

# Let Patriarchy Burn!

## a feminist rant

“How many articles does it take until men start working on their shit? Aren’t you tired of hearing and reading about it? Maybe Smith and Wesson do a better job? At least stop considering yourself revolutionaries. YOU ARE NOT MY COMRADE.” - Molly Tov in *Profane Existence*.

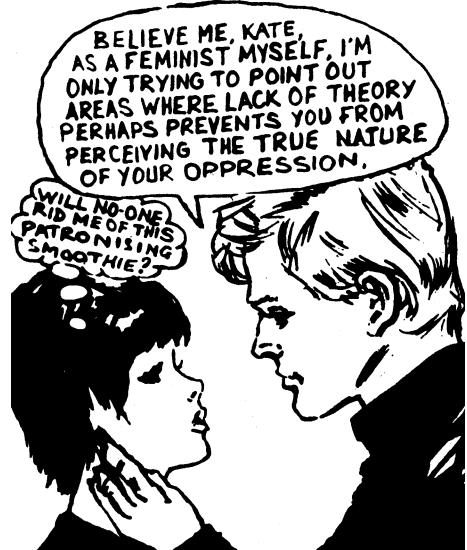
So i’m talking to an activist man about misogyny within a particular group and he’s telling me i need to get in there and change it from the inside, not attack it from the outside. That sounds like reformism to me. He says no, because in our united fight against capitalism we’re on the same side. But we’re not.

Patriarchy is often bandied about as a term to explain men’s prejudices or/and behaviour toward women. But just as the behaviour and attitudes of a boss towards a worker is not the intrinsic problem of capitalism but rather an expression of it, so gender relations are some of the symptoms of the cultural, economic, social and ideological system of oppression, exploitation and power—Patriarchy.

An article about patriarchy (which was actually about sexism) on road protest camps appeared in Do or Die No. 7, and outlined some of the ways in which patriarchy shows itself. The list of ‘complaints’ was referred to as disgruntlement and claimed; “For all men’s faults women are still very much respected on site and patriarchy does have its advantages.” Patriarchy does have its advantages, but only for those who wish to maintain oppression. Any movement that does not challenge this oppression is not a fight for freedom. This article will examine how the ideology and practices of the radical ecology movement in the UK stunt the development of true resistance.

### Manifestations of Patriarchy In EF!

Patriarchy appears in a number of both obvious and subtle ways in advanced capitalist society. Unequal and unfair distribution of labour, rape and the constant threat of it, objectification of our bodies, women unheard, talked over, burdened with child-care and domestic slavery, depoliticised [their thoughts and actions made personal/emotional rather than political] and deprivatised. But instead of these being challenged in a radical movement like Earth First! they are replicated. As the article ‘Patriarchy on Road Protest camps’ suggests, gender relations on site range from the uncomfortable, through the intimidating to the ultimately impossible. The division of labour whereby men commit ‘heroic’ deeds and women do the washing up is petty compared to the tolerated incidences of rape and sexual assault that occur on drunken nights. Aware activists talk



angrily about the experiences of sex on site, not being utopian freedoms but a charming variety of sexual coercion of schoolgirls to total irresponsibility around contraceptives resulting in unwanted pregnancies. These power abuses are not confined to sites but also to urban environments. One woman commented:

“When i first came to our anarchist social centre and thought it would be a good idea to get involved, it was this boy’s club—there was this one woman who did shifts, but she just came in, cleaned up and served tea, it was the three blokes who’d sit around together, joke, and in this way sort out what’s happening with it...it was a real effort on my side to feel responsible and become a part of the decision-making processes.”

Not acknowledging women as autonomous political individuals (depoliticisation) seems a common experience in political movements. When talking of the struggle i have found most inspirational, i was dismissed as only being interested because my former male partner was also, as if my political thought process was centred in my cunt. The accusation of being smitten with a single person instead of dedicated to revolution was something many women i spoke to also had encountered.



*Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)*  
*Famous author of what is called the first major feminist text—'Vindication of the Rights of Women' which argues passionately that women should not be contained in the role of domestic slaves and mistresses, and criticizes monarchy, aristocracy and standing armies as well.*

The anecdotes of everyday sexism are too numerous to list, but that they occur continuously and without paradox in the radical eco movement must be examined: these are not one-off, isolated incidents, but part of the patriarchal nature of Earth First! Without an understanding of—and resistance to—the multiple power relations in our society there can be no true social change.

### **Flawed Philosophies and Failing Philosophers**

The media construct of ecowarriors is not far enough removed from the realities to be ironic. One of the ideologies that is central to eco-activism is that of romanticism. Romanticism is a myth of patriarchy that creates opposites such as good/evil, man/woman, active/passive. This is a means of simplifying and justifying differences that are actually constructed. To be pushed into one of these definitions polarises us into restricted behaviour and restricted mindsets, limiting our beings and our potential. For example, the notion of 'defence of the planet' conveniently forgets the fact that we are fighting for ourselves. Instead the earth is the passive

beauty, capitalism the evil dragon and we good fellows the noble knights.

### **Look at me mum, i've smashed the world**

Macho posturing can take many forms. From masking up in counter-productive situations, to throwing things without aim and mission, boasting about criminal records—or worse, criminal activities, or being the person down the tunnel the longest. These activities often operate at a level of competitiveness within the network rather than co-operation and suggest that activism is for the adrenaline and the recognition rather than the daily effort toward building mass resistance. Wanting to be seen to engage in heroic or hardcore activity relies on others' failure to do the same, and instead of these activities inspiring others to take action they alienate—hence the problem of some people ("activists") being asked to take action on behalf of other people; e.g.: people being asked to pie someone, or 'save' some land from road building. (Why does everyone need to take action when superman can do it for us?) Rather than using the most effective tactics available, macho activists need the most visual; hanging from harnesses is, in our 'movement', a more popular approach than mass direct action, and media stunts are seen as 'worthwhile' activity despite such an obviously problematic relationship with the media.

### **Crucifixion is too good for us**

The other side of the coin is the concept of activist suffering:—a few suffering for the needs of the



*Louise Michel (1830-1904)*  
*A founder of a libertarian school, fighter on the barricades of the Paris Commune of 1871, and never quelled in her 'deeds not words!' style agitation for anarchy, feminism and animal liberation.*



masses. Accountable actions fall into this category, as do hunger strikes with unfeasible demands. As most people (in particular those with responsibilities such as children) are not willing to lose their liberty for actions of limited effectiveness. These actions remain the domain of a few who offer up themselves for 'the cause'. As before, these misguided actions mean that most people are excused from taking action (who needs to do anything when Jesus will do it for us?) Those who suffer most in society do not fetishise or glamorise suffering. This privileged option of personal sacrifice courts attention sometimes termed 'public awareness' but like macho media stunts does little to forward radical social change.

Alongside an ideology of romantic eco-heroism comes a clear rejection of feminism (and other politics that draw attention to divisions between 'us'). This is of course essential to a polarised vision of the battle. We too are individually and collectively responsible for the shit that goes on, we too are the villains, the wrongdoers, and even 'the enemy'.— e.g. whilst struggling for the destruction of global capitalism we are still creaming off the Third World. Recognising our oppression we must also recognise our positions as oppressors, our privileges. This requires understanding the specific differences of our oppression: we are not equally abused by capitalism, this is dependent on our class, our race, our nationality, our sexuality, and our gender. The radical eco movement is only just beginning to address these issues and still fails to carry a concept of women's specific oppression or women's specific resistance, separate from men's.

Some oppressions are treated with more priority than others: the rape of women (a near universal experience) seems to be of less importance than the rape of the earth. Rape is seen as an individual and personal problem between rapist and victim rather than rooted in our patriarchal system. In the same way the destruction of the planet may be partly carried out by construction companies, but these companies are not the core problem. Again, fights for 'indigenous people's land rights' do not distinguish between men's and women's land rights which are (again, near universally) different. Most 'tribal' societies have indigenous laws which have different access and control of land according to gender.

Similarly, women's resistance is overlooked, made invisible, written out of history: from the diggers to the dockers, go directly past the suffragettes, do not collect any credit. Or perhaps worse, women's resis-

tance is only understood as the co-opted part of the movement. Just as mainstream society looks upon Greenpeace as radical ecology, the co-opted liberal end of feminism is falsely viewed as feminism. But feminism is not about whether white middle-class



*Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912)*  
*As an anarchist, she believed changes in society had to occur in the economic and political spheres, but added the personal and psychological dimensions of life to this—the 'moral revolution'. She educated women to be industrially independent, and maintained independence herself all her life.*

western women can wear lipstick or not, it is about poverty and violence and power. The simplifications of the feminist movement, behaving as if all women were equally oppressed and all men were similarly oppressive, are lessons for the radical eco-movement. The feminist movement ate itself by not acknowledging difference—that some women were closer to power than others due to their class or race. This meant class and race struggles were not truly dealt with in the movement and that the mass feminist movement never became resistance for the benefit of most women but only for the privileged few.

An over-simplified vision of how to 'save' the world is not only wrong, it is dangerous. The radical eco-movement will suffer co-option if it is dominated by young white middle-class graduate men putting their concerns first: to be noticed, to be a hero, to set the agenda, to be special. For in the struggle for freedom the needs of the most dominant groups in society should come last. Women's resis-



## The First Uprising

by Commandante Insurgente Marcos

In March of 1993 the companeros debated about what would later be the “Revolutionary Laws”. Susana was in charge of going around to dozens of communities to speak with groups of women and put together, from her thoughts the “Women’s Laws”. When the CCRI got together to vote on the laws, each one of the commissions got up: justice, agrarian reform, war taxes, rights and obligations of people in struggle and women. Susana had to read the proposals that she had gotten together from the thoughts of thousands of indigenous women.

She started to read and, as she read on, the assembly of the CCRI became more and more restless. You could hear murmurs and comments. In Chol, Tzotsil, Tojolobal, Mam, Zoque and Spanish. The comments jumped from one side to the other. Susana, undisturbed, charged on against everyone and everything. “We don’t want to be forced into marriage with someone we don’t want. We want to have the children we want and can take care of. We want the right to hold rank in the community. We want the right to speak up and to be respected. We want the right to study and even be drivers.” And she kept going like that until she was done. At the end there was a long silence.

The Women’s Laws that Susana had just read meant a true revolution for the Indigenous communities. The women responsible were receiving the translation in their dialects of what Susana had said. The men looked at each other, nervously, restless. All of a sudden all the translations ended almost all at the same time. And in a single movement, the companeras responsible for the laws started to clap and talk among themselves. needless to say the “Women’s Laws” were approved unanimously. A Tzeltal responsible for the law commented “The good thing is that my wife doesn’t understand Spanish, because otherwise...” An insurgent official who was a woman and a high infantry rank, jumped on him “You’re fucked, because we’re going to translate it into all the dialects.” The companero looked down. The women responsible were singing, the men were scratching their heads.

...That was the truth: the first EZLN uprising was March, 1993, and was led by Zapatista women. There were no casualties, and they won.

tance to patriarchy is not some sub-heading that can be dealt with ‘after the revolution’. The global struggle against body mutilation, domestic violence, infanticide, sexual assault, rape, domestication, slavery, dehumanisation, poverty, forced sterilisation and forced reproduction is not nit picking.

## Anarcho-misogynists Anonymous...

### A 12 step plan

These are some ways of challenging our social conditioning by a patriarchal culture. Macho behaviour is not specific to men, although often more common as males have been traditionally encouraged into stereotypical men (meaning aggressive, dominating, active, individualistic etc.) and women encouraged into equally limited and repressive caricatures instead of us all achieving our full potential as human beings.

- 1. Women’s Space:** Women, spend time in it, especially if you don’t understand why it exists. The experiences of women’s space are different to mixed space. And let’s stop ‘discussing’ it in mixed groups—women’s space is neither requested or demanded, it is taken and the opinions of men are irrelevant.
- 2. Skill Sharing:** It is largely a myth. Usually it is about one individual teaching one or many, and obviously gives rise to many problems of hierarchy and patronising behaviour. Lets work on real trading...you show me yours and i’ll show you mine.
- 3. New Women Being Fuck Fodder:** This is particularly present, or maybe just most visible, on mixed protest camps, although also a problem in women’s camps when they are treated like lifestyle cruising grounds, at squat cafes/social centres and in urban groups. Other women can ‘buddy up’ with women who are new and let them know they are valued as activists. Males can be friendly but not invasive. Everyone can pull up their friends or intervene if somebody is being out of order. Be honest, tell newcomers about problems like this so they don’t think they’re imagining it, or that this is acceptable behaviour.
- 4. Sexual Coercion:** While this is such a common complaint, it is often kept hush hush, people not wanting to rock the boat. As people who value direct action we need to take it—girl guerrilla groups who have issued confrontational warnings or revenge attacks on known bastards have claimed mixed areas as places not to mess with women in. The actions we take against corporate



scum can and should also be taken against raping scum.

**5. Question Everything:** Why do you really want to do that banner drop? Is it the best, most effective attack on this particular target or is it the one that gets you the most credit? If you can't be bothered to go flyposting and engage in sabotage, but you

will get nicked for something high profile and dangerous... ask yourself why. Think carefully before every action. Just what and who are you doing this for?

**6. Shut Up:** Meetings are generally dominated by a few mouthy individuals with little particularly constructive, creative or original to say. Recognise that some people are more confident than others talking in meetings. Have go-rounds at the beginning and at the end of meetings and somewhere halfway too. When someone new or someone who doesn't usually speak gets the guts to say something, credit them. Properly facilitated meetings are a great asset to those who don't jump in. And talk to new people or quiet people afterward; tell them you liked what they said.

**7. Wash Up:** It's such a cliché it's almost a joke. But it takes more than soapsuds to sort out the division of labour. On actions do the things you don't usually, offer to do the support work, stay in the office, do leaflet distribution, be—godforbid—anonymous. If it's an action that's public then it doesn't need the trust of an affinity group off to burn something down. Team up with less experienced people—write that leaflet with someone who's never written one before instead of your usual comrade.

**8. Sisterhood:** To misquote one of my male friends—there's no point spelling womyn all funny if you don't do the acts too. Solidarity in sisterhood can be interpreted in 100's of ways, be doing at least some of them.

**9. We Don't Need Another Hero:** Putting ourselves and others in hero-positions fictionalises our activities rather than reaching out to others. Bragging is neither skill sharing nor empowering others to act. Let's get humble because nothing we do is glorious, especially not when it's sensational. The sexy factor of an action isn't the be all and

end all and media coverage is generally counter-productive. Get real—seeing a young dreadlocked white boy hanging off a thin rope on the TV does not empower the viewer into thinking they can do the same.

**10. Learn:** Inform yourself of women's resistance, historically and geographically. If you know all about the Spanish revolution but not about 12th century women's rebellion in China widen your reading list.

**11. Abandon Your Privilege:** This is the hard one. First we need to acknowledge and recognise that as first world activists we occupy a global position of privilege. Most of us also have extra power due to our youth, our skin colour, our family class background. When we ignore our own or other's chains they don't just disappear, and when we topple these power relations most of us will get bruised on the way down. Admit we don't get the hardest deal. Listen to others, we might not know the best way. Get criticised, feel uncomfortable, and deal with it.



*Although the familiar picture is of a peaceful middle class woman with hat and placard, suffragettes smashed windows and set churches on fire, and many were working class*

**12. Unity Against Patriarchy:** While the fight against patriarchy is women's struggle and it is imperative that 'feminist' men do not hijack this struggle, everyone should participate in overthrowing systems of oppression. "Not only because men are capable of its perpetration but because we can be accomplices as well, by engaging in harmful ridicule and by our silence. But the struggle for respect for the specificity of gender can also include us, by acknowledging what we are, what we are not, and above all, what we are capable of becoming." - Commandante Insurgente Marcos.



## Women's Liberation

What follows is from an interview conducted by a 'young anarchy-feminist' with an 'older second wave feminist'. It took place over a couple of pleasant afternoons and is an attempt to look into and understand the significance of what was called the 'Women's Liberation Movement' in the 1970s and early '80s.

### **Tell us a bit about yourself..**

I got involved with the Women's Liberation Movement in 1970 while I was a student at university. It was a very big group and we had subgroups and so forth, it was so exciting! When I was trying to look at what I have done over the last nearly 30 years, it seemed to be mainly communication and facilitation. I haven't been out on the streets that much. I've done a lot of work in publishing, and I've organised all sorts of conferences and events. I have done quite a bit of grassroots stuff. I've been very involved with local Women's Centres, and I was involved in the Soho 16 campaign, supporting 16 women who were arrested at a Reclaim the Nights demonstration in Soho in the late '70s.

### **What would you describe the autonomous Women's Liberation Movement as? What was it made up of?**

Thousands and thousands of women! At the last of the national Women's Liberation conferences that we had, held in Birmingham in 1978, there were 3000 women. You can be sure that for every woman who came, there were another 5 who couldn't make it. So there were loads of us! I suppose what we're talking about is the period between 1970 and 1985. We were organised in mostly small groups, some of which had some national co-ordination like around different campaigns, at the socialist-reformist end. I'm not meaning that distinction as a put-down, you just have to think about the different ways that groups organised. On the socialist feminist side, you had the National Abortion Campaign, the Working Women's Charter organising in trade unions, I'm sure there were loads of others but those were two I still have in mind. On the radical feminist side, there were things like 'Women Against Violence Against Women', of course there was the National Women's Aid Federation. The first Women's Liberation refuge was opened in Brixton in 1973. It was clear that it was an excellent idea, because domestic violence was a really huge feminist issue.

### **Opening up a refuge was taking direct action...**

Yes, what happened was that these women I knew opened up a squat in Brixton and then, soon after that, there was a second one and within a very short

time there was a National Federation of 10 or 20 Women's Aid refuges, mostly squatted. This is one of the things I had been thinking about, is the perceptions I think younger women have about what the Women's Liberation Movement was like, and what kinds of actions we took. A row with a younger friend led me to thinking about the connection with the campaign I'm most active in now, Friends of Hackney Nurseries. This is basically an alliance of parents, staff and community activists in Hackney who want to save the threatened nurseries. And Hackney's in a ridiculous situation, only because of how bad things are elsewhere, that we actually have had one of the largest proportions of childcare provided anywhere in the country over the last 10-15 years. If you look at why this is, it's because of this huge network of community nurseries—around 23 at



*The 1930s saw a lot of civil unrest due to high unemployment and economic depression. Here, women pickets battle it out at the Newton Steel Company strike in Michigan, USA, in June 1937.*



the moment. Now probably the last 10 that set up were actually more or less out of fairly straight Council initiatives. But the first dozen were all squatted by groups of feminists! So a lot of these community nurseries that are now very straight organisations, are actually the result of Women's Liberation activism, squatting these Council-owned buildings and refusing to go away and saying 'We want a nursery here!' I think this is terribly important that people understand that. Particularly in Women's Aid, I don't know how many refuges there are around the country now, and I suppose most of them are run in a rather conventional way with police support and social workers, which is not all totally bad but, you know... without the really radical influence of a lot of feminists squatting buildings, doing all this stuff, we wouldn't have that now.

Most of these groups took funding at some stage, which is probably what led to their de-radicalization, though you wouldn't necessarily blame people for taking funding under certain circumstances. Up until 18 months ago the London Rape Crisis Centre had managed to stay a completely autonomous feminist organisation. And they were in danger of losing their grant simply for that. Also, I know of a lot of organisations which used to be run collectively. Then the London Boroughs Grants Scheme made it a condition of continued funding that they stop being a collective and introduce a hierarchy and a manager. My experience of the nursery campaign at the moment is that the community nurseries are entirely dependent on funding from the Council. I must say, I do not fancy the idea of having to tell these 20 groups that the only way they can save themselves is by squatting their buildings. We'll have to see, it's a slightly softly softly approach right now.

#### **How would you sum up the differences you mentioned between socialist and radical feminists?**

There was a very early slogan I always felt sort of bridged the gap, which was 'There will be no women's liberation without socialism, there will be no socialism without women's liberation.' This is extremely true. It was never that straightforward in practice, but the crudest way of putting it is that socialist feminists thought the initiating cause of oppression was capitalism, and that if you sort capitalism out, then women's liberation would sort of come along as a part of that. And therefore they were always prepared to work with men. Whereas radical feminists thought the initiating cause of oppression was patriarchy, and that men, even before you had

capitalism, have always oppressed women, and that was the underlying cause of oppression. And it's not that radical feminists never worked with men, I was always prepared to, but that if you couldn't sort out the relationship between patriarchy and women's oppression, then you weren't going to be able to sort out capitalism. That was the split, kind of crudely put. And I always felt that I straddled the two. Then there were the separatists who would have nothing to do with men, at all, down to ridiculous things like they purged their record collections of anything with men in them. And then there were some radical feminists like myself who were utterly convinced the problem was patriarchy but a) were prepared to work in alliances with men and b) didn't think that capitalism was irrelevant.

#### **Would you say radical feminists were generally more pro-woman, not necessarily separatist?**

There was what was called the pro-woman line, which is political, not about the personal behaviour of any particular woman. It's that in a fight between a man and a woman, you automatically take the woman's side. You should, of course you didn't always, but you should also believe that every woman was doing what she had to in order to get by. That was certainly what I tried to live by. So I think to that extent you can say that radical feminists were more pro-woman, but I wouldn't say they were so in terms of incredibly nice behaviour.

#### **Back to those differences, I think patriarchy and capital are so dependent on each other and so related. Anarchist feminism seems to be fusing socialist and radical feminism by referring to 'patriarchal capitalism' and power as such as what they're fighting against.**

It's very important to understand the position of anarchism. I suppose I always thought of myself as a libertarian socialist. Certainly some of the political activists in the '60s were anarchists and some of these were women who became Women's Liberationists. There were always anarchist feminist groups, although they were never huge. But what that leaves out of the equation is the fact that if you look at radical feminist ways of organising, and analyse them in terms of more conventional male politics, the thing they're actually closest to is anarchism. Socialist feminists tended more towards traditional Marxist forms of organisation—hierarchical, democratic centralist etc., which I just never had any taste for. But all that was never explicit. What I felt I



*Challenging all authority in the Spanish Revolution of 1936, women organised and educated themselves in the 'Mujeres Libres' federation and fought in the autonomous militias against the fascists.*

invaded the offices of one of the Fleet Street papers about the ways women were represented in it. We were rather strong on symbolic gestures. There was also lots of squatting. You see, that's another thing, when we talk about action, it's very easy to get hung up on patriarchal notions of what taking action's all about. I think we definitely did see from the very beginning that changing your life was taking direct action. It's easy to see how bit by bit that has been co-opted into lifestyleism, making my life better and sod the rest of you. But thousands of women just putting down the drying-up cloth,

was doing was organising myself politically in a way that I felt comfortable with. That was how most of us were organised. Even a lot of women who were definitely socialist feminists were organising in a non-hierarchical, small group kind of way. The roots of the movement in terms of organised politics was the New Left, a student movement, which was predominantly Marxist, plus women from other radical political groups such as trade unions and black groups. But other influences were 'ordinary women', women who had previously not been politically involved. A very interesting group was for example a group of mums and housewives from Peckham in South London. People like that, and I suppose people like—a working class beneficiary of the post-war welfare state—we just made it up as we went along. It's kind of interesting that it turned out to be an anarchist type of organising.

#### **Could you describe the methods you used, of action for example?**

What kinds of actions did we do? Well, there were the famous ones, like the first one that got prominence in this country, the invasion of the Miss World competition. The first kind of things I did were for example, when I was in my group in Cambridge, there was a single mother, she was having an awful lot of trouble with the Social Security. So some of the women in the group went down and occupied the Social Security offices. There was a lot of that kind of occupying of offices—one time a group of women

that was a startling phenomenon at the time. And an awful lot of women left their men. And I think that's a big act of rebellion. We're not just talking about women running away to battered women's refuges, but the Women's Liberation Movement made an awful lot of women realise that they didn't have to stay. And statistics up to today show that a higher number of divorces are actually initiated by women. There were also an awful lot of meetings and conferences, writing pamphlets, going on demos...

#### **What about the group methods?**

Yes, one of the original political tools was what we called consciousness-raising groups. The idea was you would have your consciousness raising group in which you would discover your common oppression as women and then that would enable you to think of imaginative action to take. That was obviously where a lot of the personal stuff like leaving your husband came from—women would egg each other on. 'Go on leave him!!!' And once you realised in the group that it wasn't just you... Women did support each other a lot, in the basic ways of taking each other in.

There were certainly separatist women, not hundreds and hundreds, but quite a lot, enough to make you feel that that was an option, whether or not you necessarily wanted to follow that option yourself, but it encouraged the rest of us, I think. On the one hand I've got quite strong reservations about separatist politics, because I actually don't think it's helpful as



a political strategy. However, the good side of it was that those women were absolutely clear that men were the enemy, they weren't going to have anything to do with men at all until after the revolution, and that it was only by being separatist that women would learn the necessary skills both practical and emotional they needed to really invigorate themselves. I think that that was very encouraging. There was a very moralistic element about it, where women were made to feel that unless they were separatist they were letting the side down. Occasionally I now come across women who were very separatist in the '70s and have mellowed out. I feel kind of ambivalent because on the one hand I'm pleased they mellowed out a bit, but on the other hand, I remember what a hard time they used to give people! It certainly was a viable lifestyle, mostly conducted in squats or in collective women's houses, one or two of which turned into women's housing co-ops and housing associations.

**The consciousness-raising groups, I always wondered where they came from. How did they get together?**

What we had from the very early days in London, and in other cities as well, was a Women's Liberation Newsletter. And basically, I think what you need for any kind of substantial radical movement is grassroots communication. The London Women's Liberation Newsletter came out every week—which was really quite an achievement. On the hand it is a bit of a mystery how women found their way in. On the other hand, they just kind of did and lots of towns had Women's Centres and there were local newsletters. I suppose in the early days those were the main public arenas.

**What would you say are other lessons that can be learnt from the Women's Liberation Movement, especially considering all the talk of a 'post-feminist society' and the only place you find feminists today is in academia? It seems far away, women taking action and on the streets as feminists.**

I know! I feel weird having this conversation because it really makes it clear to me how historical it is in some ways. I'm sitting here with another grown-up who is asking me about things like they were another lifetime. Well, I think the lesson that I would learn is that it's bollocks that we are in a post-feminist period. It's complete bollocks, on any level, from women's equal pay to the level of domestic violence. On any indicator, women are clearly still oppressed. But it's also clear that we have made

progress and it would be really foolish, not so say depressing, to say women have achieved nothing in the last 30 years. One of the first lessons that I would like us to learn is there's no point giving up, you just have to keep plugging away. The other important thing is that we need a strong autonomous Women's Liberation Movement to make sure that women's politics are kept on the political agenda. And I think that women meeting on their own as part of a political movement is absolutely essential. The only way to combat the recent lack of women's issues on the political agenda is for women to get together with other women from their organisations, and meet separately, because it's so easy as a woman to feel isolated and relatively powerless. It's important to take charge and know that you are really powerful. But it makes it a hell of a lot easier if you do it with a bunch of other women.

**It feels like there's nothing specific anymore about women's resistance, as if there was no point to it—all political action is supposed to be all inclusive. Feminism is seen as a limited, single-issue approach and women only action/groups unnecessary and even counterproductive.**

I believe it needs some of us older feminists who've been around since the second time around to keep reminding those of you who I'll call the third wave (or the last bit of the second wave or whatever) that actually these are the issues, that we can work together, and it's possible to do these things. Another lesson I'd learn is that men have to bloody change. And it's absolutely no good for men to sit around and bellyache. I think what I have always felt is I'm not at all, not at all interested in what a man has to say. What I'm interested in is what a man *does*. Is he there doing 50% of the childcare? Is he there doing the cooking? Is he there taking minutes at the meeting? While the women can get on doing stuff, basically allowing women to take their space. I don't want to hear his theory, not in that context. My partner is very active politically, and he's very concerned about men's oppression, but he channels his political action into stuff that's generally not around sexual politics. But what he does, is he does 50% of the childcare, he probably cooks more than me, he's actually there where it counts, and that's what I'm interested in. I think that's what any self-respecting woman or man should be interested in.

I have also been interested for years in women's collective history. Having this conversation with you is very interesting because it makes me realise how



important it is. There has been a certain amount that's been researched, although not very much, stuff like the chronology of the Women's Liberation Movement, published by the Bradford Feminist Archive, that's crucial. Did I tell you I've got an article that's coming out in a book fairly shortly? It's actually an academic book, my first academic article! It's looking at the feasibility of producing an electronic history of the Women's Liberation Movement, but what it's basically about, or why I want it to be written, is because I have become aware of the fact that these conversations like we're having are starting to happen all around the place. I think not losing our history is actually a rather political thing that could be done.

### Without seeing the Women's Liberation Movement as a concluded thing...

That's right, seeing it as a continuum. For god's sake I hope I've got another 30 years in me, I intend to be part of a third wave.



In 1984, forty women police officers stormed the South London hospital for women (the only one of its kind in the UK) to end the nine month occupation in defiance at the threat of its closure.

### Further Reading:

'68, '78, '88. *From Womens' Liberation to Feminism*, Amanda Sebestyen (ed.), Prism Press 1988, ISBN 1-85327-022-9: An attempt to document 20 years of the Women's Liberation Movement. The various contributions cover a wide range of issues from a wide range of backgrounds, including many first-time writers.

The Raven, Anarchist Quarterly Number 21, *Feminism, Anarchism, Women*, Freedom Press 1993: This includes theoretical anarcho-feminist contributions plus appraisals of various anarchist women in history. One essay though is really annoying: 'Men Are Human Beings, Too!' by Peter Geiger, a frustrated bloke with odd misconceptions of feminism. Twat.

*Beyond Power. Women, Men and Morals*, Marilyn French, Abacus 1985, ISBN 0-349-11335-1: The author has taken on an immense task with this book—investigating the nature and effects of power throughout society and throughout history. She manages surprisingly well, in an informative and readable way.

*Untying the Knot*, Jo Freeman & Cathy Levine, Dark Star and Rebel Press: Two influential contributions to the question of organisation in the Women's Liberation Movement. Reprinted here as a pamphlet, they both still have relevance also in other contexts.

*Reinventing Anarchy, Again*, Howard J. Ehrlich (ed.), AK Press 199X, ISBN 1-873176-88-0: This anthology deals with anarcho-feminism in Part Four, including a contribution by Carol Ehrlich, reprinted by Spectacular Times as a cheaper pamphlet called *Women and the Spectacle*. This is recommended reading for all those who doubt feminism's significance in an anarchist theory.

*The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir, Picador Classics 1988, ISBN 0-330-30338-4: A classic analysis of a woman's position in society. At times a bit generalising but a useful tool in understanding patriarchy.

*The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer, Paladin Press 1971, ISBN 0-586-08055-4: Another classic of the Women's Liberation Movement, this is detailed, humorous and inspiring. Also recommended is her new book: *The Whole Woman*: a reassessment of the feminist movement today.

*Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*, bell hooks, South End Press 1981: This explores dealing with two identities—being black and a woman, and how feminism relates to black women's realities.

### Novels

Academia invented the abstract issue—before that, politics was based on reality. And reality is far better conveyed through stories than dull long sentences. The power of the novel should not be underestimated. Some of the best feminist books (but also some of the worst) are in the form of novels and have become classics in the Women's Liberation Movement. These are the ones that inspired me most:

*Braided Lives, Vida*, and others by Marge Piercy

*The Women's Room*, Marilyn French

*The Shame is Over*, Anja Meulenbelt

*The Awakening*, Kate Chopin

*The Bean Trees*, and others by Barbara Kingsolver

*The Colour Purple*, and others by Alice Walker