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# *The* **Socialist**

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Dreaming of Freedom...  
**Daring to Change**



**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2008**

## THE SOCIALIST

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# The Socialist

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*The Socialist is always looking for interesting, insightful, well-written material. In particular, we are looking for work that highlights the struggles and triumphs of the working class. We will accept news articles and stories about organizing and protests, but we are also looking for short fiction, poetry, and music/arts/theater/film review. Please mark all letters to the editor as such and limit letters to 250 words; articles should not exceed 1,500 words. Submit as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word .doc or .rtf format to SocialistParty@sp-usa.org, or by mail to: The Socialist, 339 Lafayette St. Room 303, New York, NY 10012.*



# The Strength of Stones

by Annette Marie Hyder

*.. like streams of water in a waterless country,*

*like the shadow of a heavy crag in an exhausted land. -- Psalms 32:2*

This is a true story about a woman who was a stone: strong as the bones of the earth.

And she was a pebble. Not in that she was insignificant but rather that she was small but she made a difference, just like that small pebble that can start an avalanche. And she was flint. Not in that she was hard but rather that she was able to strike a spark, set fire to hidebound customs and to many hearts and hands.

And she was granite but not in that she was inflexible. But rather, she was the stuff of mountains, soaring-majestic-inspiring-awesome, and she was onyx, jade, verdite, serpentine, and jasper, beautiful indeed.

But at first she was just a stone in Pakistan, used to hurt her brother, a rock thrown at him; gang-raped on the orders of a local justice council to atone for her brother's "crime." He was charged with rape by her village jirga to keep him from telling how he had been sodomized by leading Mastoi men.

She screamed for help while she was dragged in front of hordes of villagers. She begged for mercy. But no one came to her aid. And it was as if she was stoned as well as raped, in that there were stones in the hands of a mob-like tradition, in that the villagers became stones themselves and bruised the skin of compassion largely with multi-colored and livid marks.

Naked and shivering she walked back home, her feet bare, her path lined with silent spectators.

In that wilderness of patriarchy, rape victims are known to kill themselves in shame. She could marry a deep dark well of obliterating water death bride to Lethe-like relief or shed tears all her life monsoonic misery storms of grief and wild wailing winds of anger.

She refused to be cairned with shame.

She took the council to court and in the ensuing worldwide attention the Pakistani government tried to block her way. Standing stones of travel restrictions were placed in her way, menhirs her rapists were jailed but then set free monolithic obstructions but her feet were made of water. And more than mere standing stones can be worn away with the obstinacy of water.

She is: avalanche starter, mountain breaker, a stone with feet of water.

She fought back with resolute strength. And she won with a noise in the midst of the news of the world that sounded like a mountain's CRACK to the women, stones upon stones in places around the world.

The government awarded her \$8,300 in cash and she took that money and started the village's first-ever school. She has dedicated her life to social work, to education, in that, she has built a school and teaches the Koran to young girls and boys she says "If women

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2008

### To our readers...

International Women's Day is a day for truth-telling. For reflection and for action. For questions and for answers. For radical women around the world to connect with each other.

We believe that the meaning and promise of International Women's Day emerge vividly from the articles, poetry, and graphics we are proud to present to you in this issue of **The Socialist**. They will interest, inform, inspire, and challenge you. They will convince you that red is our color. Red: the color of daring, of anger, of warmth. The color that accents our dreams, ignites our passion, illuminates the path of our action, nourishes our international revolutionary spirit. Red says "Go!"

So on behalf of the Women's Commission of the Socialist Party-USA, we send you bold, red, joyous greetings for International Women's Day 2008. Long live the principles and practices of democratic socialist feminism!

In solidarity and sisterhood,

Courtney J. Campbell  
Susan Dorazio  
Ari Moore

aren't educated, it's hard for them to speak up for themselves." She has even enrolled her rapists' children. And women everywhere, from women who live in deserts of sand, like hers, to women who live in deserts of moral dehydration and societal dessicance, are saying her name Mukhtaran Mai.

She has shown that we are stones who dwell among stones each building upon the other but each defining by individual actions what can or cannot be Mukhtaran Mai.

She has become polished obsidian for other women to see themselves within. And her name has become a stone in the hands of women far and wide and around this world Mukhtaran Mai. Her name has become a stone in the collective fist of resistance raised against silence and humiliation. And her name has become the rush and the sound of water running its course to freedom.

Mukhtaran Mai many women have been silent stones all their lives.

Mukhtaran Mai you have called these stones to witness and they will speak.

Mukhtaran Mai they will speak.

*Previously published in INTHEFRAY Magazine*

*Annette Marie Hyder is a journalist, artist, author, and founder and curator of the international feminist project "Facing Feminism: Feminists I Know". She is on the editorial board of "INTHEFRAY" magazine and her poetry has been translated into German, Italian and Spanish.*



# Theater for Youth, and for the Community

by Betania Gonçalves da Silva

**W**e are women, we are black, we are white, we have curly hair, we are poor, we have to attend bad schools and yet we are able to fight for our rights and make art.

Em Cena Arte e Cidadania (On Stage: Art and Citizenship), a local, non-profit organization, was founded on November 28th, 1998 by a group of friends who trusted in three kids (as they called us) who strongly believed they could make a difference in the world through the arts. Although they called us their kids we were adult enough to face the challenge of proving to the founders of Em Cena Arte e Cidadania that we were right.

This group of friends legally founded Em Cena Arte e Cidadania but we-- Larissa Araújo (Classical Ballet teacher who now teaches at the Bolshoi School in the south of Brazil), Cristiane de Sá Rodrigues (piano teacher), and Betania Gonçalves da Silva (theater teacher)-- made it come true!

Under the dictionary entry "culture" we find "a society's collective production, or, on a deeper level, the heritage of the whole of humanity, built up throughout its history." In this great cauldron we call culture, art is seen as a way of expressing ideas, experiences, and emotions. It is brought to life through the use of shapes and colors, in visual art; through sound in music; through body movement in dance; or through words in literature.

In all its forms of development, in dignity and in comedy, in persuasion and in exaggeration, in the meaningful and in the absurd, in fantasy and in reality, art always has some element of magic. The "magic" of the essential ingredients: form, sound, color, word, movement, are formed according to established principles and not haphazardly. The artist's work enables her or him to dominate, control, and transform experiences into memories, memories into

expression, material into form, and elements into works of art.

With the idea that we were able to use that "magic" which enables the artist to transform things into art to make a difference in this world, we set up a school of Classical Dance, following the Russian Method, in May 1999 for a group of thirty children: 28 girls and 2 boys. Although it has changed a lot, it is still a performing arts school and has been on-going for nine years at the headquarters of our partner, Movimento Pró-Criança (Pro-Child Movement). More than 350 kids have attended the courses offered by Em Cena Arte e Cidadania. The targets of our efforts are the children of the community-- the ones considered to be living in deep poverty.

Movimento Pró-Criança is, like Em Cena Arte e Cidadania, a non-governmental organization, where work is geared toward placing greater emphasis on the citizen, through educational and vocational programs.

Many people have asked us why work with art if those kids need food? The answer comes easily to us:

In Brazil, the struggle for human rights is rewarded only at the most basic levels, with the majority of the population guaranteed only minimal survival conditions. This makes people always wait for the government or for some other person to come and bring them food, or some pocket money. This makes people wait for someone, for something, that can transform their lives into gold, that can bring them to the world of the rich, that can stop their suffering!

Meanwhile, formal education and art education are pushed into the background and the real tools one needs to fight for her or his rights (such as the ability to read and write, find strength to face challenges, and so forth) are set aside.

It was time, then, to make something which looked and sounded

like magic so the families and kids who were so used to receiving the pocket money from the government or attending bad schools would join us. But at the same time, something that would allow them to be the magicians for their own lives.

Therefore we set up as our overall aims:

1. To set up a high quality performing arts school which aims to put children's time to good use and to keep them off the streets.
2. To educate capable professionals, who can work effectively in the art market, in this way giving people the ability to carry out the activities of dancers, teachers, choreographers, and backstage crews.

And as our specific goals:

1. To improve children's self-esteem through the playful-educational-professional work.
2. To encourage children to attend formal school.
3. To keep up with children's attendance and performance at formal school
4. To increase involvement of the family in their children's education.
5. To place greater emphasis on the community.
6. To call people's attention to the social problems faced by the kids and teenagers from the poor communities of Recife.
7. To help dreams come true.

In May 2006 we were on a bus, on our way to present our biggest performance called *O Quebra Nozes no Reino do Meio Dia* (a Brazilian version of *The Nutcracker*). As we passed the most beautiful and elegant theater in Recife, *Teatro de Santa Isabel*, Nívea Farias (a young dancer of 13 who has been at *Em Cena Arte e Cidadania* since 2000) said:

"I have been in *Em Cena Arte e Cidadania* for five years. I have danced on the streets, at schools, at many theaters in this city and in the countryside. I wish one day I could dance at *Teatro de Santa Isabel*. But I think this dream is impossible because *Teatro de Santa Isabel* is only for very rich people and rich people do not like to see the poor in front of them."

The other kids who were on the bus started to say the same, and they all looked very sad on that day.

When we returned to our regular activities, we called together the young dancers (15 girls and 1 very talented black youth who has been pushed back by some dance companies in the city because of his color). We talked about dancing at *Teatro de Santa Isabel* and what it would mean to them and to *Em Cena Arte e Cidadania*.

They were so happy with the possibility that a dream would come true, a big dream. Again somebody said we are not able to; that we are not talented enough for that stage.

We started rehearsing *O Quebra Nozes no Reino do Meio Dia*, even without the approval from *Teatro de Santa Isabel* to dance there. We worked hard for two years - which is a long time for teenagers to keep the same goal. We lost two young dancers to the streets and to drugs and it was difficult to keep their motivation. We saw their sad faces and their belief that they were not good people because they were poor - some were black - and they all lived in one of the most violent areas in the city of Recife. We could not give up on that dream, otherwise a lot of the work we had done in that community would go to ruin. But we also were becoming unmotivated and tired of trying to prove that we were good!

Finally in October 2007 we received the greatest news: our performance proposal had been accepted by the *Teatro de Santa Isabel*. We could tell that the eyes of those little artists shone again and we never saw them put forward so much of an effort as they did in putting *O Quebra Nozes no Reino do meio Dia* on stage.

"Teacher, it is not only dancing for them, but it is proving to ourselves that we can do a lot and that we will never stop believing in ourselves. It might take time and a lot of work, but now we know that we can make our own destiny," said Natália de Lima Farias (a young dancer of 22 who has been at *Em Cena Arte e Cidadania* since 1999).

And then on December 6th, 2007, 450 people were at *Teatro de Santa Isabel* to see *O Quebra Nozes no Reino do Meio Dia*. Along with the performance, the audience saw the talent, the brightness and the strength of those kids and teens who find energy to struggle everyday for their lives against the violence and the prejudice of being poor and living in "favelas".

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*Betania Gonçalves da Silva was born in Pernambuco, Brazil. She graduated from High School at Colégio São Luis in 1989 and went on to the Pernambuco Federal University, where she studied art education, specializing in drama. Her children's book "Banquete de Aniversário" (Birthday Banquet) was published by Bagaço in December 1997. Since 1999, she has worked as an English teacher for Associação BRASIL América. She has been the Project Coordinator of Em Cena Arte e Cidadania since its beginning in NOVEMBER, 1998.*

*Photos of Teatro de Santa Isabel taken by Beto Figueiróa.*



# Radical Left Wing Socialist Feminism In Denmark

by Nina Agerskov

## The Socialist Youth Front

The far left-wing in Denmark consists of a range of parties and groups, from communists and Marxists, to environmental activists and syndicalists, to anarchists and revolutionary socialists. The Socialist Youth Front (SUF), with a membership of approximately 1,000 people, is an attempt to unite the young people of the radical left. Hence, our program includes many different ways of thinking, but with the three common, but unwritten, agreements: namely, that we are socialists, that we are revolutionaries, and that we are activists. The blending of political directions inside SUF, and the fact that SUF is just a 7 year old organization, makes it necessary to have an open, collective structure combined with the possibility for small groups within SUF to develop policies in specific areas, and then work on these policies in the context of the common program.

Consequently, SUF has got both a Woman's Group and a Gender Politic Group. While the Women's Group is self organizing, meaning that no male is allowed at meetings unless invited, the Gender Politic Group is for everyone in SUF, and is the place where issues around both sexism and feminism are discussed by both men and women. Both groups work hard on developing socialist feminist analysis for discussion with the whole organization, both in order to educate and involve the members of SUF in the struggle, and to develop SUF's external politics and program.

## SUF and The Red-Green Alliance

The Red-Green Alliance (RGA) has existed since 1989, and is represented in the Danish parliament with four members, which equals approximately 2.5 % of the Danish vote. It is the only revolutionary socialist party in the parliament, and, not very surprisingly, it is supported by SUF at elections. However, this is not the only connection between RGA and SUF, as there exists an actual agreement between the two organizations about how cooperation should take place, and as many members of SUF are also members of RGA. The organizational structure of SUF is not a carbon-copy of that of the RGA, but the principles about non-hierarchical and collective leadership are the same. The ways of developing policies are therefore very similar between RGA and SUF, and the feminist policies and ways of organizing and working in SUF are inspired partly by the Red-Green Alliance.

## We are socialist, revolutionary, activist feminists!

The feminist analysis of most of the people inside SUF can be described by using the three common ideas that support our work:

- We are socialist feminists because we see how capitalism lives and grows by the repression of women. Feminism is a tool in the fight for socialism because capitalism lives off repression of working people in particular women, undocumented workers, ethnic minorities, and those otherwise disadvantaged. The perpetuation of inequality is indeed one of the cornerstones of capitalism. By fighting for women's liberation, we are actually attacking the very foundation of capitalism.
- We are revolutionary feminists because we believe that fighting for feminism is not just about fighting the market's discrimination of women, but also, and maybe even more importantly, fighting the very ways we speak and think about the notion of "woman". Consequently, we also need to fight what in an academic way can be described as a "battle over discourse", because the prejudice about so called "women's work" and "men's work" is still alive. There is not any biological reason why a woman should not be as good as a man in repairing computers

or being leaders, and still, these jobs are very rarely occupied by a woman. So we've got to work on what psychological factors must be changed in order to create equality between genders. This "battle over discourse" must not only be fought at the work place, but in all areas in which women are discriminated, e.g. in the home, in the media, in advertising, in the educational system, in politics, in bed, and inside our own organizations. (Just because we are all fighting for socialism certainly does not mean that conservative ideas on how women should act are not present!). We usually say that you've got to apply the feminist perspective to the analysis of every concrete problem and plan of action.

- We are activist feminists, because we believe that creating politics in practice is much more energizing and hence has a greater impact than reading a book waiting for the revolution to come. Naturally, this does not mean that we do not read at all, but when we do, we get inspiration from both contemporary and former sociologists, philosophers, politicians, economists and feminists in general; and we also see art, literature, movies, music, and culture as ways to fight, and to get knowledge on how to fight. When we identify practice as our way of developing politics, we are talking about organizing activism in the street, direct action, street theater, demonstrations, campaigns, meetings, public lectures and something special we have learned from Red Youth from Norway, which is called "Bøllekurser". It means "Bully Courses", and it is a women-only event where we are together for a couple of days, learning, discussing and playing, in order to learn the principles of feminism, and to discover where discrimination of women exists today, and to discuss how we can get rid of it.

## What we do and why we do it

The best activities we know of in SUF are the ones that educate both us and society and we like to do things that shock people, in order to give both men and women a wake up call. We once started a debate about the absence of women in history books, by counting the number of male and female statues in the Danish city of Aarhus, and then putting ballerina skirts on most of the very large number of male statues.

Afterwards, we put clothing on the very few statues of women because we realized that they were all naked. Good press work is, of course, an important part of our work. For example, in December of last year, activists from SUF participated in an action organized by another network. The activists went to the beach without wearing bikini tops in order to protest the sexualization of breasts. The newspapers, of course, treated this action in different ways, some saying it was a pleasant sight, while others actually understood and interviewed the activists about their feminist perspective. In this way, the activists started a debate both inside and outside of SUF, which is exactly what we want to have happen when we do direct action.

## Celebrating the 8th of March is as important as ever!

International Women's Day was proposed by the German feminist communist Clara Zetkin in 1910. This historic event actually took place in The People's House, later known as The Youth House, situated in Copenhagen, the Danish capital. This house was occupied by young activists of the radical left for several years recently, and it produced many gender activists, feminists, and new political strategies inspired by feminism, socialism and anarchism through

the years simply because it was owned by the young people and had no "adults" to teach the activists how to think. Sadly, and very ironically, this house was sold by the authorities to a religious sect in 2001, and this sect, in 2007, tore the house to the ground.

However, the 8th of March is every bit as important to celebrate today as it has ever been! In 1910, the fight for feminism was primarily about equalizing salaries and providing women the right to vote. Now, feminism and liberation in Denmark are more about the above-mentioned battle over discourse, even though we still need to take a range of actions in order to stop women from being physically harmed, forced into prostitution, and exposed only as a sexual object in the media and in commercials. The difference in salaries between men and women has developed through centuries of repression of women and so has the way we think about ourselves and the way society thinks about women. You can still sell a car by putting a half-naked woman and top off it, and society does nothing. We've got to show what kind of a picture that kind of commercialization of gender creates. And as we have worked for equalizing salaries, we've got to work for equalizing the concepts of gender.

## SUF and the 8th of March

One of our activities for International Women's Day this year will be participating in a demonstration in Copenhagen against prostitution and for criminalization of the customer. This demonstration is being arranged by a broader network, but SUF will probably arrange smaller events inside the demonstration or at other sites in the city. It is in fact hard to know what exactly will happen, because our actions often are quite impulsive, but as SUF has activists in over 30 cities in Denmark, we will probably make nationwide actions on this day. However, we believe it is very important to remember that we've got to struggle for feminism not only one time a year, but every single day.

Being women, our freedom is not automatically connected to creating a new socialist society. The fight for feminism is an important, autonomous fight, and it is the everyday practice that makes both us, and those around us, wiser.

International Women's Day is also a day for international solidarity between feminists all over the world. Many of the goals we have attained in Denmark are still just a dream for women living in developing countries around the world. So when we take action on the 8th of March, it is very likely that our actions will have an international perspective, as for example our fight against men buying women, because no matter how much we've accomplished in the Western world, on a global basis it is still the richest men of the

## fifty-one ways to make her shut up | Courtney J. Campbell

there are fifty-one ways to make a mad woman quiet or to never speak her mind  
tie her hands place upside down drop drops of water or offer incentive  
cut out the tongue put a price on words make it a crime to talk or listen  
create fear create distraction create new words of innumerable syllables  
or mix them up let red ring blue let the sun be full let shine the moon  
make words a chore make letters itch like mosquito bites or like eating spinach  
make words leafy green hard to swallow hard to chew hard to follow  
isolate the speakers bury them in stadiums unless they make out under the bleachers  
make easy listening sound more interesting make tongues burn where they once were tickling  
put a premium on not having premiums make every voice sound like inhaled helium  
or mickey mouse or daffy duck or like george w make every word sound like fuck  
or like cursing your mother filled with guilt or like windows with shutters  
let the words slam shut clanking slamming waking everyone up  
staple lips wire jaws shut give out lollipops or huge pieces of gum  
make it a show of reality the winner never says anything  
make it ugly put it in cosmo complete with tips on landing mute lovers  
don't educate 'er keep 'er stupid let her only talk when spoken to  
then never speak not even over dinner convince her that words are for sinners  
or that they are weapons of mass destruction or even assassins on grassy knolls  
then take these all wrap strand by strand one around the other and tie her hands  
throw her in the crowd like a loose pigeon pecking at the ground but never speaking

*Courtney J. Campbell is a member of the Socialist Party of Michigan and co-editor for this edition of Socialist Women. She is a graduate student of Theory and History of Education in Brazil. Her poetry and essays have been published in several print and online publications.*

## Talkin' Puritanism | Dan Conn

While the stone releases from the grips of hate, so the camera flashes once again  
The hate of yesterday, fear's favorite voice, knows the manipulative art of momentum  
Subtlety the people begin to celebrate contact, as we inhale another drag of convenience  
Fraudulent compassion once drew a tear; now entertainment's distance allows us laughter  
The label of envy collects the warmth of empathy. We settle for goose bumps  
Boredom threatens our truth with reality and the wretched tradition of tomorrow  
Calculated tolerance encourages bigotry's pace, until we listen and desire understanding  
We use the rock to make fire, and, to fire, we owe our ability to forget  
Let us all remember yesterday's suffrage  
Awake both young and old

*Dan Conn, like a flower in the desert, lives in rural Colorado and has spent most of his life in Colorado Springs. He teaches social studies and writes a column in a local newspaper.*

world who buy the poorest women of the world. Thus, we've still got to fight internationally for socialism and feminism by forging bonds between sisters and brothers all over the world. Connecting our fight for feminism is as important as connecting our fight for socialism!

## Get more information on SUF and RGA!

SUF's homepage address is [www.socialistkungdomsfront.dk](http://www.socialistkungdomsfront.dk). Unfortunately it is not available in English, but if you want to contact us, you can always write in English to SUF's general office: [sek@ungdomsfront.dk](mailto:sek@ungdomsfront.dk). RGA's homepage address is [www.enhed-slisten.dk](http://www.enhed-slisten.dk), and an English version is available.

*Nina Agerskov, 22 years old, has been a member of SUF for 5 years and of RGA for 3 years. She is a member SUF's Women's Group, is co-founder of SUF's Gender Politic Group, and has been a part of SUF's leadership collective for the past year and a half, developing socialist feminist policies for SUF on both a regional and national basis. Right now she is working in a record shop, but this Fall she will be studying music science at the University of Copenhagen.*

# An Irish Solution to an Irish Problem: Socialists Will Not Compromise

by Jennifer Earles

When the government denies a woman the right to abortion following an unwanted pregnancy, tragic self abuse, or risking life-long injury (or even death) by being forced to put one's trust in an amateur abortionist, can be the dire consequence. This International Women's Day, we must recognize the socialist women and men in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and throughout the United Kingdom who continue to fight for abortion rights.

British women won the fight for abortion rights with the 1967 Abortion Act. However, despite Northern Ireland's membership in the United Kingdom, and even though Northern Irish working women pay the same taxes as their British sisters, they do not have access to National Health Service (NHS) abortion services even in cases of rape and incest. Women in Northern Ireland continue to be underrepresented in the major political parties that operate under antiquated laws and presume to understand the personal lives and choices of all women regardless of class, age, and race. The developments and persistence of peace in Northern Ireland have depended on women who have fought hand in hand with men to reestablish institutions within this historically turbulent nation. However, despite women's willingness to defend their national rights, they are denied full control of their bodies.

Northern Irish law mimics the British law prior to 1967, abiding by the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act which makes all abortions illegal. With the 1938 Bourne judgment, the Northern Irish parliament does permit abortion in cases where a woman's mental or physical health is at risk. In 1945, the British Infant Life (Preservation) Act also was extended to Northern Ireland which allows abortion to preserve a mother's life. Very few abortions legally are allowed in Northern Ireland today around 70 per year. These are mostly in extreme cases where the mother's physical or mental health is severely and permanently endangered.

These laws, however, do not prevent women from needing or seeking abortion. Instead it punishes low income women, unfairly forcing them to travel secretly, often alone, to Britain or other parts of Europe. According to the Northern Irish publication, the Socialist Worker, almost 40 women per week leave the North for an abortion. And according to Abortion Rights: The National Pro-Choice Campaign, 54,000 women-- including young women, older women, mothers, single women and married women-- have been forced to make this difficult journey since the British 1967 act was passed.

More than 50 percent of Northern Ireland's female population is at or below the poverty line and 58 percent of all births in Belfast during 2006 were to single women. For these women, abortion procedures outside the country can cost as much as \$2,000 including travel and accommodations. Those women who can't afford these steep costs may resort to unsafe, illegal "back-alley" abortions. In fact, 11 percent of Northern Ireland's general practitioners say they have seen the results of amateur abortions. These practitioners also are not allowed to refer desperate women for NHS abortions in England. For those who do find the necessary funds, time off work and producing false alibis also present a challenge. Women from the North are three times more likely than their British counterparts to have an abortion after 20 weeks explained, no doubt, by the difficulties in getting money together.

Northern Ireland's major political parties, both unionist and nationalist, remain deeply divided on most politically issues; however Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein have united to oppose abortion. The groups refuse to endorse the exten-

sion of the Abortion Act to Northern Ireland because "no one in Northern Ireland supports abortion" and they will not "impose" it. Socialist groups see this statement as viciously false and agree that this simply is an attempt by politicians to persuade its citizens to protest against abortion. Ordinary people do not live their lives like Paisley, Adams, or the Pope say they should.

Since the Belfast Agreement of 1998, the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as part of the U.K. has been guaranteed; however, the issue of abortion rights has been left to the Stormont Assembly (Northern Ireland's local assembly). In 2001, the Family Planning Association (FPA) in Northern Ireland took legal action against the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSP) arguing that the agency has failed to clarify what abortion services are available and in what circumstances. The FPA also blamed the DHSSP for not providing proper public health care services to women with unplanned pregnancies.

Following this official action, an independent government body was set up to ensure that Northern Irish law measures up with international human rights obligations. In 1993 they issued a public consultation document on the issue of abortion, which stated that: "The law on abortion in Northern Ireland is so uncertain that it violates the standards of international human rights law." Unfortunately, on October 22, 2007, the Assembly voted to approve a DUP motion calling on the Minister for Health not to issue guidelines to clarify the law on abortion, stating that this clarification would have made abortion more widely available.

In Northern Ireland, forty years of struggle have passed, and countless dangerous and illegal abortions have occurred, since the NHS started providing safe and legal services in Britain. Making abortion illegal oppresses women and keeps the working class woman focused on and burdened by domestic duties and raising children. These sexist and classist laws have prevented low-income women from obtaining full control of their bodies. Meanwhile, socialist groups continue to make the voices of the pro-choice working class heard by putting pressure on the parliament to give women in Northern Ireland the same right to abortion as in the rest of the UK.

These achievable equality rights depend on women's voices and the power of the working class, working for socialism-- the only political and social option that stands for the right of women to choose safe and legal abortion, regardless of class, age, race, or circumstance. Providing women with the time and resources to be educated and to participate fully in the running of society is the only way sexism and inequality will begin to wither away, and full rights for women will be guaranteed.

For more information on Socialism and Pro-Choice groups in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom visit:

[www.socialistyouth.wordpress.com](http://www.socialistyouth.wordpress.com)

[www.swp.ie/home](http://www.swp.ie/home)

<http://www.socialistpartyini.net>

[www.abortionrights.org.uk](http://www.abortionrights.org.uk)

*Jennifer Earles is a long-time resident of Central Florida. After spending years working as a reporter and with various non-profits related to education, Jennifer recently returned to school in order to earn her master's degree in Women's Studies. Her interests including international reproductive rights, universal health care, gender representation in the media, and working to increase minimum wage nationwide.*



# The Myth of Female Slave Passivity: Six Responses from the Past

by Billy Wharton

Until the prison door of the Kingston Workhouse slammed behind her in August 1821, Kitty was just one of the more than 300,000 persons enslaved in the British colony of Jamaica. It was in this month that she ran away thereby violating her status as a piece of property under the arbitrary rule of the small estate owner Richard Stedman. Kitty did not take this act alone. The advertisement in the colonial newspaper reported the following “Kitty, negro woman, and her negro children.” This short entry provides a glimpse into the complex world of a little known actor in the history of slavery: the female runaway.

Typical contemporary views of the female slaves assign roles alternating between victims of rapacious slave owners and labor workhorses. While both descriptions have historical merit, they simultaneously act to emphasize female passivity. A review of the lists of slaves detained in the workhouses of Jamaica during the last decades of slavery (1820s & 1830s) suggests alternative possibilities. Instead of passivity, the reader finds inspirational examples of female slaves challenging sexual and labor oppression by asserting control of their own bodies through running away.

Jamaica had once been an economic juggernaut of the British Empire. The production of sugar and coffee through the use of slave labor had translated into massive profits during the 18th c. for slave owners and delivered cheap products to the tables of metropolitan Britons. Yet the turn of the 19th c. brought a rising humanitarian critique by the anti-slavery movement in England and pressure from below from a slave population inspired by the success of the Haitian Revolution. Sugar boycotts and petitioning strained the political clout of slave owners in parliament. On the island, relations that were burdens on female slaves such as the duties of child rearing and the control of marketing routes were crafted into strategies for resistance.

For a female slave running off was often not an individual act. The previously mentioned Kitty brought along her children--William, George (young boys), Caroline and Sophy (younger children)--on her nearly 100-mile trek from the western part of the island to Kingston. Kitty's rebellious group also included an unnamed “mulatto child [child of a white man and an African] about eight months at the breast.” This suggests that the cause of the conflict might be rooted in her copulation with her owner.

In March 1829, Annie Miller and Martina made a pre-emptive defense of their progeny during their escape from the far west coast of Jamaica to Kingston in the east (more than 100 miles). Both slaves were pregnant. Annie was one of 11 slaves owned by a Miss Sarah Buchanan and held on a small estate named Boggy-Hill. Martina is described as a “sambo creole” meaning that she was the child of a mulatto and an African. Her master, a Miss Jane Pollard, is described in the workhouse list as a “person of colour.” Thus Martina, as well as Kitty, had already become entangled in the complex racialized realities of the Jamaican colour line during slavery.

Ultimately, Kitty, Annie Miller and Martina ended up in the Kingston workhouse. Each spent about one-month incarcerated before being reclaimed by their owners. Their stories offer testimony to the extreme measure females slaves took to defend the basic family unit of the slave community. Their actions represent an assertion of the basic humanity of parents and children over and against the larger property relations of the slave marketplace.

The defense of family does not exhaust the resistance strategies of female slaves. The story of Mary Johnson demonstrates that there were no age limits to the rebelliousness of female slaves in Jamaica. Listed as an “aged creole woman,” Mary had been a runaway for

nearly eight years following the death of her master William Johnson who was a maroon (group of self-emancipated slaves guaranteed freedom by treaty in 1738) in the northern parish of Trelawny. Since then she had been “working about to maintain herself.” Since the 18th c., female slaves used local weekend market days to control the sale of products produced in slave gardens (lands ceded by masters to slaves to cultivate subsistence crops). It is likely that Mary and other female runaways were engaged in this activity. Though her body carried the scars of several bouts of ring-worm and her teeth had decayed through lack of care, Mary displayed a sense of self-initiative which was the bane of slave masters throughout the island.

The case of Amelia offers an example of a similar temperament. Amelia was taken before a slave court and charged as a runaway. The Sitting Magistrate George Atkinson soon discovered that she was more than the usual fleet-footed slave. Through an examination it was found that she was the property of the Bloxburgh plantation in Port-Royal. The overseer of this estate, a Mr. Roberts, confirmed as much and reported that Amelia had been gone for quite some time. While the trial was conducted in June 1830, Amelia had lived outside of Bloxburgh since 1819! Eleven years of independence earned her a one-week stay in the Workhouse and a return to the plantation.

Sarah, a slave from the far eastern most parish of St. Thomas in the East, fared less well than even Amelia or Mary. Running away had changed from a tactic to carve out some independence to a way of life. Although she is described as a “young creole woman,” Sarah had achieved the status of an incorrigible runaway. Not only had she made multiple escapes from the plantations she was enslaved upon, but she carried out a successful jail-break from the Morant-Bay workhouse. Her activities earned her a one-month stay in the Kingston Workhouse and a sentence of “convict for life.”

While it is clear that the dissident activities of the above mentioned six women did not alone lead to the collapse of the slavery in Jamaica, their strategies and determination reveal the larger fabric of slave resistance on the island. Far from being passive these enslaved people demonstrated a willingness to assert their humanity which is so often lacking in our contemporary post-emancipation society. In the case of Kitty, Annie Miller, and Martina the hardships of life on the run and the potential repercussions of capture were the cost of defending their children. They asserted a human bond which was counter to the property claim made by their master's upon their progeny. Mary Johnson, Amelia, and Sarah demonstrated the manner in which the seemingly self-interested motivation of personal freedom managed to challenge the logic of the mass extraction of labor from Jamaican slaves. Each demonstrated a capacity for self-sufficiency outside of the relations of master and slave.

International Women's Day is celebrated as a moment to tell the stories “of ordinary women as makers of history.” (United Nations) The lives of female runaway slaves in Jamaica offer an example of women who managed to convert the hardships imposed upon them by history into spaces in which new forms of liberation could be imagined and practiced. May their legacy reach deep into the 21st century and inspire new generations of “ordinary women” (and men) to question relations of family, freedom and labor.

*The article is based on a reading of the workhouse lists for Kingston, Jamaica (1820-1832). These lists are published in the Royal Gazette of Jamaica and are available for review at the Public Records Office in London, England.*

*Billy Wharton is a member of the Socialist Party USA and active in the NYC local. He is currently completing a dissertation at the State University of New York Stony Brook.*

# Marie Equi: Pioneer Socialist Feminist

by Eric Chester

Although largely forgotten, Marie Equi was an important figure in the radical movement in the Pacific Northwest at its heyday, ninety years ago. Her life crossed the usual boundaries, defying traditional categories. She lived openly as a Lesbian, while promoting reproductive rights and working closely with the Industrial Workers of the World. Her life deserves to be remembered.

Born in 1872 in New Bedford, Massachusetts, her parents were working class immigrants from Italy and Ireland. As a teenager, she contracted tuberculosis from working in a textile mill. After several years of recuperation, she moved to Oregon in search of a healthier climate. After a brief stay in San Francisco, Equi soon returned to Oregon and enrolled in the University of Oregon Medical School in Portland. Upon graduating in 1903, she remained in Portland where she developed a practice oriented toward working women. In 1906, Equi became involved with Harriet Speckart, and the two forged a long-lasting relationship.

Equi was one of the few doctors in Oregon to perform abortions, which had already been made illegal. Her clientele included not only women from affluent backgrounds who were willing to pay considerable sums, but also those women who could afford to pay little or nothing.

Margaret Sanger came to Portland in June of 1916, and she and Equi became close friends. Equi helped Sanger write a pamphlet providing accurate information on birth control, at a time when this information was difficult to obtain. Three male allies were arrested for distributing this pamphlet, and Equi and Sanger were arrested when police dispersed a rally in support of the three.

In 1913, Equi moved from a purely feminist perspective to one that integrated these views into a broader analysis of capitalism. One of her clients told her of a militant strike of women workers at a local fruit cannery. IWW militants had joined the workers on the picket line. Equi was arrested and beaten when police attacked the pickets. From this point onward, she became a harsh critic of capitalist society. Although it is not clear if she joined the Socialist Party, Equi identified herself as a socialist. She also helped the IWW as it sought to organize unskilled workers, although as a medical doctor she could not become a member.

With the advent of World War I, Equi's commitment to radical politics put her at risk. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson initiated a preparedness campaign, aimed at building up the U.S. military and setting the stage for U.S. entry into the war. Around the country, local authorities, with the aid of the local media and business interest, staged large parades to counter the widespread popular opposition to the war. Portland's parade, held in June 1916, drew 15,000. Equi brought a large banner that read: PREPARE TO DIE, WORKINGMEN, J.P. MORGAN AND CO. WANT PREPAREDNESS FOR A PROFIT. The banner was ripped from her hands, and zealous super-patriots then forced Equi to kiss the flag.

Once the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, Congress was quick to enact legislation drastically curtailing fundamental civil liberties. Well aware that it was a likely target of repression, the IWW muted its anti-war message, and focused its efforts on organizing at the workplace. The Lumber Workers' Union launched a strike to demand an eight-hour day that spread throughout the Pacific Northwest. Equi assisted the union in this effort.

On June 27, 1918, Equi was a featured speaker at an IWW meeting held at the Portland local hall. In her speech, she insisted that IWW members had no intention of fighting for any national flag,

but rather for the red flag of international working class solidarity. Furthermore, Equi said that "there were fellow workers pulled into the army against their wills" to fight in a war they did not see as their own. Finally, she pointed out that the Irish had taken advantage of Britain's preoccupation with the war, and were "asserting their rights" in resisting British rule (in the Easter Uprising of 1916) and that the IWW "should do likewise" to organize against corporate rule in the U.S.

On the basis of this speech, Equi was indicted for violating the Espionage Act of June 1917, and its even more draconian version, the Sedition Act of May 1918. The Bureau of Intelligence had assigned an agent to keep constant track of Equi. In one of his reports, William Bryon condemned her as "an anarchist, a degenerate and an abortionist."

Equi was convicted in federal district court in December 1918 on six felony counts under the Espionage Act. Sentenced to three years in jail, she was released on bail pending her appeal. George Vanderveer, a prominent Seattle attorney who had served as lead counsel for the IWW at the recent trial in Chicago of IWW leaders, acted as her counsel. In October 1919, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed her conviction. Vanderveer had argued that Equi's speech was protected under the First Amendment, but the Circuit Court ruled that during a time of war the federal government held "every power necessary" to take any action it deemed to be essential to win the war. Furthermore, to deny the authorities "the power to prohibit acts which directly interfere with the operation of the government in raising armies and prosecuting the war" would be to undermine an essential prerequisite "of sovereignty." Thus, the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of speech was suspended during wartime, and any speech that could in any way hamper or hinder the draft or the war effort could be made illegal.

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear Equi's appeal in October 1920, and she was incarcerated in San Quentin, California, a maximum-security prison. She served nearly a year in jail, and was paroled in September 1921. The federal government had silenced Marie Equi as it had most of the radical Left.

After her release Equi never returned to her previous role as an outspoken radical. She lived quietly in Portland, although from 1928 to 1936 she again came under the scrutiny of government intelligence agencies when she lived with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, one of the IWW's most well known leaders prior to 1916. In 1930, a heart attack left Equi bedridden for most of her later years. She died in anonymity in 1952.

For Marie Equi, the personal was political. Her politics was a seamless whole, in which gender stereotypes, the oppression of women, and the exploitation of the working class were to be challenged and resisted at every level. We can still learn a great deal from her life and her work.

*This article is based on Nancy Krieger, "Queen of the Bolsheviks," Radical America (September 1983) 17:55-73. A condensed version of Equi's June 1918 speech can be found in the Circuit Court of Appeals ruling upholding her conviction under the Espionage Act. The ruling can be found at Federal Reporter 261:53-56.*

*Eric Chester is a member of the National Committee of the Socialist Party-USA, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, and the author of True Mission: The Labor Party Question.*

# A Call to Action for Iraq's Children

by Claudia Lefko

Imagine I am not alone in despairing at the end of the year. While others look forward, I am haunted by what we did not accomplish in 2007. Particularly devastating is the ongoing war and occupation in Iraq, and the toll it continues to take on all of us, but particularly on the civilian population in Iraq, most especially on children.

I was humbled to receive a holiday greeting from Dr. Salma in Baghdad, with her wish for peace in 2008. Iraqi doctors have suffered enormously. The once quality health-care system in Iraq has been devastated by years of war and sanctions that kept medical training, equipment and medicines at a bare minimum. In 2006 Medact, an organization of British health professionals, estimated that 18,000 physicians had fled Iraq since the 2003 invasion. Doctors face ever increasing threats of kidnapping and death. An estimated 120 doctors and 80 pharmacists had been killed in the first three years of the occupation. How does Dr. Salma continue to hold onto hope! How do these Iraqis continue to hold onto hope!

Then came an appeal and photographs from southern Iraq, asking me to support a non-violence training project. Children and youth in Al-Samawa are being asked to turn in their toy guns for balls and other toys. The photographs showed two men and a long line of children holding their toy guns. Next to them you see the balls and the pile of already cashed-in guns. Again, I am moved. What resilience in this gesture, given the depth of the problem facing parents in Iraq and in other war zones around the world.

The appeal brought to mind an experience I had during time spent in Iraq in the winter of 2003 working on an art exchange project and taking photographs of children on Dr. Salma's cancer ward in a pediatric hospital in Baghdad. One day I was confronted by a small child wielding a toy gun, and gesturing for a photograph. I stopped and stared at the child in horror, a sinking feeling sweeping over me as he struck his pose and waited for the click of my shutter. I realized immediately that this would be a photograph with a "message": this is what happens to children growing up surrounded by war and violence.

But what message would I give the child by taking this photograph? I would be affirming his pride in the toy gun, giving my unspoken support, my consent. I would legitimize his war game, which, like all children's games, is practice in preparation for a future in an adult world. I didn't want to immortalize an Iraqi child in this horrifying posture. I turned and walked away, leaving him standing in obvious disappointment.

Several years later, a friend handed me the January 22, 2007, issue of Newsweek Magazine with "my photograph" on the cover. A small, serious looking Iraqi boy poses with a toy gun and stares from a white background. Above his head, in bold letters the caption: **The Next Jihadists.**

Inside, on page 24, is a fold-out photo of 13-year-old Ammar with his real Kalashnikov assault rifle. In letters that take up nearly half the facing page the title reads: **Iraq's Young Blood.** It was another sickening moment for me. There was "my" photograph, but the gun is real. And the message is less a lament about the tragedy of what is happening to Iraq's children, than a warning against them.

Iraq's children need to be rescued, not feared. They are the best hope and most important resource of any country, yet they continue to suffer and die out of sight and out of mind of most of us. Save the Children's report "State of the World's Mothers 2007, Saving

the Lives of Children Under 5" shows that Iraq continues to have the highest Under5 mortality (U5MR) of any country in the world. Since the first Gulf War, the U5MR has increased a staggering 150%. It is estimated that one out of every eight children in Iraq dies before their fifth birthday: 122,000 children died in 2005.

According to UNICEF some two million children "...continued to face threats including poor nutrition, disease and interrupted education" in 2007. Only 20% of Iraqi children outside of Baghdad have access to safe drinking water or proper sewage treatment facilities. Seventeen percent of Iraqi children are permanently out of primary school and an estimated 220,000 are missing school because they

and their families have been displaced. These are in-country figures and don't include the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children and youth whose education is interrupted or ended because their families have fled to other countries.

Children are *developing*, each stage of their growth and development is a critical building block that enables them to reach the next stage. In order to achieve their potential--physically, emotionally, intellectually--their needs must be met at each stage. The lack of food, clean water, shelter, education and access to health care adds up to--at best--a compromised future.

Somehow, this ongoing crisis for Iraqi children continues to escape the mainstream media. Iraq is a never ending sporting event, with sides developing strategies, making gains and suffering set backs. The real losses suffered by Iraqi children, day after day and year after year, are rarely added up and taken into account and almost never reported on.

Recently, I was telling a friend the story of "the photo-not-taken". She sighed. "I disagree with you," she said. "Think of the impact a photo like that would have had. Look at what Newsweek did with it." "I took the side of the Iraqi child," I said. "We have to take the side of the Iraqis if we are going to build a movement on their behalf. We cannot 'use' them for our own educational and political purposes, even if they may gain in the end. For me, the choice is clear. The price is not worth it."

"Children are both our reason to struggle to eliminate the worst aspects of warfare, and our best hope for succeeding at it," wrote Graca Machel, the author of a ground-breaking assessment and call to action on their behalf. The UN accepted "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children" in a unanimous resolution in 1996. The report affirms the right to special protection and care for children caught in war and conflict zones and reaffirms their rights under international treaties.

Iraqi children--and all children in war zones--need the international community to stand by its commitments, and deliver the protection and care that is guaranteed them under international law. Maybe, 2008 will see some much needed action on their behalf.

*Claudia Lefko is a long-time educator and advocate for your children and their families. Founder and coordinator of the Iraqi Children's Art Exchange Project, she can be reached at [www.iraqichildrenart.org](http://www.iraqichildrenart.org).*



# For Maria-Protest and Poetry

by Amber Santos



Women with the weight of the world on your shoulders  
I see you marching  
I march with you  
I march for you  
Woman. Mother. Earth. Creation.  
How is it that you are the target for death  
When you are the giver of life  
Omi. Mama. Mãinha.

I live in a big city in the northeast of Brazil. I live in a house with a yard on a quiet street. When you go out the door from my house, any direction will take you through shantytowns or favelas. You could call them low-income communities, home to the working poor, home to the dignified and struggling, home to the desperate. The weight of survival is on the shoulders of the women. I see this when I move through the communities. In times of unemployment and hardship, of living from government hand-out to government hand-out, its mostly women who sustain their families.

What would you do if you were born in a favela? How would you live your life? You are new, a baby, a child, and you learn early to fight for your crumbs, to protect yourself. Fists come down hard on those around you and you lose your people to crack and to crime. The temptation to get a gun and hit the streets is too great. The needs are many and the desires are reinforced daily. Watch the soap operas. Look at how the rich cruise by in their cars with tinted windows. Give me a piece of the beauty, a piece of the nobility. I want to be somebody. Anybody but me.

Society tells you: You are a favelado-someone who lives in the favela. You have bad hair and black is ugly. Those in power send their messages through the glowing box and the massive colored images on billboards. Blond is beautiful. White is chic. Xuxa is the dream. Little girls continue to associate the “good” doll with the white doll. Black Brazilian couples wait years to adopt the light skinned, green-eyed children. And the woman is the jewel of consumption. Drink a beer and in your head, lay a hot woman who looks nothing like your people. She is European, giant, inaccessible. Your wife is short, stocky, brown. Images of women are used to sell products. And the woman is the target for selling products, to make her more beautiful, to make a man proud and important. Nothing like a hot girl on his arm to make him seem powerful.

Brazilian women, known worldwide for their sensuality and beauty, draw sex tourists and adventurous travelers. Women and girls are bought and sold. Women, Drugs and Arms; the dirty secrets of the bustling underground of our world. And I’ve seen the dark cars cruising slowly through the favelas.

In the community I get to know the women:

**Maria da Conceição** “My husband doesn’t like it when I leave the house alone.”

**Maria Julia** Her leg is wrapped in bandages. She walks slowly to work. It takes her an hour and a half. And then she sews and sews and sews. Later, she stops at the market to buy rice and beans. She walks slowly home. Through the alleyway to her shack, stepping over her grown sons passed out on the floor, she walks. In her shack, seven kids are sprawled on a bed watching TV. She has borne 18. Eight have died.

**Maria Aparecida** I see the bruise on her face. He sends her into the kitchen to get us beers. She is slumping. Relieved. He won’t hit her in front of us, right?

**Maria Rita** “He doesn’t let me work.”

**Maria José** “I’m not allowed.”

**Maria Claudia** She prays and prays. Her grandfather side on the streets with her friends. She prays that her granddaughter will do what she is told. She looks at the clock. Her granddaughter is late. The favela is dark. She puts on a robe and walks carefully out to the street. Through the shadows she sees the figure of her granddaughter’s nappy hair. She sees her leaning up to kiss a boy. She yells her full name from the other side of the street, demands that she come home, out of the darkness of the street and into the safety of her shack.

**Maria Helena**

The year 2007 came to an end according to our western calendar and it is an end punctuated by fireworks of assaults and deaths and crime. The Christmas carols drown out the cries of the women who march for the death of their sisters and mothers and comrades. Once a month, women gather in downtown Recife in the name of the women who are killed daily in Pernambuco. They march to the Federal government buildings and carry candles for the victims. Every day, a woman is killed. Every day, lovers, husbands and boyfriends in crimes of “passion” murder women; because she didn’t want him; because she didn’t want to; because she wouldn’t let him sell their daughter to pay the electricity bill.

**Maria Rosa**

Laws are changing  
Civil pressure on the government  
But the process is slow

**Maria da Penha**

The ritual can lessen the pain  
Of carrying the world on your shoulders  
Raise up your arms  
Raise your fists  
And twirl and twirl and twirl  
The voice can sing the story  
So that you feel it in your skin  
Your drums and your steps,  
Your colorful umbrellas  
And your lethal kicks  
Your memories  
Locked tight in the flavors in the beans and rice  
That keeps your family alive  
Tied up in the scarf around your afro  
Woven into the braids on your head  
The circle  
The cipher  
The roda  
Holds all the energies and mysteries  
Of your Resistance.



Amber Santos has been living in Recife since 2002. She works with art, communication and education. She participates in several of the social movements including the Women’s Movement, The Community Liberation Movement, The Communication as a Human Right Movement and the Hip Hop Movement. She is one of the founders of Rosas Urbanas Crew, a hip hop sisterhood that empowers women and girls to believe in themselves, express themselves, and tell their stories.

On her illustrations which appear on this page, Santos writes, “The drawings are inspired by the women who are positive role models in the situation I write about. They are leaders in their communities and the movements, they are young moms who have the attitude to survive, they are b-girls, capoeiristas, poets...”



## Woman

by Barbara Hilal

Who is this?  
who without effort  
by one's very nature  
can create the past present future in one's own body  
projecting tomorrow in an embryo made from  
arcaic generations' genes  
to conquer with softness the harsh and rough  
inspire the strong to defend the weak  
whose beauty lies in wholeness, completion  
gives unconditional love  
would never offer a child's life to any cause  
governed by instinct and intuition and nature's conscience  
protects her own  
You covered this body with robes, this face with veils  
feared because of superior sexual power

Who is this?  
This is WOMAN

*Barbara Hilal is a 76 year-old artist/poet/writer. Retired from working with the mentally challenged, she currently works with preschoolers. Her newest book "Wind Bourne" will be published by "Meeting of the Minds".*

## Letters Not Sent

by Pris Campbell

There were ten of them,  
skin the color of desert dust.  
We culled them from cells  
the size of barb-wired closets  
into that courtyard where  
we laughed, watched  
them strip, toss off torn rags-  
discarded cloth fluttering  
like yesterday's butterflies, made  
them spread their cheeks wide, enter  
the next man down the line,  
made our own chain of daisies  
like the ones made in childhood,  
took photos not attached to letters  
or sent (Son, I'm so proud),  
knew we were showing  
those terrorists who was  
boss and serving our  
country too, but oh mom,  
I still smell their fear and  
their sex on my hands.  
It's been weeks now.

*Pris Campbell lives in West Palm Beach, Florida. She is formerly a Clinical Psychologist, but has been sidelined by CFIDS (Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome) since 1990. Her poetry has been published in several journals, collections and in her chapbook "Abrasions", by Rose of Sharon Press.*

## Widowmaker

by Jane Crown

I've dreamt of being chased out  
Into a field  
Cast upon a pyre  
Lit  
I knew every face  
Sister, mother  
Who enveloped me?  
Noisemakers in grasp  
Indeed they partied  
Like tradition  
As I smoked  
But you--  
They gave you a new wife.

## The Vote

by Jane Crown

They- whoever they may be

Find the vote lost-  
Singularly.

The selfish act,  
The social necromancy-

The lesser of  
Evil men.

Those that bend  
To the  
Will of  
His brother-

To be of  
Free mind, solid  
Liberty upon his cloak-

That whosoever is  
Lost that  
Seek

Find his  
Foot in his humanity.

*Jane Crown is a freelance writer and poet. She has lived in San Antonio, Texas, since eviction from New Orleans by Katrina. She hosts "The Jane Crown Show" on blog talk radio featuring authors, editors and book publishers.*

# Crunch-time for Abortion Rights in Victoria, Australia: A Call to Action for Pro-Choice Campaigners

by Debbie Brennan, Melbourne Australia Radical Women organizer

This year, Victorian women in Australia could win the right to choose, at last. Fifty years of dogged campaigning in parliament and in the streets to get abortion out of the Crimes Act has brought this fundamental feminist issue to a head. The state government has been forced to finally consider decriminalisation. On March 28, the Victorian Law Reform Commission will present its recommendations to the Attorney General for debate in parliament. If legal recognition succeeds, Victoria's laws will reflect the belief of more than 80 percent of the country that the right to choose abortion belongs to every woman.

Unlike so many countries, including the United States, Australia has never formally enshrined this right. Left to the jurisdiction of states and territories, abortion remains a crime, although legislative amendments and court rulings have allowed the procedure in certain circumstances. Only in the Australian Capital Territory has the law been changed to give women the right to terminate a pregnancy-- and just since 2002!

In Victoria, the 1958 Crimes Act has covered abortion: both a woman and her abortion provider can face imprisonment for up to 10 years. For the first decade after its passage, illegal abortion was the second-highest cause of maternal mortality Australia-wide. While women with plenty of money could discreetly access a safe abortion from a Collins Street specialist paying protection money to the cops, most women had only coat hangers, poisons, and backyard quacks to turn to. The horrifying deaths and injuries led a few doctors to test the Victorian law. In 1969, Judge Menhennit ruled that abortion would be legal if a doctor decides that a woman's physical or mental health is at risk. The Menhennit ruling has served as a lifeline to countless women in Victoria. Most other states and territories followed suit with similar arrangements.

But abortion is still neither secure nor freely available. Relentless harassment makes abortion-- especially for young, rural and working class women-- more difficult as providers close their doors in response to the ever-present threat of legal prosecution and increasingly stringent Medicare procedures.

In Australia, childcare places are costly and waiting lists are long. Two-thirds of working women do not have paid maternity leave. This is a rich country, but one where close to ten percent of the population lives in poverty. Twenty percent of children under 15 are in single-parent households, 87 percent of them headed by mothers. In 2003-2004, 61 percent of these homes relied on welfare. This system, based on a philosophy of 'mutual obligation,' has become increasingly moralistic and benefits business by forcing sole parents to take low-paid jobs.

The fight for reproductive justice in Victoria has been building

as the squeeze on jobs, services, and welfare intensifies. Women are society's mainstay, and the economy's pressure point. When an economy is in trouble-- as this one is!-- women feel the most acute pain.

This system couldn't last a day if women ran their own lives, and had a say in how society should be run!

Victoria's business-friendly Australian Labor Party (ALP) government has done everything in its power to resist calls by women and men, from the streets and echoed inside parliament, to decriminalise abortion. In 2006, ALP Member of Parliament Caroline Hirsch prepared a bill to remove abortion from the Crimes Act, but

withdrew it under pressure from then Premier Steve Bracks. In August 2007, an attempt by ALP member, Candy Broad, to present a decriminalisation bill drew opposition from senior government ministers. In October, the new ALP government tossed the political football to the Victorian Law Reform Commission. Despite short notice, the commission received 500 submissions from organisations and individuals across the state. Radical Women's submission called for abortion on demand, provided free to

all women in all stages of pregnancy. Let's demolish the moralistic, misogynist myth that foetuses deserve rights above women.

Anti-abortion forces are seriously organising to silence these demands. Fighters for reproductive justice have to organise better and harder. And this is both possible and necessary. The recent win of the campaign for same-sex fertility rights in Victoria proves this. For years, the lesbian/gay/bi/transgender/intersex community tenaciously battled for equal rights in assisted reproduction, surrogacy, and adoption. Although the fight is not over, winning the rights of lesbians and single women to all assisted reproductive technology services, including donor insemination services, legal parenting recognition for non-birth mothers in same-sex relationships, and the easing of surrogacy regulations is awesome. Up against the same 'pro-family' anti-woman, anti-gay opposition, this victory is also a breakthrough for abortion rights.

Pro-choice campaigners cannot rely on the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission, nor the legal process to follow, to deliver on abortion rights. For decades, women have demanded, 'Our bodies, our lives, our right to decide!' and 'Not the church, not the state. Women will decide their fate!' It's time these words turned into reality.

For more information, or to share your thoughts, contact Radical Women/ U.S. at (415) 864-1278 or email [radicalwomenus@gmail.com](mailto:radicalwomenus@gmail.com).

This is an excerpt of a longer article written for the *Freedom Socialist Bulletin*, the publication of Radical Women/Australia ([radicalwomen@optusnet.com.au](mailto:radicalwomen@optusnet.com.au)). It is used with permission. Photo by Michelle Reeves.

Radical Women is a socialist feminist organization immersed in the daily fight against racism, sexism, homophobia, and labor exploitation. Radical Women views women's leadership as decisive to global change.



# Revolution: a Woman's Issue Everywhere

by Jean Grossholtz

Since the 1970's, I have been involved with women organizing world wide around issues of globalization. Acting against war and against the US empire has uncovered the links between racism, class, patriarchal power, and the economic requirements of capitalism. Like many of you reading this, I see these linkages daily. Many of us have tried to bring our organizing into line with this reality. Sometimes this is easier to do at the global level than at the local level.

Although safe, accessible food and jobs were always issues in political organizing, the relation to trade policies being put in place by our government in league with others was not part of the picture at the local level. The global nature of these changes-- and the way trade treaties were being adopted with little knowledge or participation by the Congress, the media, or least of all the people-- startled me. Serious structural changes were taking place in our economy and polity almost invisibly.

There was much discussion of what to do about this. Our work had made clear that women's lives were at risk due to the environmental impact of Free Trade policies and, as Vandana Shiva (the Indian physicist, ecologist, activist, editor, and author) has made so very clear, the destruction of the global commons. Despite massive attempts to educate, we failed to stop this attack on our world.

Now we are faced with a world torn apart by the results of the merciless enforcement of free market economics on the globe: the planet in ruins, our forests disappearing, mud slides and floods commonplace. Even the oceans are polluted. Hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of people are on the move-- uprooted from their homes and their cultures by the international imposition of structural adjustment and free trade policies that opened their countries resources, land and services to private ownership by transnational corporations and the end of regulations that protected local business, health and labor. Millions are traveling to escape local wars, or giving up their home in the face of certain starvation. These are throw-away people. They are migrants, illegals. (What does law mean when a human life is defined as illegal?) They are everywhere --on the borders of Europe sleeping on the streets of world capitals, in internment camps in Spain and Texas.

What is it that is hidden when we see on TV streams of women carrying starving children across deserts; when we read of the immigration police raiding factories and shipping women to the Texas internment camps leaving their babies behind; when we see pictures of yet another uprising in a barrio somewhere in the global south. And what are we thinking when these events are answered by benefit concerts and groups asking for donations for Darfur or Haiti? Why is the economic inequality of this global system not transparent?

In Kenya, the latest country hit by so called tribal-based violence, women make up 90% of the labor force working on the big farms that grow green beans and flowers, etc. for the European market-- which means they no longer grow food for their families and survival is every day at risk. With women's traditional roles undermined, and the damaging effects of deregulation and privatization destroying local economies, anger at the existing government is widespread. So when an election comes along that gives the people a chance to throw the existing government out, they rise up and do so, and riot when they are denied. And we are told to see this as a tribal uprising, not as class warfare.

Vandana Shiva says women's work is to maintain the agricultural base: to harvest and store seeds, and transfer forest products home

for feed and fuel. But women's work is never counted in the gross national product. Women are never seen as agents of production. So when Punjabi women were removed from production, violence against women increased. The first sex clinics for determining the sex of the fetus and the abortion of females started in the Punjab. Infanticide is thus created by this commercialization of agriculture. Females are dispensable, just as nature is dispensable. Only that which is owned or created by man is valuable.

The question is: Why do we allow this reality to be hidden? Most of the peace groups readily admit that the war in Iraq is about oil. It is not about democracy-- about a government responding to the people's wishes-- but rather a murderous action to protect and advance a corporate agenda engineered by a small group of people who control the levers of government. The willing support of the so-called opposition and the media speaks volumes about the reality of who is in control.

Women in the world understand this. At all the ministerial meetings of the WTO where some of us fought in the streets to tear down their fences and open their halls, others worked with the government groups inside to provide them with information and alternatives. During the last WTO ministerial, thousands of migrant women marched in the streets of Hong Kong. They asked the world to get rid of the WTO, as farmers and workers have been doing at every international meeting since Seattle in 1999.

Our work for change is hampered by the reality of the class system created by global capitalism. In each country, a corporate elite runs the economy as a privatized deregulated market. Governments keep that inequality in place in order to keep the masses from demanding their rights. In such circumstances, the idea that the popular vote would change, or even influence, the decisions being made about our future is problematic at best.

In the United States, most political activism is directed at the Iraq war, the destruction of the Constitution, and the end of the atrocities committed by our government. But these are consequences of the larger fact of the end of national sovereignty, of a world controlled by global transnational corporations, of an economy oriented toward the sovereign rights of business to make a profit.

It is time we give up the idea that peace or justice is possible in a world divided by the corporate control of resources, and where human rights do not include enough to eat, health care, and a roof over your head. Revolution is a woman's issue everywhere in the world.

*Jean Grossholtz retired from Mt Holyoke College after teaching politics and women's studies for 40-odd years. She has been an active organizer in movements from women and lesbian liberation to supporting actions in Latin America and Asia against U.S. imperialism. She is a member of Diverse Women for Diversity, headquartered in India; and Women for Life on Earth, headquartered in Germany.*



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