only and not mothers.

During this conference some emphasis was put on the repression of the police and police use of prostitutes as informers was denounced. (The movement does not seem completely free from manipulation by the police.)

End of November Paris: The prostitutes visit the Police Prefect and write down a complete pamphlet of demands. One of the representatives declares: "Prostitution has not only luxury aspects: There are women, among us, who have not enough to feed their kids."

11 December Marseille: The prostitutes create a national trade-union. The Head Office is 46, rue de Breteuil, Marseille. It is open to all prostitutes. The emphasis is put on exorbitant taxes and fines and on police repression, very severe in Marseille. The trade union will fight to guarantee human living conditions for prostitutes.

New York, 10010; ASP (Association of Seattle Prostitutes), c/o Janine Bertram, 1704 12th Avenue, Seattle, Washington, 98122. We are not aware of any prostitutes' groups in Canada although there are rumours that prostitutes are organizing in Toronto.

FROM THE GREAT

Law of Peace

of the Longhouse People (Iroquois)
Akwasasne Notes, 1975

Article 44--The lineal descent of the Five Nations shall run in the female line. Women shall be considered the progenitors of the nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of their mothers.

Article 45--The women heirs of the chieftainship titles of the League shall be called Oianer or Otiianer (Noble) for all time to come.

Sterilization and "Adoption"

One Native American woman out of every seven has been sterilized. The sterilization of non-white women by U.S. authorities is increasing. In Puerto Rico, one out of three women of child-bearing age has been permanently sterilized. Many non-white women have been sterilized without their knowing consent. In Alberta, Canadian doctors urged native women to sign forms written in a language foreign to them. The forms gave the doctors the right to perform sterilizations; the women were never told the nature of the operation.

In Pennsylvania, one native woman, Norma Jean Serena, Creek-Shawnee, is suing the hospital and welfare officials of Armstrong County for ordering her sterilization and illegally taking 3 of her 5 children from her. The "official" medical reason for her sterilization was "socio-economic". The children were taken by authorities who lied to her about the state of her children's health, telling her that they were "seriously ill" when they were healthy, and telling Serena that she was too ill to take care of her child. When in 1973 she received a favourable ruling ordering that her children be returned to her, the county delayed for almost a year before, under the threat of a contempt citation, complying with the court order. In all, her children had been illegally kept from her for 3 years.

Norma Jean Serena's case is not uncommon for Native Americans, as almost a 1/3 of all native children are separated from their families and placed in adoptive homes or institutions, according to studies done by the Association on American Indian Affairs.

Native American organizations are demanding that social agencies pay the same rates to Indian families caring for children as they pay to non-Indian families so that Indian children can be raised in their own culture. Native American peoples are demanding control over the lives of their children and an end to this newer form of social genocide.

Zulu Queen Given Custody of Children

In Durban, South Africa, Queen Sibongile Winnifred was granted interim custody of her 2 children after alleging her husband whipped her while she was pregnant. Her husband had also accused her of bewitching him!

Chinese Women Create and Operate Scrap Metal Factory

(NWL)--China: Recently interviewed at the scrap-metal factory they started, 9 women related the way they overcame their difficulties and their husbands' laughter to build the plant. Without tools or training, they borrowed shovels and pails, gathered scraps from local plants, and asked everyone they could for information about converting the scrap into powder. They had to build a shed to be able to work in the cold weather; then they had to build an oven. Next they needed to make a chimney, for which they gathered empty tar barrels and soldered them together rather than ask the state for the 30,000 yuan it would cost for the chimney. Before long, the women's plant was producing valuable metal powder in quantity and selling it to the machine factory nearby. Once the 9 women had mastered powder-making, they wanted to learn how to do the actual casting. Technicians and veteran workers offered to help them. Today their plant turns out several dozen different parts for the larger plant, and employs over 140. Only a small number of the workers are men; the women are in charge and only they do the important job of firing the furnaces. The plant, which now has two shifts, has its own nursery and paid maternity leave. The women set their prices to cover costs, pay a 5% tax to the state and put aside 20% for accumulation. Husbands, who have long since stopped laughing at the women, have agreed that whoever gets home from work first makes the dinner.



Union Activities Spur Solidarity in Philippines

(NWL)--Philippines: Industrial action by the seamstresses at the U.S.-owned Gelmart corporation, the largest garment manufacturing operation in Asia, have spurred notable solidarity among a growing number of women. Study groups and support for women sacked because of union activities have meant political involvement for women who have never dared to speak out. On one occasion, when management locked the doors to prevent women from leaving at the end of their work day to attend a meeting, they jumped out the window including one who was 7 months pregnant.

Indian Women Fight Oppression

Rolling Pin Becomes Symbol of Movement

(NWL)--India: Women are forming many feminist groups, not only middle-class women but working-class and peasant women, despite the distortions about women's liberation conveyed daily in the mass media. The Dalit Panthers, the militant "untouchable" organization of western India, has a growing number of women's branches. The most active are middle-aged working women. In south India, a new Democratic Women's Union is attracting women agricultural workers, particularly in the district of Thanjavur. 75,000 of them attended a recent rally where they demanded equal pay, free choice of marriage, and the right to divorce. In Bombay, the Women's Anti-Price Rise Front has become famous for its ability to bring women into the streets for militant action. They have marched through the streets banging pans and brandishing their rolling pins as weapons--the rolling pin held up in a clenched fist, is the symbol of the movement. Women coming by train to attend some of the demonstrations marched onto the trains without paying their fare. The issue of greatest appeal, according to feminist Ahilya Rangnekar, who worked in slum districts, is the right of women to control their own bodies. An 8-month old student group, Progressive Organization of Women, of Hyderabad is the most radical in its analysis of Indian women's oppression. Its first campaign was on the issue of the dowry, perhaps the greatest form of specifically feudal oppression there. For many families the dowry is an almost unbearable burden, and for women it is frequently pure humiliation. "Marriage is a market-place: it's like cattle-trading" is often heard. The next series of actions was directed against the physical as well as verbal sexual aggression by men who hang around the college buildings and in corridors. In February POW picketed the theatres that showed obscene films, held more marches and splashed black paint over posters and bill-boards which used women's bodies. In addition to these student-based campaigns POW activists have worked among slum women and planned campaigns for childcare centres for working-class women. Their groups have spread to 8 communities outside Hyderabad.

Stoned in India

(NWL)--India: A report on the failure of birth control campaigns mentioned that in some areas officials assigned to the campaign were stoned--especially if they performed vasectomies.

LESBIANS IN ROME

"ALL OUR CHILDHOOD WE ARE TAUGHT TO KEEP AWAY FROM MEN"

Maria and Giulia fell in love while still at school. They spent every possible spare moment together and made plans to share a flat when they were old enough to leave home.

Maria's family, though Italian and Catholic, were fairly untraditional about such matters. They had suspicions about their daughter's relationship but preferred to let them pass. She'd get over it, meet a nice young man. It was just a matter of time.

Giulia's case was different. Before meeting Maria she had already become engaged to the requisite 'nice young man'. But now everything was changed. She couldn't go through with it and told him everything. Insulted and horrified, he informed her parents. A long battle had started.

Giulia was snatched out of school and locked in the house for 9 months. Twice she managed to escape with Maria and twice they were brought back. All that time she was beaten every day. The family treated her like a prisoner. She was given extra chores, though she didn't mind that. At least it was something to do. Standing by the window, washing up the dinner plates, her eyes would remain fixed across the street to the spot where Maria would stand at the same time each day for a chance to see her lover. Eventually the family gave up and Maria and Giulia were able to live together.

Happily ever after? Not quite... or not yet. As lesbians in one of Europe's most 'macho' cities they lived isolated and afraid. They both had jobs in the same area but chose to live at the opposite end of town so they could be near their only two other friends. They joined FUORI (Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano)--FUORI means "Out" in Italian) and through FUORI came to the women's movement, where they began to find support.

STRUGGLING ALONE?

The story is true and it is characteristic. The women's movement has meant the beginnings of gay consciousness for hundreds, perhaps thousands of Italian lesbians. But there must be many more who struggle alone. Their oppression is such that even the feminist magazine *Effe* has so far refused to print anything on the subject for fear of offending the Communist Party.

Giovanna Pala, a lesbian member of the Movimento Femminista Romano, is currently writing such an article, but she admits: "If I want them to publish it I have to be careful. I'm trying to be a bit indirect, a bit ironic. At the moment it's the only way."

If a lesbian is lucky enough to get a job, the situation remains gloomy. A friend of Giovanna's was recently sacked from her teaching post because she was homosexual. When asked why she was sacked, she was refused an explanation. There is no single teaching union in Italy and she knew her particular union would give her no help. Gay pride is still in its infancy in Italy and you can't do much alone.

Giovanna doesn't know anyone who has come out at work and she tells stories of friends who pretend she's a man when she rings them up at the office.

There are no bars for gay women in Rome. One woman tried to start one but was forced to give up after continual harassment from the police on the pretence of looking for drugs. There is one private club frequented by homosexuals, but it is expensive and tends to be a predominantly male retreat.

AVOIDING GAY/STRAIGHT RIVALRY

But more women are coming out as homosexual--if not at work or to their parents at least among friends and in women's groups. For a country like Italy this is a big step forward. At last there is a way for them to meet other women. They organize dances and they lose their fear. Women are beginning to see lesbianism as a political choice, a sexuality defined by women, for women. They are setting up communes and developing solidarity and sisterhood.

It was this that most impressed me when I spoke to the lesbians in Rome. They give each other tremendous support and seem to avoid the gay/straight rivalry often found in women's groups in England. Within the women's movement in Rome there are no strictly lesbian groups but the women do not see this as necessarily a bad thing. By associating themselves with a total struggle against sexual oppression they avoid the dangers of gay separatism, and many previously heterosexual women are beginning to rethink the nature of their sexuality.

They are learning the importance of warmth and physical contact among women and many are coming out to join their lesbian sisters. Giovanna estimated that about 70% of the women in the movement had had homosexual relationships, and not many of them return to heterosexuality afterwards.

UNFAIR TO CRITICISE

As in England, butch/fem role playing is often apparent among Italian lesbians. Giovanna felt it was unfair to criticise.

"I really don't think we can make judgements about what women look like. In Italy, to be a man is a positive thing. Some women find it easier to be positive if they act and dress like men."

But isn't that what the movement is all about, I asked--the realisation that to be a woman is as 'positive' as to be a man? She agreed, adding that among younger lesbians, role playing was less apparent. It is crucial in the political development of Italian lesbians that they are beginning to see themselves as women-identified-women.

I asked about that stranglehold on every progressive movement in the country, the Roman Catholic church. On a personal level it seems to be less of an obstacle than one might expect, though most feminists tend to abandon their religion. When a Catholic friend of Giovanna's con-

fessed her homosexuality, the priest was surprisingly sympathetic.

But then, as Giovanna pointed out, the Church itself is very homosexual. Many of the priests are gay. Nor does the Catholic education do much to discourage lesbians. "All our childhood we are told again and again to keep away from men--men are wicked, men are bad", said one woman.

So gay consciousness is growing and it's good to see it developing as an integral part of the women's movement. FUORI has tried to encourage women into its ranks, but mostly from a sense of duty. Like the English CHE (Campaign for Homosexual Equality) most of the members are uninterested in the specific problems of female homosexuals, and lesbians who have any political analysis of their position prefer to join a women's group. Many are active in the wages for housework campaign and the fight for free abortion and contraception.



Deborah Bundy

Looking beyond the immediate problems they see a common basis to female and gay oppression, thrown into sharp relief by the specifics of the Italian situation. Only 17% of Italian women work outside the home and it is hard for women to get jobs. A lesbian, above all, needs to be economically independent. The support is mutual and Italian women are beginning to see that discrimination against lesbians is discrimination against all women.

They still have a long way to go. There have been no public demonstrations and no direct political action as yet. But it is on the way. When Maria and Giulia set up house together, Giulia's family tried to sue Maria's under an ancient Italian law of corruption. There are no laws against homosexuality in Italy so this was their only method of attack. The law states that anyone, of any age, can be accused of corrupting the morals of another person. The sex is immaterial though it seems to be used exclusively in cases of homosexuality.

The case is still being heard but an unfavourable verdict could be the catalyst to draw the women onto the streets. From the personal will spring the political, and in a sense it already has. Lesbians in Italy are shedding their guilt and learning to love one another without shame, in itself a political act.

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INDONESIAN WOMEN

1. The Banned Women's Organization

From the early days of the Indonesian Republic, a number of women's organizations came into existence, each oriented more or less towards the various political trends within society. Among these was the Gerakan Wanita Indonesia (GERWANI), the Indonesian Women's Movement which represented the leftwing of the women's movement and included a far greater number of working and peasant women among its members than any other women's organizations.

The GERWANI was not affiliated to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and did not confine its membership to communist women; it described itself as 'an organization of communist and non-communist women'.

By the time of the October 1965 events, the GERWANI was the largest women's organization in the country with a membership of several hundred thousand. It organized women on such widely varying issues as fighting against polygamy and forced marriages, setting up women's clinics and creches, running infants' schools and educational courses, fighting for economic demands such as resisting rising prices and arranging social gatherings for women. It also had a periodical entitled Api Kartini named after Kartini, Indonesia's first outstanding woman emancipationist who died in her early 20's at the beginning of this century.

After the coup attempts had been crushed on 1st October, 1965, the PKI and numerous other organizations associated with the leftwing movement were immediately banned and held responsible for the events that had occurred. The GERWANI was included among the organizations banned and its members became liable to immediate arrest or, for those employed, to immediate dismissal from their jobs.

Women were also playing an active part in the trade union and peasant movements, and here too as members of the leftwing trade union federation, SOBSI, and the leftwing peasants organization, BTI, both banned in October 1965, they became liable to immediate arrest. GERWANI-A Special Target: After the military took over, an unbridled attack on all leftwing organizations was launched; and the left wing, deprived immediately of all its organs of press and channels of communications, was unable to reply. The GERWANI took the brunt of the attack in a vicious campaign that was deliberately aimed at arousing passions by depicting it as an organization of sex-maniacs. The organization was said to have been responsible for recruiting women and girls to go to the Lubang Buaya Training Camp which became the headquarters of the people responsible for the 1st October coup attempt. Sensational reports appeared in the press about "Gerwani prostitutes", "obscene sex-dancing and ritual", and "girls mutilating the sex organs of the murdered generals". There is no doubt that these unchallenged reports helped to incite the frenzy which led to the massacres that swept many parts of the country in the latter months of 1965.



2. The Women Tapols

There is no way of accurately estimating the number of women being held as tapols. There are some women's prisons and camps where numbers are known approximately but there is no way of knowing how many women are being detained in the scores of lesser-known prisons, the interrogation camps and military units dotted throughout the country.

Plantungan Women's Detention Camp in Central Java has a total of 386 tapols. This camp accommodates long-term category B women, the category officially described as those who cannot be tried for lack of evidence but who will not be released because they are considered "a threat to national security". They work on the land for their sustenance in a very inaccessible region. Only a very small proportion are still in contact with their families and receive occasional food parcels. Family visits are extremely difficult and a great rarity because the camp is remote and much time and money is needed to secure a permit. Most of the women have lost all contact with their children and husbands, and live in an atmosphere of constant anxiety about what may be happening.

The two other known women's prisons are Bukit Duri Prison in Jakarta and Bulu Prison in Semarang. The former is believed to hold about 75 women in the special wing for political prisoners. There are probably several dozen women being held at Bulu Prison. A fairly large number of women are known to have been arrested in West Kalimantan on charges of helping the guerrillas operating in the province.

With an estimated 500 women tapols in the small number of known institutions, it is reasonable to estimate that there are at least 500 more being held in other places. There are therefore at least 1,000 women being held as political prisoners in Indonesia.

TORTURE OF WOMEN: Torture is widely and systematically practised against tapols in Indonesia. Women are also subjected to these brutalities with the added ingredient of unbridled and often violent sexual assault. In many cases, women are forced to strip naked during interrogation as a method of embarrassment and demoralization. The standard forms of torture are practiced such as electric shock, beatings, cigarette burns and being left dangling by the wrists for many hours at a stretch. To all this is added, in the case of women, insertion of im-

plements into the vagina and vicious pummelling of breasts, even against women who are known to be still suckling babies.

3. Women On Trial

The number of women who have been brought to trial since the first arrests took place nearly 10 years ago is extremely small.

4. Problems of Detainees' Families

The wives and children of the tens of thousands of tapols, many of whom have been under detention for almost 10 years, are in many cases living in conditions of destitution. Social services are non-existent in Indonesia and there are no benefits available to families deprived of the bread-winner. The families suffer too because of the fears that have been instilled in all sections of society, strongly discouraging anyone, even close relatives, from doing anything to help the dependents of tapols. Many things such as obtaining employment, enrolling at a school and moving into a new district can only be done if a person has a "certificate of non-involvement in the October 1965 events". Generally speaking, the wives of detainees are not entitled to such certificates, although in some places they succeed in getting one by concealing their identity or bribing a local official.

Many of the tapols' wives found themselves completely unprepared for taking on the responsibility of earning enough to keep their children and feed a husband in prison and, with society forced into such a hostile attitude, they have not succeeded in establishing for themselves a stable income. The problem of ensuring their children a proper education has greatly added to their worries. No education is free, even at primary school level because of levies imposed for entrance, monthly school maintenance fees and contributions to teachers.

Many families, in an effort to ensure their survival against harassment by military or other officials, took the step of moving into a completely new district where they could build a new life for themselves. But there are many disadvantages to such a choice. It means that wives must opt not to visit their husbands in prison or supply them with food; it also means that if their real identity were discovered, they could be arrested for having attempted to "flee from justice".

Another aggravating factor to be borne by tapols' wives is that in Indonesia there are few single women, and divorced women and widows usually remarry because most communities have little tolerance for the 'unattached' woman. Tapols' wives are therefore often frowned upon by their neighbours, pestered by men and mistrusted by jealous women. Such attitudes have compelled many wives to move to other districts or to ask their husbands for a divorce in order to seek the security of another marriage. The pressure of divorce is understandably high when women live in such uncertainty about their husbands' prospects of release.

REVIEWS

The Three Marias

NEW PORTUGUESE LETTERS

by the Three Marias

Maria Isabel Barreno
 Maria Teresa Horta
 Maria Velho da Costa

Translated from the Portuguese by
 Helen R. Lane
 Bantam Paperback, 365 pages \$2.25
 Doubleday Hardcover \$11.50

(Reviewer's Note--Page numbers of
 quotations used in this review refer
 to the hardcover edition.)

"The need to reform social patterns in Portugal and put an end to discrimination that women suffer in public and private lives" (p.7) summarizes why the three Portuguese women created this book of fiction. The book is so close to non-fiction that the Portuguese government arrested the authors for "abuse of the freedom of the press" and "outrage to public decency" (p.7). The women were brought to trial in October 1972 for violating a Portuguese law which made "writers, publishers, printers, and distributors legally responsible for the morality of works they put before the Portuguese public" (p.7), but the underlying reasons were that these courageous authors dared expose the soft underbelly of macho arrogance with its weakness and ugliness, and they dared to explore the full body of female compassion, love, and understanding with its tenderness and beauty. (Reviewer's note--Pressure from the literary world and the change in the Portuguese government in April 1974 brought about an immediate dropping of the charges.)

The Three Marias, women in their early thirties, with their similar cultural backgrounds and similar literary interests agreed in 1971 to meet twice a week to examine their "problems as women and as liberal writers" (p.7). During discussion, three points of focus emerged: the oppressive role of mother; the victimization of women by man the aggressor; and the victimization of women by "the psychological roles forced upon them by history and society." (p.9) (Reviewer's note--Although these women reflect their country's milieu, their discoveries are valid nearly everywhere.) To dissect and study these focal points, they created the idea of the book. For thematic unity, the Marias chose a 17th Century legend, The Letters of a Portuguese Nun, about a young woman, Mariana Alcoforado, who at age 16 was placed into a convent by her widowed father because he was unwilling to provide her with a dowry nor support her any longer. The Marias saw the convent to which she was sent as symbolic of all the walls entrapping women--marriage, motherhood and female docility which society encourages. According to the legend, Mariana meets a dashing French officer and falls in love. He loves her and leaves her. She writes him a series of letters in an attempt to define her thoughts of their

by angela sergio

relationship. Each succeeding letter reveals more of her despair at his apparent lack of concern for her love.

Her letters progress from hope--
 "Our hearts it cannot separate; love which is more powerful than fate, has united them forever" (p.405), to anguish--"It is a difficult task to learn to suspect the sincerity of those to whom we have given our love" (p.406), to despair--"You deceived me everytime you said that it made you happy to be alone with me... you had calculatingly planned to kindle my passion...you looked upon it only as another conquest and your heart was never really moved by my love..." (pp. 414-5), to pleading--
 "Have you abandoned me forever?" (p.421), and finally, to great strength of character and love again when she could write to him and say, "I realized the whole terrible power of my love only when I exerted all my efforts to rid myself of it!" (p.423)



The betrayal of Mariana and her subsequent gaining of self-understanding symbolize the original writing by the Three Marias because the experience of dependency Maria had parallels the Three Maria's of women depending on male society. Through using the legend, the model Marias lay bare the themes and forced readers to ponder them.

The book consists of a translator's preface, the poems, prose essays, invented "Mariana letters" and unsigned but dated letters written by the three authors to each other which chronicle their strengths, doubts, fears and triumphs.

An authors' afterword calls the book "a written record of a much broader, common, lived experience of creating a sisterhood through conflict, shared fun and sorrow, complicity and competition, and interplay not only of modes of writing but of modes of being." (p.399) Also included is a section of notes which explain references to the Portuguese language or other material unfamiliar to the reader. The book could be read in many ways: the legend could be the starting point (my choice), or the afterword could be read first, or any of the pages could be chosen at random because each page has its own unity.

Let me share with you the beauty of their writing which ranges in tone from intellectual analysis to

frank personal revelations. These excerpts touched me and are only examples of the power of their words.

"granted, then that all of literature is a long letter to an invisible other, a present, a possible, or a future passion that we rid ourselves of, feed, or seek." (p.15)

"And of ourselves: what will we make of ourselves?" (p.16)

"With the greatest precision, the hand above the paper sets down ideas in a letter that we write, not so much for an other as for our own nourishment: the sweet sustenance of tenderness, of the invention of the past, or the poison of accusations and vengeance, these being basic elements of passion in the reconstruction of our bodies, ever prone to yield to invented, but not false emotion." (p.17)

"Oh how many problems I foresee, sisters: the three of us will be considered a single case, though we have no way of knowing if it will become a cause, and for that very reason we give each other our hands, and hold them out to others, hands joined in a circle, warmly clasped and firmly wielding the pen...the theme is a passing one, a rite of passage, the impassioned exercise and experience of passion; and the tone is compassion, a sharing with passion." (p.21)

"What sort of metaphor is Mariana for us, if we come close to killing ourselves in order to leave her out?...We are telling each other about our experiences with men and our childhoods, the landscapes we have seen, the stops along the way; we are composing hymns of praise to each other and saying what each of us will do and how we will (not) carry on the closely following."

they were and internal. strange cultural the women have had centuries. I can reject Marias and their tradition. I hold for all the women who pains of their lot with ing because they are exp to; I hold in my heart an understanding of why The Three Marias created the government's reaction it too clearly states the truth. The Three Marias brings to mind these words of G. Rosa, a Brazilian author: "All I know is that there are too many mysteries surrounding books and those who read them and those who write them; one must be humble... Often, nearly always, a book is a far bigger thing than what we are." (pp.401-2) Truly, there are mysteries within The Three Marias; surely, we must be humble at the literary beauty and power of it, and certainly, the impact of The Three Marias is far beyond the ordinary.

DIALOGUE WITH IMMIGRANTS

WEST INDIAN

I am a registered nurse, living in Toronto for the past 6 years. My first rude awakening was to find that I wasn't a registered nurse but just a graduate nurse. I had been practicing nursing at that point for about 7 years. I felt very angry and reacted very badly. It took me a year and a half before agreeing with the College of Nurses to write one paper in pediatrics.

I'm a single parent with children in Toronto. One has almost completed high school. The principal of the school seemed to be rather racist to a point. I used to get at least 2 phone calls from him a week. I have only had one other open confrontation about my blackness. In the supermarket a lady reinforced the fact that I was black, I told her, yes, I know and what else was new.

ITALIAN

I am a community worker because I couldn't find the type of work I did back home without Canadian experience. I have been here for 9 years and the biggest problem when I came was the language. I knew yes and no; what they meant and that was it. If you go to a country as a tourist, it might be a very joyful experience but when you have to look for a job and an apartment, it is something different, very difficult. I do not have the experience of living in the typical Italian area, although that is my background, because I did not want to. I wanted a chance to see if I liked the country or not. In order to do that I really had to integrate myself into the community, learn the language and habits. It was really strange at the beginning. Letters to my father were between 20 and 30 pages every time. Some people were really nice but others were not. The Canadian people are very ordered like having 1, 2, 3 lines waiting for the bus while in Italy the strongest one gets on first. A very big problem is always having a map because you cannot ask for directions in another language.

I work at Centro Donne. It is mainly for Italian women and immigrants. Now we have a grant that permits us to get \$110 a week (that's a beautiful salary). We have Spanish and Portuguese speaking people and they work for the community groups. Another problem is coming from countries where certain areas are undeveloped of seeing Canadian women as outgoing, and feeling envious but at the same time they have lost part of their femininity. We try to make the immigrant women understand there is something else besides a kitchen to be confined in, children to be raised, or clothes to be washed.

EAST INDIAN

6 years ago I came on a sabbatical to work at the University of Toronto, not knowing very much about Canada. In all of India there is one immigration office in Delhi. I had to go 1,000 miles to get my papers processed but they didn't think there would be any problem. After someone had started working in my post, the immigration office said I couldn't bring my daughter (I am a single parent) because my salary wasn't adequate. I was in a real quandry because, as a woman, I had really put a lot of people's backs up by saying that I was leaving for my career. Having come from a colony and teaching English, the next thing was to get a Ph.D. from a white English-speaking country. I left my daughter with my mother for a few months. I saw myself as a very selfish careerist woman which wasn't really very easy to live with. It was equally hard not to pursue this thing that I wanted. When I came here, people couldn't understand that a reasonable adult with a child abroad could live.

At the Montreal airport, the immigration officers are a breed apart, they really aren't like anybody else. They don't seem to understand any ordinary, normal human plea, excuses and reasons. In the time I spent in Montreal I had to wait 4 or 5 hours. Having been a middle class woman all my life in India, I hadn't realized in some ways what it was to look at things from the bottom up, basically. I had taken a lot of things for granted. I was really at par with any working class woman. It didn't matter what university degrees I had, I was an immigrant, of a particular colour, a woman who had the pretension to

be middle class. At U. of T., my education was not taken into account even though I had four years of university teaching. I had to repeat my M.A. which made me very angry, very depreciated.

I worked very hard to get myself a "proper salary" and my daughter was allowed to come after about 7 months. That was my introduction to the officialdom of Canada. I didn't become an immigrant until the amnesty declared in 1973. I stayed from 1969 till 1973 because I felt terribly mortified about having to go back to that immigration office. Every time I went to renew my student visa I felt I should be grateful that I was here. Often I was asked how I got a job teaching at the university, even part-time, when Canadian students don't. All I could do was refer them back to the discretion of their faculty members who chose to have me. I worked at Atkinson (York University) and Victoria College (U. of T.) for 4 years.

My problem has many aspects to it and some of it is in common with any woman, being a woman and a professional woman; being a non-white immigrant woman who is trying



to make her way into the middle class world which is common with white immigrants or poor whites from here. There are problems which are specific to me and some I share but they were certainly increased by my being a non-white immigrant woman. My daughter is 8 years old and goes to school. She has lost most of her language which is the usual tragedy of immigrant homes. At first she could not speak any English so she was really extremely paranoid. She's quite ashamed of her Indian name because people find it hard to pronounce and make fun of it. She's been called things like "chocolate". She has become aware of the phenomenon of colour to the extent that I find it distressing to see in a child. I think children have an infinite resilience and an ability to cope with stress under various circumstances. Her identity is somewhat at stake. Since she will have to fight really hard to gain it and keep it, this should not be a racist fight but a class fight of all non-white and poor white immigrants. You learn to

IMMIGRANT WOMEN

live a non-person existence. If they notice that you are different, it is associated with inferiority. To be different and to be equal hasn't been in my experience. I have always found more official situations to be the most personally disruptive. This image of the immigrant that the bureaucracy gives me is now in parts of the Green Paper.

ITALIAN

The language is why they create the so-called ghettos, because of these safety valves they are not being exposed to the society that does not understand them. They create little cities where the food is the same and the store owners speak the same language. The people usually emigrate for either political or economic reasons. They come here because there is an opportunity to have a better type of life. In the back of their mind, they still want to go back. But things are changing back home; the pill, abortion, the school system, and so on. They are not participating here or in the changes back home. My son is almost 11 and is reaching the point of the generation gap. It will always exist.



The fact is that our children are suffering so much because they are splitting their experiences, their personalities, their feelings by going to school here or to work, having Canadian friends and then when they go home they are supposed to be Italian. Not even their language is spoken that clearly, in a dialect, at home and the old ideas of staying home at night. It really makes you feel disconnected and I can see an enormous problem.

WEST INDIAN

4 years ago, most people were only required to write one paper if they were trained in England or a midwife which I am. If you came from the West Indies you were not even recognized as a nurses' aide. So I came to Canada and after 3 years went back to Barbados. I thought I would have a lot more to offer. I came over here to work and further my education. Recently, regardless of

whether you are trained in England or the West Indies, you have to write 5 papers I think. For a qualified nurse who has been working for some time, this is ridiculous. The other problem that most of the nurses encountered was the Canadian registered nurses. They have the theoretical knowledge but when it comes to practical experience they just haven't a clue. Most immigrant nurses are getting a lower salary and half the time they had to do the work of the registered nurse. Canada should not make it difficult for you to work once you are here.

The other problem is with the school system. For some unknown reason, if you are not white you are classified as being stupid and you don't know the language. If you speak with an accent, you are automatically deaf. People tend to shout at you. Most of the teachers and school principals seem to think the same way. If you're black, then there's no way you should go to university. I insisted that my boy go into the 5 year programme and the principal wanted to know if I was sure of what I was doing, if I knew what the 5 year programme entailed. That was where my hassle started with him. Parents are told that the kid is supposed to go to a vocational school and some of them have no idea what these programmes are all about. Nobody bothers to explain to them, and the next thing you know the kid is coming home and he is in vocational school. 90 times out of a 100, the kid has a lot more potential than being classified for vocational school and I think it's time somebody started explaining to the parents. The child gets frustrated, the parents don't know where he's at and next thing you know you have a juvenile delinquent on your hands. He's not going to pay attention in school because what he's doing doesn't interest him. Then the parent is running to the school all the time, he's skipping class, and eventually the child ends up being exactly what the principal said he would be in the first place--a drop out. This just isn't fair.

My daughter who is in Grade 10 has been called all sorts of names from "monkey" and "why don't you go back to your own country". She has to be Canadian at school if she wants to survive in one piece. This I can see and I try not to force my way onto her because this is a crisis she is going through right now. She doesn't talk very much about what is going on at school. I find out, like most other parents, second-hand. I have to teach her how to survive out there. One thing that got me very angry last term was to find out that she was in a special English class. The teacher decided that she couldn't speak English. She found herself in a class with Chinese, and Italians who were learning Grade 2 or 3 English. She spent 8 weeks in that class being taught by a Canadian who lived in Trinidad for 18 years.

EAST INDIAN

I was about 24 when I began to realize that education isn't a value in itself. That after you learn to read and write, you have to take into account what it is you are reading. Very racist things are written, it is one of the easiest ways to condition and disseminate. Even better, if the government or particular social group or class has control over this particular type of literature that they can disseminate whichever way or however they please. They talk of propaganda in communist countries. At least there is a clear, visible state arm that distributes leaflets. When we talk about vocational schools, we are also talking about very poor Canadian whites--Nova Scotia, New Brunswick have enormous problems. Race keeps people apart so that if I fight with my Italian neighbour and we are all factory workers, the question is who is ripping us off?

Panel discussion with Himani Banarjee (East Indian), Clara Costa (Italian) and Sybil Clarke (West Indian).

"DIALOGUE WITH IMMIGRANT WOMEN", 9 audio cassettes from a panel discussion and four workshops by and about immigrant women from the Italian, Portuguese, West Indian, East Indian and Latin American communities in Toronto. The workshop was sponsored by the Bloor & Gladstone Branch of the Toronto Public Library and the Cross Cultural Communication Centre in spring 1975. Cassettes are available at cost from Cross Cultural Communication Centre, 1079 Bloor Street West.

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