



RACE

REVOLT

ISSUE TWO

## Welcome to Issue Two of Race Revolt

Putting this issue together has been an amazing opportunity for me to be inspired by all the thoughts, ideas, and intentions that come across in the contributions.

So many thanks to everyone who contributed. I am especially delighted with receiving letters about issue one, as well as more art. Feedback from the last issue makes me realise how much people want to be having the conversations that stem from, and result in, the articles in this zine. The whole process has reminded me that activism does not have to have the answer, that its power can lie in asking questions, both of ourselves and the societies we inhabit. It can generate questions, challenging and inspiring us. It makes us take a closer look at concepts of identity, community, involvement and power structures. Race Revolt shares all these things.

Humaira Saeed, March 2008

***Race Revolt aims to start dialogue on issues of race within  
alternative and activist communities,  
with a queer / feminist / diy focus***

**Please send in contributions for future issues!**  
rants / articles / poetry / fiction / art / frustrations / scribbles / letters...

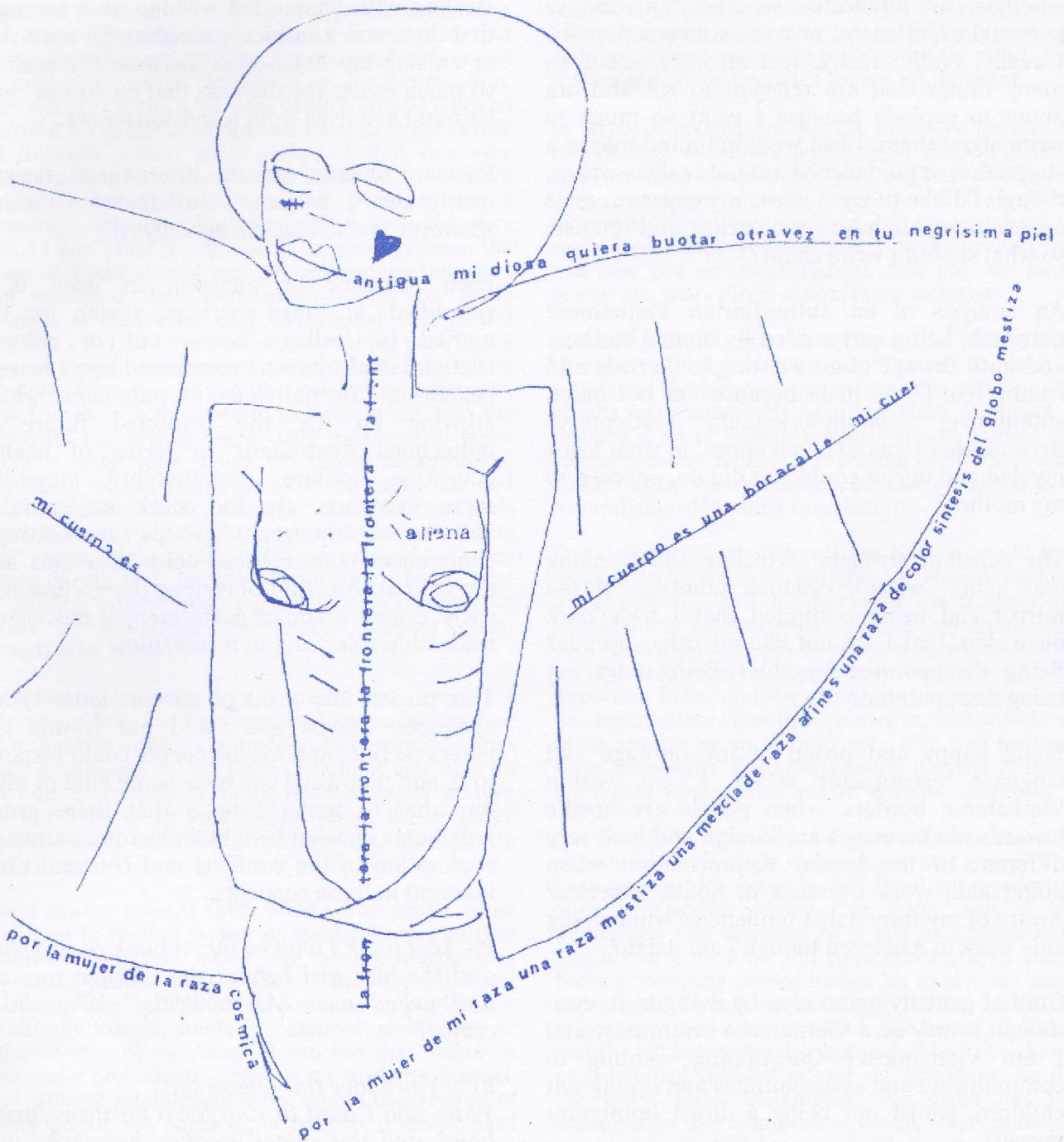
Send ideas, suggestions, thoughts, finished pieces to:

racerevolt@riseup.net

Race Revolt  
c/o 27 Cromwell Avenue  
Whalley Range  
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Back page advert by Heena Patel, heena@riseup.net

Here's my artwork. It's about being mix race and the complexity of it.



Artwork by Veruska

Words from "Las Fronteras / Borderlands" by Gloria Anzaldua

I was really hoping to write something for this issue of Race Revolt however I have heinous amounts of schoolwork. There is also the issue of not knowing where to start... and not sure whether to intellectualise and universalise personal experiences, or write conversationally. I really, really, really, feel strongly about so many things that are relevant to RR and am about to explode because I want so much to write about them. I just wouldn't mind maybe a suggestion or guidance? I am not really a writer, though I'd like to try. I guess my experiences as an Asian female have been varied, and intense; so what should I write about?

An analysis of an authoritarian Vietnamese patriarch, being surrounded by mum's brothers and until the age of 20 wanting to be male and feeling like I was male because I'm not quiet, submissive, family-oriented, sedentary? Because there was so much appeal in what I saw my dad and uncles could and did do, opposed to my mother?

The constant struggle of feeling and thinking and living "white", catching glimpses in the mirror and being reminded that I have dark olive skin, that I am not like my other friends? Being disappointed by this? Being angry at being disappointed?

Being happy and proud of my heritage and language except for when I am within Vietnamese borders, when people are hostile towards me because I am foreign and look very different to the locals? Appropriation when doing aide work overseas in South America? Aware of my imperialist tendencies while doing aide work in Asia even though I am Asian?

Guilt at gentrifying an area by living in it, even though it may be a Vietnamese community and I am Vietnamese? Questioning wanting to communicate and assist families and immigrant children, whilst not being a direct immigrant myself?

The sexualisation of my race, which makes me feel sick? Hearing partners, or potential partners, fetishise me as a symbol for exotic conquest, and feeling used and messed up by this?

Not understanding where my race ends and where me as an individual starts? Accepting that this line will blur always?

Dealing with shame for wishing as a teenager that there was a surgical procedure for removing or erasing my Asian-ness, because life seemed so much easier for the kids that could dye their hair and had lives from television shows.

Racism, reverse racism, internalised racism, institutional racism, anticipated racism, whatever the hell racism actually is!?

Each sentence or question in itself is a simplified, at times extreme, slogan for the myriad of feelings borne out of cultural frictions. And I haven't mentioned being teased, beaten up, or oblivious to judgment, whilst growing up. Or the projected future of indigenous Australians in terms of health, education, welfare, sustainability, longevity, mere existence. Or the stark un-ignorable absence of immigrant groups at meetings, conferences, convergences, political actions, and my guilt at this. And of course, the exclusion at social events, amongst performers or musicians, leadership roles, and in media/film.

This turned into a bit of an epic letter :) My apologies. Maybe you could put it into the letters section, and maybe people could respond to it, and that way I can have some kind of filter for what to write. I hope that there aren't judgments on what is right and wrong, rather an exploration of the conflicts and contradictions inherent in these concepts...

PS. *Last week I walked into a punk record shop and the nice girl behind the counter saw me and yelled out: "Asian Pride!" Why did I cringe?*

PPS. *You'll love this anecdote:*

*Years ago I used to sing for a hardcore/grind band, and this metal vocalist dude, who was also a lawyer, said, astounded: "That was amazing for a chick..... who's Asian, too!"*

*He could see my gape in response, so he quickly followed up with: "You know... because girls can't really scream like that, and Asians are so small and quiet. So it was really surprising."*

*Ha!*

Whilst I don't feel I have enough to say about the issues you're raising here to write a full piece, I would like to respond here as much as I feel I can, and it'll be up to you to decide if you want to use any of it.

Firstly, I recognise that there is a problem, and that I'm not happy about it. I'd ask you to recognise that there are other groups who are marginalised, or not present at all, within the type of groups you mention, but accept that the whiteness of such groups tends to throw it up as the most obvious issue in terms of lack of diversity within such groups. I find this very disappointing, but since I feel alienated by a lot of those groups (for different but perhaps related reasons - feeling excluded is feeling excluded after all...) I don't find it particularly surprising. Given the class and educational bias of such groups though, I am surprised that there aren't more non white women of that class and educational background (middle class, university educated) taking part, as it's not as though universities are dominated by white students (that may sound like a sweeping statement, but I work in a uni library, and would say that the students I'm serving on a daily basis do come from a very wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Strangely, or not strangely, I do encounter less and less students from working class backgrounds though.) and you'd think that students of all colours and ethnic backgrounds would be exposed, at some point during their university educations, to the type of political mindset required to join such groups, so it must be something else that's stopping them. Question is, what?

Is it that such groups are advertised, and as such are recruiting from, white dominated spaces/groups? or is it that non-whites are made to feel, somehow, that such groups are not for them? I think it may be a bit of both personally. I think feminist/queer activist groups need to be very careful about the language they use to advertise their groups, and group activities.

On a similar point, I think often white people resist the urge to discuss racism or issues relating to race because they fear using the wrong words and upsetting people. Well, I know I do... the difference between 'race' and 'ethnicity' seems to be particularly politically loaded, similarly 'coloured' and 'black' or 'afro-carribean', or 'Asian'. I can see that 'Asian' is especially problematic because it's so damn general, but without establishing every ethnic background of every person you speak to, or refer to, it can be hard to avoid it. I find 'Eastern European' similarly problematic. I should perhaps point out that I live in a so-called 'prosperous' area, which has had a largely white population for years, but which has grown more ethnically diverse over the last 5-10 years. I've also observed in recent years a kind of unpleasant 'pecking order' of casual racism, in that it seems to be O.K. to racially abuse Polish people and other Eastern European migrants (I know that is badly phrased, but

save for some Poles and Ukrainian's I've met, I don't know where most of the other people I'm seeing out and about are from) in a way that it's not O.K. to abuse black, Irish, or Asian people. I understand how this state of affairs has come about (ie that the most recent set of 'immigrants' tend to get the most abuse) but that doesn't mean that I don't find it upsetting, and, yes, it's not just white people who are racist. But you know all of this, and it's getting off the point...

In terms of activist groups, the ones I've personally experienced, which are not many, I think a general smugness and complacency may be the problem. It's easy to consider yourself more radical than older, more established organisations, but it's very hard to really look inside yourself and your group and ask just how you are more radical, how you are more grassroots, more direct action, more inclusive.

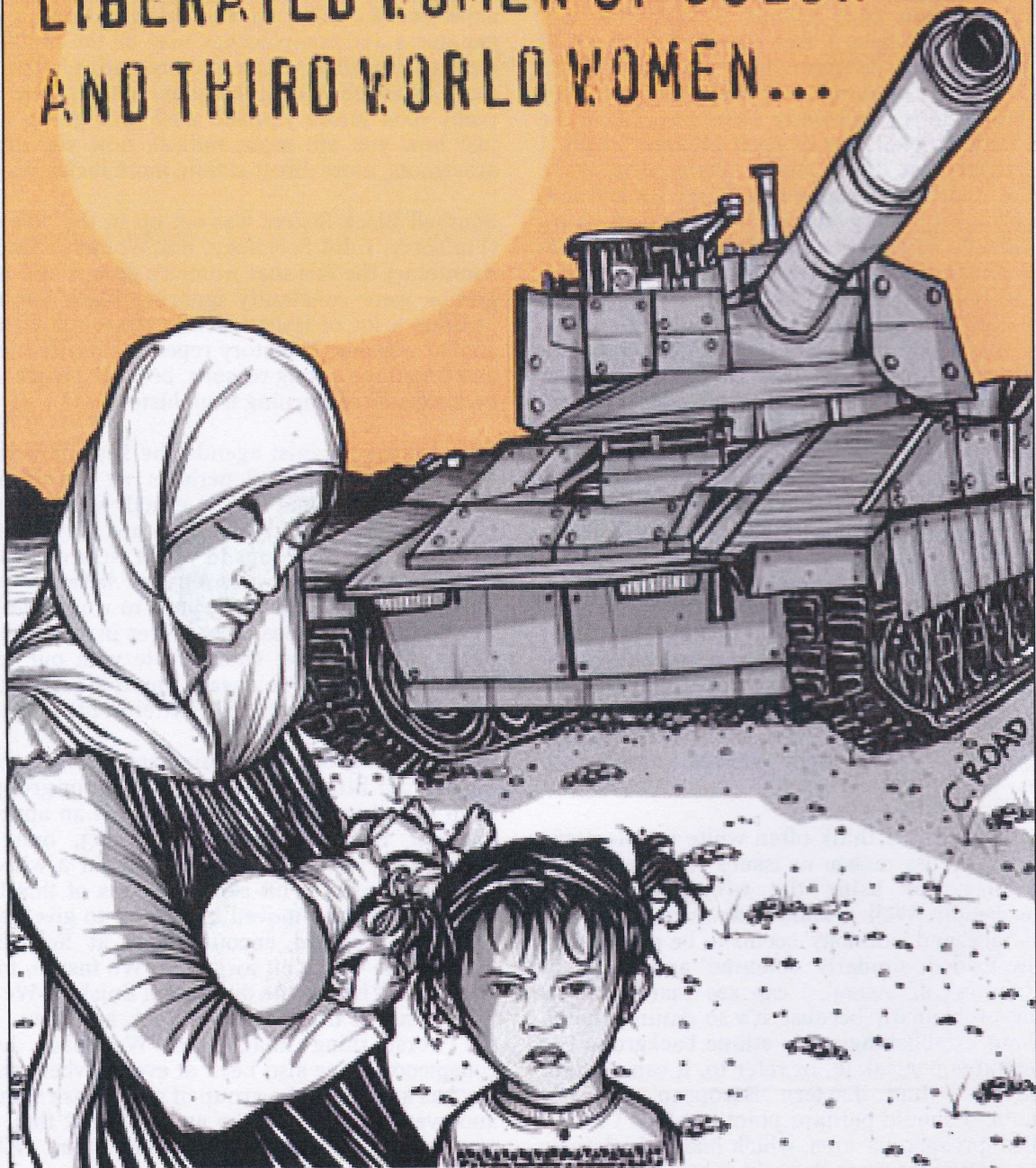
Southall Black Sisters was set up in the 70's or 80's (I'm sorry, I did Sociology, not Women's Studies) to counteract the fact that women's groups and feminist groups were constantly ignoring black feminists. I imagine a lot of lesbian feminist groups formed for similar reasons. Is history repeating itself? I feel it is, and for all the wrong reasons, because people seem to be incapable of learning from history.

Is a simpler feminist agenda the key? or would that mean a lack of focus? perhaps we should all look inside ourselves and decide exactly which issues are important to us, and why, and are they compatible with the feminist groups to which we are affiliated. If we regularly find a discrepancy between what is important to us, and the groups to which we belong, we should either raise these issues in, and outside of, those groups, or we should vote with our feet and leave. Personally, I've always found it easier to leave, but I think your approach is better in the long term.

Another thing, how welcoming are we when someone outside our little circle wants to join our group? This is an unfortunate example, but I feel an appropriate one: At Ladyfest Manchester 2003, one of the discussions was attended by a girl in a wheelchair, and we were all a bit self conscious of this I think, because everyone moved back a bit to give her more room, and smiled encouragingly at her, and the atmosphere was a bit awkward. We fussed, in short, and she left before the discussion finished. We should have handled that better and yet, somehow, we did the worst thing imaginable: We made her feel conspicuous. I've also been at events where someone shy has approached a group of girls to ask something, and everyone has shut up and stared at their feet or whatever until they've gone away again: NOT very welcoming.

I don't know if any of the above is the kind of discussion you wanted, but here it is anyway, and I hope it helps in some way.

INVADING ARMIES HAVE NEVER  
LIBERATED WOMEN OF COLOR  
AND THIRD WORLD WOMEN...



ONLY WE CAN LIBERATE OURSELVES

## MEMORIES FROM THE WAR

Kerem Blumberg  
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Marching as a pink-black block that was very much queer. People cancelling coming to Queeruption. Getting beaten up by the cops in the pride parade in Jerusalem for being anarchists. An Israeli activist getting shot in the head in Bil'in with a rubber-coated bullet. Fucking great Queeruption parties in Tel-Aviv with Palestinian drag shows. A week in the 'alternative summer camp for youth' in the forest, with kids from the north of Israel who couldn't go home because their houses were bombed. The TV being bombarded with soldiers, Army PR, Lebanon burning, Gaza being bombed. I remember being screamed at that we should all be shot, be killed, go to Gaza, that we "fuck Arabs!", that we live in an illusion, that we should go to military service. Parasites. Arab lovers. Scum. This is us.

A few months after the war, a group of us went to Haifa, to an ASWAT\* conference. I was excited seeing that Leslie Feinberg who wrote "Stone Butch Blues" will be talking. We all spent a while here passing around the book, reading it obsessively for 3 days till finished, and feeling utterly depressed. Outside the conference the women from the Islamic Movement were demonstrating against the conference. Journalists weren't allowed to take photos. Women from ASWAT had their lives threatened by Muslim extremists before the conference.

And when Leslie Feinberg spoke, we nearly rioted. Saying how s/he only came here because of the invitation of ASWAT. That while s/he was here s/he will not speak one word of Hebrew or Yiddish- they are the languages of oppression. S/he will not sign one book in Hebrew. Describing the courage of the Palestinians and Lebanese against Israel. Israel was imperialist, occupying, oppressing. We stopped listening and were getting angrier by the minute.

Israel might be doing all these things, but what about Israelis? Are we all to blame for what our government does? Are all Americans (like Leslie Feinberg him/herself) to blame for the war in Iraq? Are all British to blame for colonialism? Are all Palestinians to be admired and supported even if they are sexist, homophobic? Is there always an oppressor and a victim? We were in the conference, supporting our Palestinian sisters, resisting the war and occupation, fighting racism and homophobia. And we got slapped on the face.

Living in Israel is full of contradictions. It is my home. I was born there, I speak the language. I'm all too familiar with the mentality. I am considered a traitor in my own country (to which I'm not very loyal.) I have been shot at by an army that is full of my neighbours, my school friends, my family. I

marched in very nationalistic Palestinian demos. I have also felt much safer to be openly queer in Tel Aviv, than anywhere else in the world.

It's here that I became vegan, went to political punk gigs, marched in the mainstream pride parade in politically queer block, reclaimed the streets, learned to screenprint, dumpsterdived, squatted, became an anarchist.

And still I feel people who aren't from here, don't count Israelis as being important to the world-wide resistance because we were born on the wrong side of the map. We are all oppressors anyway. But are we?

Israeli society is very diverse. There are Palestinians living inside Israel who are citizens, there are Druze, there are Russians, there are Ethiopians, there are Beduins, there are refugees and work migrants from Africa, Phillipines, Sudan, Thailand. There are Jews who came from Europe "Ashkenazzi", and Jews of Arab descent "Mizrahi", who came from Arab countries.

So if you think all Jews should go back to Europe, are they to go back to Iran? To Poland? To Egypt? To Georgia? Will the country you live in accept Israeli immigrants, or do you live in a country with racist, capitalist borders?

Inside Israel there is racism, discrimination, economic problems, militarism, chauvinism, privatisation, violence against women, poverty- the whole lot. Do you think that it's a coincidence that the poorest people in Israeli society do the shittiest jobs in the army, namely be Border Police officers? That most of the left in Israel comes from Ashkenazzi, better-off background? And this is only the tip of the iceberg of course.

Israel, and the conflict is not as simple as a 3 step, or 2 state solution. There is no black and white here. It all feels like different shades of grey. Shades that darken or lighten depending on the situation. But a solution starts with solidarity. One without borders and nationalities. Solidarity with Palestinian and Israeli queers, vegans, anarchists, feminists, punks, anti-racists, peace movements. Starting now.

*\*ASWAT is a group whose aim is to serve Palestinian gay women, where they may express themselves, discuss gender and sexuality, define their feminism, and address the conflict experienced by them between their national and gendered identities.*

More info: [www.aswatgroup.org/english](http://www.aswatgroup.org/english)

## FEMINIST RACISM

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Our DiY movement has long been weakened by an unconscious kind of (white) problem: feminist racism. Race bigotry at large forms the economic, social and ideological relationship which objectifies and de-humanises communities: it cuts people into 'us' and 'them' caricatures, shrinks our collective understanding of history and culture, treats 'black' as the categorical 'other', and affords/denies £££, privilege and agency because of an individual's perceived background, colour or tongue.

Racism isn't just the beat and batter kind, despite a tendency for white liberals to see racism in narrow terms. The most obvious emblems of hate crime may include BNP pride, smashed skulls and humiliation, name-calling and ugly-meant words, but there's a creepy kind of racism that white feminists do quite well by themselves: racial bias, unconscious racism, and a spectrum of white-as-invisible-norm style race politics. The kind of racism that doesn't even know it's there.

Unlearning racism takes a lot of time, honesty, and brow-beating. Folks talk about the *hurt* of racism; both those recognising the extent of their race enmity and those on the receiving end of white ignorance and actions. But if we treat racism as an *inter-personal problem* only – as a task of overcoming guilt and talking through our conflicts – then we remain hooked into the race problem with no effective answers. Racism is more than an intention, it's a social structure. If we understand unconscious racism (how we internalise the effects of that social structure despite aligning ourselves with anti-racism), then we are closer to figuring out ways to dismantle it; if we understand how racism operates – in our psychic lives as well as in the culture industries, welfare office, class rooms, etc – then we are more mutually empowered to stop and resist it. Our anti-racist beliefs and intentions have to start giving way to anti-racist actions if they are to mean anything at all, with 'action' being just another word for conflict and engagement.



## **UNCONSCIOUS RACISM HAPPENS...**

**When** we expect our non-white friends and allies to educate us about white privilege and racism.

**When** we see ourselves as victims of a racist society, oppressors unable/unwilling to shake off race- gifts and perks.

**When** we're so scared of screwing up that we don't even try- whether that's pronouncing people's names or naming a problem as its happening in our communities.

**When** women who say they are anti-racist, or want to be anti-racist, fail to do any of the work in shooting down their racism and replacing it with strategies of communication, activism, and learning.

**When** we discuss 'women' but we're really only discussing (middle-class) white women.

**When** we accept stories that non-white women only got involved in feminism in the 1980s.

**When** organisers (for e.g. Ladyfest) select a non-white performer and congratulate themselves on a multi-ethnic bill.

**When** white women use images of non-white women for flyers, zines, posters and such- as if 'colour' could be added to a group like a P-R exercise.

**When** we talk about 'Black feminism', but not about 'White feminism'.

**When** we know nothing about non-white history, culture, traditions, activism and theory, through which to find our own places of knowledge and critique.

**When** people refuse to consider whether their politics/agenda/language appeals or makes sense to non-white communities and individuals.

**When** an event has only one race-related workshop, or none at all.

**Whenever** 'gender' is seen as the root or primary oppression.

**When** 'anti-racist' white women fail to move out of their comfort zones.

**When** we accept and recycle noxious racial stereotyping.

**When** white women appropriate struggles as their own (equating racism and sexism as the same thing, for example) or act as patronising 'savers' of non-white and 'Third World' women.

**When** we read bell hooks and think that's it for learning about anti-racist feminism

**When** we remain wilfully uninformed.

**When** we hold the arrogant assumption that non-white women would/should want to join racist feminist groups.

I have been thinking a lot recently about what it means to be a male person of colour, a trans person who identifies more as male and takes Testosterone. Every day I get closer to passing more as male. With that comes both a great sense of self as well as a huge vulnerability. It seems quite risky and sometimes a stupid conscious decision to be making. But is it so straightforward and calculated? I know I could not see myself as a female bodied female identified person even if I was to stay in my present body, mind and spirit, even if I didn't appear to be male (I still would be).

**“Only now, after all this time, do I understand how frustrated he must have felt coming to England. A man with a lot of pride who was socialised to provide and protect his family, which he failed at, reduced to having none. Never to be considered an equal to an English man even if he did know better.”**

I always knew growing up just how difficult it was for my brother, the closest male person of colour in my life, who was constantly in trouble with school, *a failing student or being failed by the system? In trouble with the police or being harassed by them? Fighting with other boys or risking being beaten up by them?* His choices seemed limited but I think I underestimated his struggle until now. Being a male held so much privilege in my mind, then, compared to being a female person of colour in a culture of strict gender roles and divides.

My mother, a strong, educated independent woman was clearly my role model and has

influenced me greatly. So what male role models do I have as a male of colour?

My uncles and older cousin brothers who are drunks, womanisers, family men, men of leisure, strong, tough, handsome and desired men. *My lovers tell me that I am handsome, but also that I am pretty. I also love the ladies but I am not a misogynist and I desire all genders.*

My grandfather? Big built, well dressed and a great hunter who moved to East Africa with nothing and built a solid foundation for family to come. *I never really knew him, he died when I was very young and all I remember was a feeble man who had lost his mind before he passed on and passed on those foundations he had worked so hard to secure and lay. I am tiny in comparison to him.*

My father? Who was an extremely abusive, strict disciplinarian but also well educated, well travelled with a great appreciation for the east and west. He would beat into us that we had to study and learn the Queen's English in order to be respected and accepted. *Or did he just beat us because he couldn't get the job (respect and acceptance) he wanted and deserved and should've easily got if he hadn't been a mere immigrant whose credentials didn't matter, a male of colour in a white males world?*

I saw him argue once when I was seven with an English man about the pronunciation of 'café'. He knew the correct way and the English man didn't (but thought he did) and it angered him so much. Of course he took it out on us, his family, like he usually did with beatings to let out his rage. Only now, after all this time, do I understand how frustrated he must have felt coming to England. A man with a lot of pride who was socialised to provide and protect his

family, which he failed at, reduced to having none. Never to be considered an equal to an English man even if he did know better. *How often was he patronised, laughed at, taunted, and told he was inadequate, for being a male person of colour? Or was that just his excuse to hurt his family?*

On all the anti violence against women marches I have been allowed to attend (as a trans male identified person I have not been allowed on some women only demos despite being a survivor of abuse as a female first hand, socialised in a women's refuge and a downright feminist) the policy is zero tolerance of male onto female violence. I agree but I would also like to understand why this happens, especially in similar situations to mine with male people of colour.

As I cradle my body whilst I sleep every night, I fearfully remember my father entering my room in tears sorry for all that he had just done (until the next time of course) wanting to embrace. *For forgiveness? For understanding? Was he sorry for the monster he became? Was it his fault? Or was he also a victim with no voice for injustice? As a male he was told he was not allowed to be weak, to cry for help. Or was it learnt behaviour passed on from father to son? I know his father did the same onto him, although I never even knew him. I also see my father in my brother and so what does this mean for me if I am now in that line of descent. I hope it is not that heritage that we gain.*

*One thing I know is that I never want to be a male like him, but can I help that? Will it be different for me?*

It is true that I am not in the same world as the males of colour I have spoken about. I have been socialised as female and a tomboy, despite the true (male) gender identity I have claimed. I have been socialised and surrounded by feminists. I am not afraid of not being 'man

enough'. I will never be and do not wish it either. I have a community of alternative males. I know how to verbalise my frustrations and anger. I am the first male in my family to undergo therapy.

**“I am not in the same world as the males of colour I have spoken about. I have been socialised as female and a tomboy, despite the true (male) gender identity I have claimed. I have been socialised and surrounded by feminists. I am not afraid of not being ‘man enough’.”**

Still...as I put up my hooded top on a cold winters night to keep warm and well I am fully aware of what this means for me: (along with my distrustful, stern, weary glance, for all that I have experienced) that I will be read as the male of colour A(nti) S(ocial) B(ehaviour) O(oder) stereotype. I will most likely either be attracting the attention of

- a) Women who will be afraid of me
- b) Bad boys who may want to pick a fight because I pass as one of them/ pass as a fag or batty boy/ because I don't pass fully as male but they can see that I am trying to
- c) The police who may want to stop and harass me

*None of the above people care about my heritage, of what I have spoken about, that I question my own masculinity and what it means to be male. At first glance this is what they see. This is what they choose to see. This is what they choose to believe. What do I choose now? What truth do I choose for me?*

## IF YOU CALL ME ON MY RACISM

Lisa B

[www.luckygoat.org](http://www.luckygoat.org) , [www.myspace.com/lisabpoetry](http://www.myspace.com/lisabpoetry)

i belong to the tribe that is all humanity, i honour diversity, all colours and creeds, and i don't really need to think about race because – we're all just people – we're all just equals  
i am a seeker of truths and the light i am a lover of all humankind, and i'd love to study yoga in india, to align my spine, to calm my busy, modern mind, to find that sense of connection i'm just missing from my life  
and i think i'll learn an ancient asian meditation practice, to release my attachments, ease my tension headaches, and gain greater self-awareness  
i want to focus on my spiritual growth, my personal evolution, my expanded horizons, and not on the impact of my very presence in "underdeveloped" countries where people are constantly being sold the "advanced" western lifestyle, and where i am a walking talking reminder that they too could work towards this massive backpack, a widescreen tv and a waterbed if they'd stop growing food crops and grow coffee and cocoa instead  
i feel positive about supporting poorer economies with my spending money as long as i don't examine why my dollar goes so incredibly far (everything's so *cheap* there!)  
i know that my intentions are pure, i buy these experiences in the spirit of sharing, and entirely outside any context of exploitation – yes, colonization was really, really awful  
but we know  
that all ended  
long ago

my purchases are an expression of my appreciation for other cultures, although i've yet to consider why my sisters and brothers, paid in pennies, will never, ever come to Canada to buy bargain price art, nor what constitutes a freely-given invitation in a climate of modern-day economic imperialism which, by the way, benefits me directly  
besides, they beamed at me. they were genuinely friendly...and i'd far rather be inspired by smiling cheerful people living in appalling poverty, to idealise and romanticise strength, spirituality and resiliency, that's much easier for me, than considering that white western business interests are heavily invested in keeping from "struggling nations" the self-determination that could allow them food clean water  
i don't want to feel guilty, it only makes me confused and angry, it doesn't help anybody, and more importantly, i don't want to face the fear and grief which waits underneath  
i want to feel good about sharing another's culture  
and i want to avoid my shame and hurt about feeling i've little to offer in return  
i want to journey on haunting and mysterious indigenous chants away from my sadness and pain about having tenuous connection to my own great-grandmothers' spiritual tradition...was it swallowed whole by early christianity? burned with the last witch?  
(*or maybe, it never even did exist?*)

i want a five dollar, two hour thai massage, to leave me totally, *totally* relaxed and to push back that awful truth: that my beautiful, clean, safe home was built on the beaten, broken bones of the people who lived here before my ancestors came to kill and rape and steal  
because i don't need to feel that pain  
and because i can't fathom how i could even begin  
to take responsibility  
or to make any reparation  
if you call me on my racism  
i'll remind you that i'm a lesbian  
and i'll refocus this conversation  
onto my own oppression.

## THE TROUBLE BETWEEN US

Red Chidgey  
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“Socialist feminism was the feminist current most closely linked to the anticapitalist New Left and black movement, especially the Black Panther party. Its goal was to create a society in which resources were shared equally, not simply to provide more opportunities to women...one of the central struggles of young white socialist feminists was to create a racially inclusive movement. And for most of those years, black women rejected and attacked the feminist movement as racist.”

- Winifred Breines

The problem with much movement documentation is that “history is something that happens when the White Folks show up and stops when they leave.”

- Charles Payne

Why didn't a racially integrated women's movement emerge from the revolutionary fervour of the 1960s and 1970s? This is the question posed by Winifred Breines in her U.S.-based historical study, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Focusing on socialist feminist groups in Boston, Breines takes an exhaustive and compelling look at the failure of white women to co-create a multi-racial movement, despite anti-racist intentions. Her book looks at the 'failed community' of white and black activists, and traces feminist racism through white nostalgia for a universal brethren (the hopes of the early civil rights movement), myopic understandings of how race and class oppressions intersect with gender, tokenisation and objectification of non-white women, and African-American women's antagonistic relationships with white women through Black Power, feminist lesbian groups, and socialist alliances. Breines spotlights several collectives, including Bread and Roses and the Combahee River Collective, to map feminist race relations from the civil rights and student movements of the 1960s through to social justice groups of the early 1980s. Her story is that “white and black feminism developed on parallel tracks [in the women's liberation movement], distant from earlier notions of solidarity and integration [of the civil rights movement]...Only by the end of the 1970s did white and black feminists move back toward one another, testing whether ground existed for trust and coalitions. They never reconnected on the basis of idealism.”

### **The Civil Rights Movement and the 'Beloved Community'**

The early civil rights movement of the 1960s included men and women, was multi-racial, and drew together activists from the North and the South through the 'Freedom Summer' initiatives of 1964, spear-headed by the Southern-based Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). For Breines, the “SNCC story is critical for understanding subsequent developments in gender consciousness among white and black women”. Many white women involved in SNCC believed in 'color blindness' – that is, that they were working for the just society, where everyone was really the same, and that integration (in a time of segregation and Jim Crow laws in the South) was not only possible, but necessary on all levels of organising; many were arrogant and insensitive to cross-cultural differences between North and South. Looking back, Breines recognises the form of white nostalgia, “I was able to be nostalgic for integration and the insignificance of race because of my whiteness. I did not yet seriously recognize the abuses of racism.” She points out that, for African-Americans, integration and building community with whites was not the issue, *equality* was.

Two memos on gender were circulated within SNCC by long-time white female activists (see Timeline). They had little impact within the civil rights movement- Black men dismissed the topic and black women saw them as irrelevant; they were already in positions of power directing their own projects and received support in SNCC – 'gender' seemed unimportant against the life and death issues of the Ku Klux Klan and white brutality. The 1965 memo however had a huge impact on the burgeoning white feminist movement defecting from the sexist student and New Left groups.

## Women and the Black Power Movement

After 1964, the SNCC surged to black nationalism, by way of interracial working tensions and broader government apathy to the group's demands. Black Power claimed the strength of black identity, beauty, history and culture, bringing together black men and women - especially youth - to "see themselves as blacks and no longer as Negroes". Historian Komozi Woodard characterises the late 1960s and 70s movement as "self-determination, self-respect, and self-defence". A broad-based movement, Black Power embraced the Black Arts Movement, the Black Panthers party, Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam, and black workers' organizations. The Black Panther party (BPP) - an armed, anti-state faction who organised around issues of poverty, police brutality, and American imperialism - were specifically successful at recruiting teenage members, and would provide free breakfasts for school-children, organise youth activities, and teach Afro-centric history and political education classes in the community.

Black Power's sometimes anti-white rhetoric also carried with it an explicit anti-femaleness; in speeches and texts, calls for vengeance were often fused with a heterocentric, hyper-masculinity. According to Breines, the homophobic Black Arts leader Amiri Baraka "aligned femininity and feminization with whiteness and especially white men". Hyper-masculinity was used to rhetorically castrate, even within the fold. The Panthers themselves were attacked as 'balless eunuchs' by Black Movement figures for 'pandering to whites' and building cross-racial coalitions. For some leaders, black pride was determined verbally by the virility of their dicks. White movement men were often afraid to criticise Black Power leaders, and Black Women remained in race solidarity - even now, reluctant to speak out about the sexism and homophobia and deflect from the concrete gains and strengths of the broader movement.

Within black nationalism and Panther parties, women's position was supposed to be ancillary. "We say that a black woman must first be able to inspire her man, then she must be able to teach our children, and contribute to the social development of the nation," wrote Baraka. The family- and women's traditional roles as mothers and carers- were emphasised by nationalist black males. On the topic of female liberation, Baraka slammed women libbers as "devils and the devilishly influenced." Black Panther party leader Elaine Brown saw the double-bind this created

for black women: "A woman attempting the role of leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the 'counter-revolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches'...she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race." Some black nationalist men attacked black women, in a revival of black female 'matriarchal' stereotypes, as aiding his social and economic emasculation - of keeping a good brother down. Black women struggled with notions of black femininity. The subtext was that racism harmed men more than women, and that women should play the feminine, supporting role in the revolution. In tune with this rhetoric, female students at Howard University formed a group called WOMB: "The white woman seeks to liberate herself by not doing things such as washing the dishes and taking care of the family. WOMB recognizes these things as a means of unifying the family and liberating black people." Breines notes the underlying promiscuous 'sexual revolution' expectations placed on women in the movement, where pregnancies were often left to women to deal with alone. "Birth control was actively discouraged as a form of black genocide inflicted by the white power structure," she says.

Writing in 1970, Cellestine Ware explains that women were committed to sexist black liberation groups, despite real occasions of abuse and harassment: "The black movement is so gratifying to these newly realized needs for group pride that black women have stayed in the black movement despite many injustices." Militants like Elaine Browne, Angela Davis and Kathleen Cleaver rose to become Panther leaders (in the early years they were called 'pantherettes'), and female artists and writers were crucial within the burgeoning Black Arts Movement. Some co-joined white feminist or third world women's groups, but others left black power for good, unable to reconcile their politics with the homophobic overtures to patriarchy made from some quarters. Panther historian Angela LeBlanc-Ernest notes a historical shift away from black masculinism in 1972-3, and the eventual opening up of discussions about black sexism: "The increased presence of women, the shift from paramilitary to a community service focus, the incarceration, assassination, and exile of key male leaders, and the increasing pressures of state-sponsored repression, all affected the internal dialogue about gender roles." During this time, however, the BPP had all but fallen apart.

## White socialism: Bread and Roses collective (1969-1971)

Breines claims that radical black women were on a different trajectory to white feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Jo Freeman, the author of the influential essay "The Tyranny of Structurelessness", recalls: "Our contacts with minority women were few, despite our roots in the Civil Right Movement and community organizing projects. The message white women got from black activists was to stay away; our presence, our ideas, our whiteness was oppressive."

Part of the 'magical cohesion' of the early women's liberation (white, middle-class) movement was that women came from similar backgrounds, Breines argues. "The experiences they shared as women were shaped by race, class, and education. In addition to networks and shared histories, a common culture facilitated their closeness...White socialist feminist's ability to cut ties with men and families, to focus primarily on gender, and to create intimate, inward-looking groups as the basis of their movement networks revealed their movement's strengths and weaknesses."

White feminism erupted as women turned away from the chauvinism and hypocritical tendencies of the New Left and anti-war movements. Like black women, heterosexual radical white women "noted a decrease in their sexual capital...if they were self-assured organizers and leaders". They saw their concerns and ideas being ignored or derided, and were relegated to feminized routine work in the movement. These women organised their own personal and political communities, often choosing the format of consciousness raising 'cells' to discuss their lives and draw political conclusions from instances of everyday oppression and exploitation. However, their alienation from the 'feminine mystique' – the dissatisfaction of being full-time mothers and housewives, as defined by Betty Friedan – was a luxury experienced by few working class women and women of colour, who historically always worked and juggled motherhood. Breines adds: "Women of color, immigrant women, and blue-collar women did not have the time to participate in consciousness-raising groups and were not comfortable sharing intimate details of their lives." White feminists instead had pools of privilege, education, skills and contacts through which to draw on, and could be intimidatingly articulate and confident. Many white socialist feminists had "grown up in liberal homes or as red-diaper babies – their parents had been communists or sympathetic to the Communist party – and had been encouraged to achieve and to be actively involved in oppositional and unpopular social movements." As members of the dominant race, there was less at stake for white feminists organising separately as women than their black female peers.

An ideological battleground which alienated white and Afro-American women from each other was the sphere of the family (as noted by the WOMB group). A tract written by a Bread and Roses leader captures

the socialist attack on the nuclear family: "Our goal is the abolition of the family as an economic unit". They called for free, community-controlled childcare, cheap housing, and communal living relationships. Whilst black women often turned to their family as refuge from the brutal racism of the outside world, the Bread and Roses manifestos were, according to Breines (herself a member of this group), "almost clinical analyses": "No shred of sentimentality can be discerned...personal relationships did not intervene in their straightforward political condemnation of the family as a site of women's – and children's – oppression."

Boston-based Bread and Roses, formed in 1969, was named after the worker's slogan of the Lawrence, Massachusetts strike of 1912. Leader Meredith Tax emphasized the group's commitment to solidarity with working class and non-white women in a non-tokenistic way: "We can not talk of sisterhood without realizing that the objective position in society of most of us is different from that of welfare mothers, of the black maids of our white mothers, and of women in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries. Sisterhood means not *saying* their fight is our fight, but *making* it our fight." Their actions were many and varied: campaigning for the legalization of abortion and the end of sterilization abuse, organising childcare centres, publishing information about women's health and sexuality, picketing against institutions that discriminated against women, and organising women's history classes.

One such action is illuminating for its racial effects. On International Women's Day, 1971, Bread and Roses organised a 10-day occupation of a Harvard University building, demanding Harvard provide a women's space for all women within the community (the institution had expanded its premises into low-income minority neighbourhoods). The group worked with local African-American women in the run-up to the action. Through no direct influence of Harvard, the centre was eventually set up and became the longest running women's centre in the States. A free school examining women's cross-cultural and racial history of resistance was established, with the influential text *Our Bodies, Ourselves* emerging from a course called "Women and Their Bodies." Few black women used the centre, though Breines does not examine this in any more detail. The group in general "was not particularly successful in organizing working-class women," nor at attracting black women's involvement: "Black women were consistently on members' minds, but in these early years their theory was more interracial and racially sensitive than was their practice. That practice involved opposing racism, usually in the form of supporting radical black groups." Breines concludes that whilst Bread and Roses were anti-racist, they failed in coalition-building as their support "was abstract. It was not rooted in actual experiences with black women."

## Black socialism: Combahee River Collective (1974- 1980)

Breines suggests that an autonomous “groundswell of black feminism in the United States never developed”: “Black feminism was never a grassroots movement; black feminists did not create or join many organizations.” Barbara Smith talked of the ‘time-lag’ for black feminism, where groups like the National Black Feminist Organization (1973-5) prompted other explicitly feminist black groups to emerge. One such group, the Boston-based Combahee River Collective (CRC) was a small, fluid group most famous for “A Black Feminist Statement” (1977). In name, CMC titled “themselves after the campaign led by Harriet Tubman, who freed 750 slaves near the Combahee River in South Carolina in 1863.” The group founded a local women’s refuge and was active in the reproductive rights movement, campaigned for unfairly imprisoned black women and black abortion doctors, presented workshops on black feminism at schools and conferences, and organised retreats for female writers. Thinking about the homophobia and sexism of the Black Power movement, Barabara Smith recalls, “It was risky to be a feminist in the Black community. We realized it was risky and there we were, all these risk takers, all these ground breakers.”

CRC was one of the first groups to use the term ‘identity politics’ in “A Black Feminist Statement”: “This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression.” They also eschewed separatist politics to articulate their solidarity with black men: “We struggle with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism.”



Demita Frazier protesting the murders of women of color at the mayor’s house in Boston, 1979. Margo Okazawa-Rey is sitting behind her, and Beverly Smith is looking through the side of the truck. They were all Combahee River Collective members. © Ellen Shub.

Class conflicts existed within the group as educated women from working class backgrounds were seen as privileged, middle-class and alienated from the wider community. Understandably, these women were sensitive about being reprimanded for their upward mobility. Debates broke out about whether theory-making was activism: “Suspicion of or impatience with intellectuals and theory were often linked to working-class or community politics where the goal was to become, or remain, a proletarian or community person oneself,” explains Breines. “By shedding one’s privilege, the argument went, an activist was better able to organize the disadvantaged or to maintain links with the community, which might be undone by education.” According to historian E. Frances White, education and becoming middle class – in a post-war affluence which did not generally extend to include African-Americans – was a racial issue that could lead to one being called a race traitor.

At the 1977 International Women’s Year Conference in Houston, where ERA motions about ethnic minorities’ rights passed as a plank, 20,000 women participated; 35% were nonwhite and nearly one in five came from a low income position. The second wave of feminism was reaching a peak and black feminism was getting stronger, making many challenges to white feminism along the way. According to sociologist Karen Hansen, the white feminist socialist response to charges of racism was abstract theorising and more guilt-wrangling: “There has to be a middle ground between recognizing the race and class biases of a perspective or an organization and flagellating a membership to the point that it is non-functional,” she says. New groups and

coalitions continued to form. Conflicts began to emerge within Black feminist communities, according to Breines, as “Women of color struggled over the terms *women of color* and *third world women*: whether and how such an inclusive term effaced their difference, particularly as they often identified in terms of their race or ethnicity.”



## Into the 1980s, interracial feminist coalitions in Boston

Successful interracial coalitions between white and black women formed through specific resistance to community problems- such as the Coalition for Women's Safety (see timeline). The Bessie Smith Memorial Collective was another multi-racial group, organising concerts such as "The Varied Voices of Black Women: An Evening of Words and Music" at different venues, including the Framingham women's prison. Take Back the Night marches were revisited for previous racist tendencies (chanting "stop rape" when passing through black neighbourhoods). Breines explains some of the crucial aspects of interracial coalitions on issues such as Take Back the Night and the Coalition for Women's Safety: "white women organized a support group. They did not center themselves in the political action...they listed very specific resources and help they could provide, such as fundraising, babysitting, bulk mailing, typing, media contacts, and equipment." They mobilised and provided services and resources in *response to specific requests*.

CRC member Barbara Smith wrote the following in a letter to Coalition for Women's Safety members in 1979:

We need to talk about what it means for us to be in a coalition in relation to our own specific identities. We need to talk about what it means for Black and other women of color to be working with white women, for white women to be working with women of color, for women who identify themselves as feminists to be working with women who do not identify themselves as feminists and for Lesbians and heterosexual women to be working together. A discussion of class difference[s] might also be productive. I think that all of us have been aware of our differences on some level ever since we began this work, but we've really never had a specific discussion about them and what they mean in relationship to what we're trying to do. Since these differences are definitely there it only makes sense to speak to them. Not for the purpose of divisiveness, but for the purpose of understanding and greater closeness. I feel proud of what we've done so far and how well we have dealt with each other under so much pressure.

Breines sees this as "the next step" which "entailed political exploration of what differences meant among feminists- critical realizations for a maturing feminism."

## Conclusion

Withstanding the historical use of 'black' to uniformly refer to African-American women, Breines' text is a comprehensive, multi-faceted study of the failure of interracial feminist movements to develop in the second wave - and the strengths and weaknesses this shaped politically for the women's movement in the latter half of the twentieth century. In the end, Breines' round-up history offers perhaps a too simplistic narrative of women returning to each other across difference: "The radical women's movement came full circle, from a goal of integration to a politics of separation to tentative efforts to reconnect." Even now we recognise the need for women to separate and organise from their identity differences- be that trans-only spaces, women of colour spaces, or working-class identified spaces. The challenge of revisionist histories of women's liberation movement chronology, such as *The Trouble Between Us*, is its renewed emphasis on the important, influential *early* role black women paid in contemporary women's and grassroots movements. Latter-day activists also benefit from the interpretation of interpersonal and structural conflicts - and the spectacular power of women's coalition to meet emergencies and specific problems in the community once cross-racial work has been initiated.

The Harvard University-owned building at 888 Memorial Drive that Bread and Roses members occupied for ten days in March 1971. They were demanding the establishment of a women's center and that Harvard contribute to the building of affordable low-income housing in the community into which the university was expanding. "Free Ericka" refers to imprisoned Black Panther Ericka Huggins. Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department. Courtesy Boston Herald.



## US BLACK FEMINIST MOVEMENT TIMELINE

- 1960 SNCC formed-** Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Black female leaders include Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Diane Nash, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, Prathia Hall, Jean Wheeler Smith, Bernice Reagon, Dorie Ladner, and Joyce Ladner.
- 1964 Freedom Summer-** SNCC invites white, northern students into the South as civil rights workers—one of the first instances of cross-racial and cross-cultural activism, and “the first time that large numbers of black and white young people had spent so much time together”. Many tensions existed, according to movement chronicler Sara Evans (1979), including black women feeling alienated by black men having sexual relations with white women.
- SNCC Position Paper on gender** written anonymously by Mary King, Casey Hayden and others (long-time white, female, staff members), arguing that sexism in SNCC kept men more powerful and women in traditional female roles. Memo met with derision from black women as well as SNCC men. Stokely Carmichael made the infamous comment, “The position of women in SNCC is prone!”. This was understood by King and other black SNCC activists to be a joke, not as the sexist statement it has been interpreted as by the raising swell of second wave white feminists. Whilst black women were not in ‘official’ leadership roles, they occupied strong, powerful positions. White, northern women were more likely to be in the offices and schools doing routine tasks, partly because of the danger to the project and to black men’s lives for having white women working “out in the field” (to put this in context, in 1955 a 14 year old boy was brutally mutilated and murdered in Mississippi for whistling at a white woman. The white male perpetrators were acquitted by an all-white jury).
- 1965 “A kind of Memo: Sex and Caste”** written by King and Hayden about the exclusion and subordination of women in society and in the SNCC. Memo had significant impact in New Left and peace movements, and circulated in women’s liberation movement groups. Later, King and Hayden would insist they never personally experienced sexism in the SNCC – perhaps out of loyalty and to heal rifts with SNCC black women and friends. They later announced they felt closer to SNCC than they did white women in other movements. They claim the memo was about structure and power as much as gender relations (and the status of white people in SNCC, amid raising racial tensions).
- 1966 SNCC becomes black organisation.** Stokely Carmichael chairs on a militant, racial separatist platform: “The need for psychological equality is the reason why SNCC today believes that blacks must organize in the black community. Only black people can convey the revolutionary idea that black people are able to do things themselves.” Whites expelled from SNCC.
- 1968 SNCC Black Women’s Liberation Committee** organised by Frances Beal and others to explore race, gender and class issues. Group is criticized as being too influenced by white feminists.
- 1969 Black Women’s Alliance emerged** out of the SNCC Black Women’s Liberation Committee. Changes name to Third World Women’s Alliance as more women of color join the group. Argued that ‘Black Power’s gender positions were regressive and imported from white middle-class culture.’
- 1970 Publication of Toni Cade’s anthology *The Black Woman*.** SNCC organizer Gwen Patton writes about hyper-masculinity and sexism within the Black Power movement: “for fear of deballing the needed and well-loved leaders. Black women have crouched in fear trying to do their thing.” Feminist Frances Beal contributed “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female”, an essay about black women’s double oppression. Work by Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde, and several essays on black women and liberation, also published this year.
- 1970-72 Angela Davis jailed as a political prisoner** in connection with The Black Panthers. White feminist socialist groups support “Free Davis” demonstrations and rallies, alongside support for other imprisoned Panther women.
- 1973-75 National Black Women’s Feminist Organization** founded by women previously involved in National Organization for Women (NOW) and *Ms* magazine, including Shirley Chisholm, Alice Walker, Jane Galvin-Lewis, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Flo Kennedy, and Margaret Sloan. A liberal organization, introducing scores of women to Black feminism.
- 1974 Combahee River Collective formed** in Boston, with a socialist, lesbian, black feminist perspective. Rejects separatism and works in coalition with Black men. Produces theory and is

involved in broad community activist projects. Members include Barbara and Beverley Smith, Lorraine Bethel, Audre Lorde, Margo Okazawa-Rey, and Demita Frazier.

**1978 Michelle Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwomen* published.** Sparks heated debate in the *Black Scholar* journal about rising rifts between Black women and men.

**1979 Lorraine Bethel's poem, "What Chou Mean We, White Girl? Or, the Cullud Lesbian Feminist Declaration of Independence (Dedicated to the Proposition that All Women are Not Equal, i.e., Identical/ly Oppressed)"** critiques white feminism's tendency to use their own life experiences to universalise about women's oppression and hail an unproblematic 'sisterhood.'

**Coalition for Women's Safety** formed in reaction to the murders of 12 black women and one white woman in a predominately black neighbourhood of Boston. This interracial, multi-ethnic group mobilized from existing community groups to protest the media and police downplaying the murders. White women acted in supporting roles, with Black women from Roxbury (where the killings had taken place) in leadership.

**1981 Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press launched.** Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua co-edit *This Bridge Called My Back*. bell hooks publishes *Ain't I a Woman: Black women and feminism*. Two anti-racist conferences hosted by the National Women's Studies association.

**1982 Publication of *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but some of us are Brave***- co-edited by Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith. Addresses the invisibility of the 'black woman' within discussions of race or gender.

**1983 Alice Walker coins the term 'womanist'** in her volume of essays, *Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. The term has four basic meanings: 1) "a black feminist or feminist of color" acting with will, 2) "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually...Not a separatist, except periodically, for health", 3) a womanist "loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless", 4) "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender". Walker told *New York Time Magazine* in 1984: "I don't choose womanism because it is 'better' than feminism...Since womanism means black feminism, this would be a nonsensical direction. I choose it because I prefer the sound, the feel, the fit of it, because I cherish the spirit of the women (like Sojourner [Truth]) the word calls to mind, and because I share the old ethnic-American habit of offering society a new word when the old word it is using fails to describe behaviour and change that only a new word can help it more fully see."

**Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* published.** Includes 1982 essay by singer Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century":



Black Panthers from Sacramento during a Free Huey rally at Bobby Hutton Memorial Park, Oakland, California, 1968.  
© 1968 Pirkle Jones.

is not work done in your home. Coalition work has to be done in the streets. And it is some of the most dangerous work you can do. And you shouldn't look for comfort...We've pretty much come to the end of a time when you can have a space that is 'yours only' – just for the people who you want to be there...There is nowhere you can go and only be with people who are like you. It's over. Give it up... Today whenever women gather together, it is not necessarily nurturing. It is coalition building. And if you feel the strain, you may be doing some good work."

## HISTORY OF WORDS

Jacqueline Applebee

[www.writing-in-shadows.co.uk](http://www.writing-in-shadows.co.uk)

My first memories – Ridley road market, East London, and a burning hot summer. I learnt the word 'barrow-boys' and they awakened something inside. Those young men would be shirtless in the heat, tanned almost as brown as me. My colour remained the same all year round, but theirs would change when the winter came, and the shirts and jumpers and boots would come on. I always remembered them in summer.

Women from my parent's massive church congregation, populated that market; older, seething with violent tempers would flare like the scorching sun as soon as their Sunday hats were removed. I saw fear in their eyes, though not due to anything I could represent. I heard them haggle over the price of yams in the market, but that was the only time they spoke to white men. They were afraid of them, but they would never say why. I learnt the word 'desire' and saw my two opposites - what I was destined to be, and what I longed to have.

The market has changed so much – it's open all week now, except for Sundays. The barrow boys are still there, but they talk constantly on their mobile phones, make business deals between pounds of apples and spuds. I wanted them so much – wanted to be a man just like them, long before I knew the words 'gender dysphoria' existed. I wanted to be white, to be a man, to be tall and lean and I wanted to go bare-chested in the summer, and not have anyone punish me for doing it.

I was young, maybe five or six – Irish travellers moved to our corner of North London. Neighbourhood boys threw rocks at their caravans - a warning to stay away. I learned many new words for the Irish – all hurtful horrible names that were thrown, just like the bricks. They

were not like us. They spoke with drawn out harsh words, grew silent when I dawdled near, just to get a better look of the strangers. I never told anyone that I loved what I saw.

Did the Irish travellers ever view me as I viewed them? Did they know I was a nosey little girl, who would have done anything to see the inside of their homes? And if they had opened the thin tin doors to me, I would have been so happy I would have cried.

There was an age of silence after that time. Life with my family took on a new darker hue. Punches and kicks were the only things I knew – threats of what would happen if I told anyone, were the only things I heard. I lost my voice for a year and a half, and I learned what it was to have no words inside me.

I saw a flicker of myself back then, a flash of a naked girl, surrounded by flames, screaming with fury and rage and joy, as she danced around a fire.

The word 'breasts' came at age eight, 'diet' came at nine, the word 'period' at age twelve. I finally stopped being disgusted at aged thirty-five.

Growing up with hate is never easy – when it's directed at yourself, it's even worse. When I was a kid, almost everyone I knew was black, and almost everyone was prejudiced, racist, vocal, with fists that shook and hit when I didn't fall in. I learnt the word 'coconut' and that it didn't just apply to fruit. I learnt all the different versions of 'fatso' – new words that would be added to the list once a week.

College, studies, and a new group of people to feel alienated from – that is apart from Stephen - my first openly gay man. He was thin, special, and pure eighties too. He taught me the word 'freak' and said it was the latest fashion.

I learnt the word 'bisexual' many years later, and I rolled it around my mouth until it would release without a stutter. I learnt the word 'biphobia'; that gay people had a connection to my past – the dismissal and prejudice that they shared, and perpetuated onto a new generation of outcasts. The loneliness that was all so familiar raised its head once more. I longed to be someone else.

Feeling at home in my skin is something that I strive for. It's the bright blazing future that teases my dreams, when my dreams aren't about blood and pain. I have G-cup breasts, big wide curves, and I don't feel like a woman, don't feel like I qualify.

Transgender was a hard word to spell at first, but it wasn't as hard as transsexual. Words like 'butch, boi and drag king' were easier to add to my lexicon. I bend over in a dark club in Kings Cross, feel a warm silicone length breach and stretch me open. The word 'surrender' swims through my mind. My gasping breath is thin and white - pure eighties.

I never spoke to this stranger who watched me – I simply met his eyes and stepped backwards into a darkened corner of the dungeon. Sometimes it just happens that way, besides he was bare-chested, displaying the most intricate tattoo I have ever seen carved on his scarred flesh. Words like 'Steel' and 'Ink' made my eyes widen, made my mouth curve into a smile. My mind opens a thin tin door, and he pushes me up against a rugged concrete wall. The rushing bass of blood in my ears replaces the loud music that was playing just a little while ago. He steadies me, tilts my big fleshy hips just so, murmurs at the feel of me, and the word 'fatso' is erased forever.

In my mind's eye, I see all the men I desired; from the time I was six years old,

until just three minutes ago. I can feel them all here around me, watching me as this stranger turns my lexicon inside out with every thrust. And when I come, my eyes are open in the dark cavernous room, so I see these spectres of my past smile at me in the gloom, wink blue eyes, and hazel, and green, and grey. I see them sweep their hands through their blond and brown hair, and with a unified effort, they all nod at me knowingly, and then they all disappear.

The stranger, whose name I have yet to learn, withdraws with a pop, spins me around, and kisses me deep, holds me in place, just in case I had any thought of joining the ghostly men in their shadow realm.

"You're one fine lass darlin'," he says, and his sweet Irish accent almost makes me cry.

I dip into my lexicon over time, take feelings and fantasies from my history, and now I weave stories on strangeness and belonging. I create misfit characters that are strong and beautiful, and I use words to arouse, not condemn.

The tales came out of my first lesson with a stranger, to whom I'm very thankful. I've learnt that words aren't just spoken – they are felt too. Some words can't be contained in a dictionary - they are too wild and crazy and special to be represented by scratches on a piece of paper. As a writer, I am driven to create new words and stories for those who know what it is to dance around a fire, to take their clothes off. and shake what they've got, to yell and scream at the sky, and spin in celebration at the rhythm of our own blood that drives us faster around the flames.

I'm shuffling out of my skirt, even as I write.

The end.

**“White girl. I want to change the world. But I won't change anything unless I change my racist self”**

*White Girl – Heavens To Betsy.*

A letter to a friend, July 2007:

I'm so enlightened by your writings on Haraway's ideas of the **“modest witness”**, where you say *‘I like the idea of being a reporter, or to be more exact like Donna Haraway's modest witness, knowing, implicated, but also somehow naïve. But a witness nonetheless – that is all we can do – state our position and extract what we can see/feel.’* We both contributed to Race Revolt zine issue one; I had a hard time writing what I meant within my piece. I was hung up on framing things around notions of ‘good enough’ and how limiting that is to forward movement. But I felt somewhat hypocritical writing that piece as I'm hardly one to talk, I hardly do ‘enough’, let alone more than that. Then I read what you wrote about Haraway and modest witness (if I've not misrepresented you, or the theory), and I can somehow see now that I'm knowing and implicated (thus able to report/say what I see and think) yet too naïve to do more than enough right now; my knowledge and position within my own life right here-and-now allows me to only extract what I can subjectively see and feel, and thus state that position. However, thankfully, as a witness in a world where I am actively growing, learning, observing, and living through experience, my naivety will surely shift with time (especially through reading zines like this one) as will my distance from, and relationship towards ‘enough’. There's hope in that for me. M xox'

In *Modest Witness @ Second Millennium*, Donna Haraway speaks of the depths and multiplicity of interrelations; and the importance of this relationality since relations present themselves as being fully coordinate parts of experience. Haraway claims that there is no such thing as an experience without significance, because no experience is experienced in itself – its articulations are what make it significant and sensible. And in extending our range of articulations from bare statements to “work processes,” making room for our ‘stutterings and swervings,’ it builds our knowledge as a witnesses; Knowledges that are influenced by our own responsibility over them.

My piece in the first issue of Race Revolt was ‘stuttering and swerving’, something that felt stumbling, incomplete and imperfect, naïve

and ham-fisted, and never in fact saying much at all. Fucking up, and imperfection is not in itself to be accountable.

That letter from my friend, and further reading on Haraway made me feel less embarrassed about the piece; I began to realise that now acknowledging my lack of depth, (realising I was knowing & implicated but somehow also very naïve), was helping me realise that my knowledge and experiences on which to draw on to speak of race and racism are part of an exuberant work-in-process. A work-in-progress whereby I'm taking ever more responsibility over my active listening and participation, my reading and re-reading, immersing myself in relationality (talking things through, expanding my head) – and as such learning more everyday about indoctrinated racism.

Haraway claims that it's our articulations that create significance, and I think that's the power of Race Revolt (and other 'autobiographic', experiential, articulated accounts discussing race), as avenues to extending ranges of articulations, (& thoughts) towards others' consciousnesses. Contributing (however naively) to this collection of voices, reading others' and piecing thoughts together in my head or spewing them out to others in disjointed sentences has been so important to my knowledge processes, to my active awareness and to being more confident to open my eyes. I am actively growing, learning, observing, and living through experiences.

Haraway claims that it's our articulations that create significance, and Inga Muscio's articulations in her book: '*Autobiography of a Blue-Eyed Devil: My Life and Times in a Racist, Imperialist Society*' shone a flashlight into my eyes as to the ever increasing significance of race within my white life, and its impact on my responsibility, and my open eyes.

Rather than paraphrase Muscio (as I wouldn't want to do her own articulations a disservice) I quote her thoughts, as written in the book, here:

Inga speaks throughout of '*the constructed perspective of learned white supremacist racism.*'

*'these things that live inside our own learned, pathologically self-absorbed hearts, and which we've been indoctrinated to condone or ignore, thus normalise the denial of our own humanity.'*

*'our current cultural milieu does **not** free white people into being somehow exempt from facing how we perpetuate white supremacist racism towards our fellow citizens every moment of our unconscious white lives.'*

*'White normativity is a debilitating and widespread condition/ affliction. White normativity is generally an innocuous, day-to-day, movement-by-movement assumption that whiteness is the accepted standard of worth for everyone on the planet. It is the foundation, the framework, the house that Jack built. And **we all live in it together.**'*

*'I felt like an ignorant, spoilt little fuck who cashed in on other peoples' pain through my (painstakingly indoctrinated) choice to be deluded by my culture.'*

What to say about these words... Jesus Inga's words shake me so hard. Reminding me of my accountability; our shared accountabilities over perpetuations of racism.

This raises questions in me:  
How to break that cycle then?  
How to *choose* to no longer be deluded by subconscious learnings?

That naivety I had felt over my initial zine article in the last issue, could it be true that by naming it as naivety I am acknowledging that I have been conditioned and indoctrinated **to be** naïve and unknowing?

After reading the book I wanted to contact Inga and interview her for a zine I was writing with people whose writing/ art/ thoughts/ communications blew my mind. I was too scared to though. I was scared of

looking stupid due to my lack of personal knowledge on the subject of racism. I knew I'd show myself up. It's the same reason I bottled interviewing Marjane Satrapi for an art zine I was writing a few years ago – I knew I'd look so dumb due to my less than extensive knowledge of Tehran and all that she and her work concentrated on, and drew from.

But thinking now, I'm even dumber for not doing either of these things. I stunted opportunities to learn from others' articulations; I prevented work-processes towards building knowledges. I've gotta learn that it's dumber to not learn than it is dumb to have not learned. Gotta shift my constructed perspective around race & racism; shift the thinking that race & racism is something that I'm unlearned in when in fact it's probably far from the truth, & actually comes in the form of daily indoctrination.

As I sit here writing this, a baby girl soundly sleeps in the next room. I have one ear open to her gurglings and the other open to the whirring cogs in my head that wonder and try to vision how to teach, impart and share with her about her unconscious white life as it, and she, grows.

Which is why I have so much support and energy for collections of thoughts such as those in Race Revolt and in other articulate, experiential accounts; they open my eyes and ears to shake off the indoctrination and become a more aware and accountable work in progress.

My baby niece, as I did, will grow up in the suburbs of a city, a suburb where white faces on the street, on the bus, in the park, outnumber all others 99:1. She, as I did, will hopefully want to see more than that and challenge that narrowness. I hope I'll be able to work *with* her in developing such awareness of race and racism.

Because, as Jodi Darby (of KBOO – Potland OR's community radio station) said best:

*'We're no means experts on anything. We are all still learning together. But we can all learn so much faster if we share ideas and help each other out. That's the only way we're gonna tear this mess down.'*

And thinking back to the *Heaven's To Besty* quote that titles this writing - maybe once we open ourselves up to our learned racist tendencies and/or responses, maybe all the other unconscious choices we make that

prevent forward movement and change will become clearer too, and our responsibilities will become ever more apparent, real, and approachable.

*'white girl  
I want to change the world  
but I won't change anything  
unless I change my racist self  
it's a privilege  
it's a background  
it's everything that I own  
it's thinking I'm the hero of this pretty white song  
it's thinking I'm the hero of this pretty white world'*



This summer I was fortunate enough to take a trip to Canada, and the camping wilds of the Sunshine Coast just outside Vancouver, for the tenth Queeruption. Queeruption is described on [www.queeruption.org](http://www.queeruption.org) as a "radical, free, DIY, queer gathering that happens in a different city around the world each year. Each Queeruption is different, but in general Queeruption aims to bring together a diverse groups of queers from all over who wish to challenge the racist, sexist, classist, consumer-orientated gay mainstream".

Aside from the fun and frolics of being around 250+ queers in such a beautiful setting, the amazing shadow puppet show, crazy bands, and getting my head around the term 'make-out', there were some pretty serious discussions. A few days into the week long event, the programme of workshops and plenaries was brought to a shuddering halt by the revelation (I'm not quite sure where from) that in planning for Q10 the organising collective had not sought specific permission to use the land we were on from the indigenous owners. Of course, this is not because they hadn't thought about it but because the process, and I think the debate as a whole, is not as simple as it might at first seem.

The 7-hour collective, consensus-based discussion that ensued was intense and frustrating, although well facilitated. Not only were we trying to work through the issues around the land we were sitting on, but the debate widened out to a discussion on why Queeruption has always been such a white event, and what we should all be doing about it.

The land ownership debate is one that is well rehearsed by activists (and non-activists too I suppose) from all over Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, and anywhere that the white ancestors of white colonisers are in positions of power, not just politically but economically and socially too. During the Queeruption debate one of the first suggestions during the discussions was that we should all simply move off the land and find somewhere else less problematic. But where would we go? What part of North America is not stolen land? This way of looking at things raised a number of other questions for me, that perhaps challenge some of the most basic tenets of this debate as a whole. These are my questions:

- From whom do we need to seek permission to use colonised land? (are there really one or two elders that can be linked back to some sort of original ownership? Can we ask one person for permission?)
- How is our western capitalist understanding of land ownership different from cultures or traditions that don't share the same concept? What effect/s does this have?

- Why is the debate about the way we work with indigenous people most often framed in terms of land ownership, even by those who reject notions of property and ownership?

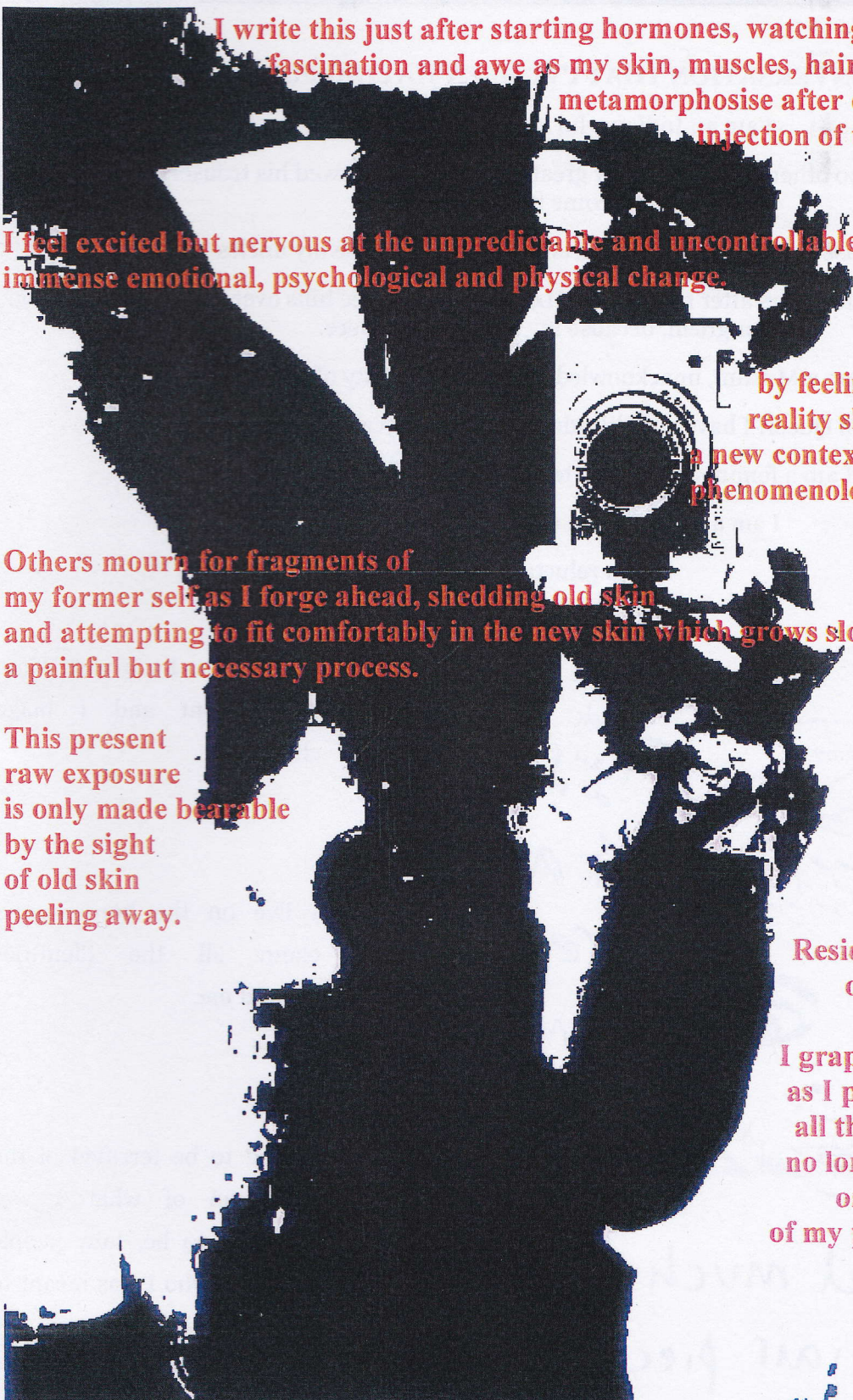
If it also worrying when we follow the logic of some of these arguments that we can end up thinking about finding an 'indigenous land' for people of all colours. Does this then include white owned land? Who would be the indigenous owners of the land in England for example?

For me, these discussions about who 'owns' land, in a world where I believe there should be no borders or property, takes away our focus from thinking about the actions we need to be taking now, and the ways we need to change our own attitudes, and those of the groups and communities to which we belong. Should we be more concerned with looking at the current way indigenous people continue to be oppressed? Could we make the effort to talk, but more importantly to listen and make links with people outside our comfortably arranged communities? I am also fully aware that I need to think about my personal actions, the language I use and my position of white privilege.

So, how can we make Queeruption more awesome? And less white dominated? From what I have heard, every Queeruption so far has had at least one workshop about queer and race, or provided spaces and discussions aimed at queer people of colour. It seems that this approach has been useful in part but hasn't really changed the demographic of participants or what dominates the agenda. Watching back the video made at Queeruption 2 in New York in 1999, the debates being held around race seemed to be pretty much identical to those we've had this year, and the questions they asked then seem to remain unanswered now.

We still need to do more, can't we make it so that race is a key part of all of our workshops and discussions at Queeruption? It shouldn't be too challenging (and if it is, all the better) for anyone running a workshop at Queeruption (or any other radical type event for that matter - how about at ladyfest? feminist activist forum? feminist fightback?), to consider the intersections that issues of race have with all potential topics. Lets not confine discussions on race to either the 'race workshop' or to something to be led by people of colour. We need to be pro-active about putting race at the centre of our events before a big issue comes up at a gathering that we then have to respond to. It may make things more complicated, but maybe that's a good thing, then we know it's worth it.





I write this just after starting hormones, watching with both fascination and awe as my skin, muscles, hair and flesh metamorphosise after each injection of testosterone.

I feel excited but nervous at the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of this immense emotional, psychological and physical change.

I am overwhelmed by feeling my existential reality shift and I acquire a new context for putting this phenomenological experience into perspective.

Others mourn for fragments of my former self as I forge ahead, shedding old skin and attempting to fit comfortably in the new skin which grows slowly a painful but necessary process.

This present raw exposure is only made bearable by the sight of old skin peeling away.

Residing in the realm of transition I am without a shell. I grapple with the new as I prise myself from all that I have known no longer able to cling onto the safety net of my past, female, self.

**THIS IS A CONVERSATION THAT I'VE BEEN HAVING FOR A LONG TIME.**

I am an Indian who has never been home.

I am an African for no other reason than my great grandfather followed his trousers and wouldn't come home.

I am British because of history and passports but mainly because my uncles were runaways.

I am Welsh because for years after returning to London I would see hills over the Strand, I longed for green, because my home is still there.

I am a Muslim, unacknowledged by the majority of my faith.

I am Queer. I have a multitude of desires, but can you see that?

I am a feminist because I tell you so and because I know.

I am a woman even though my body rebels.

I am a reluctant femme.

I am short. I am vast. I am unimportant and I make changes.



← Sachin said my hair piece was made of real hair - yick

i am a really mediocre femme.

I live on the borders and claim all the identities around me.

I don't like the label much. i do like Indian hair pieces from the 60s though.

I used to be terrified of the confusion of what I was expected to be, how people read me, who I was meant to be. Now I've lowered my anchor into the swirl of it all and am settled here; it's a good place to be.

When I was younger, perhaps thirteen, I borrowed Suniti Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* from Aberdare library. I was busily working my way through all the paperbacks with south Asian authors or the iron or apple of The Women's Press or Virago stamped on the spine. In the confusion of identities offered up to me I have always caught hold of my gender and made that a landing place.

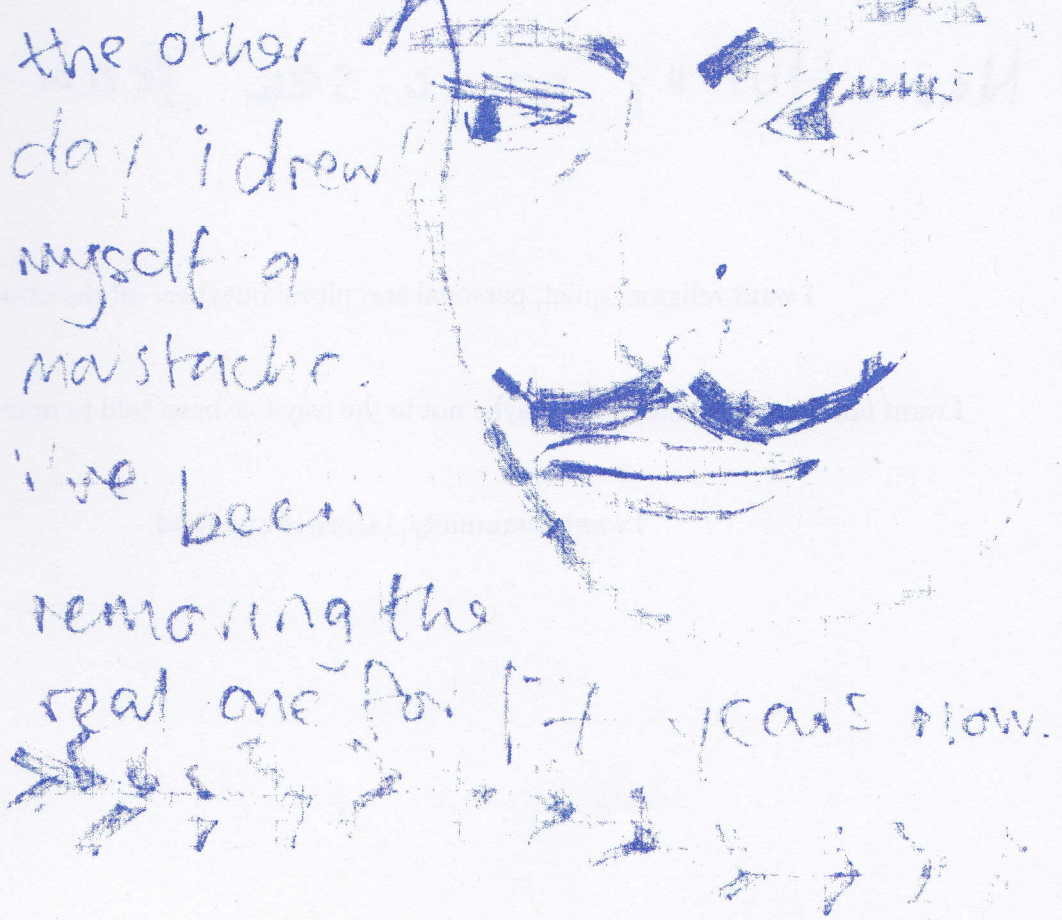
I am sure at 13 I had no idea what 'dyke' meant so I am not sure anymore how I must have read the fables. What I could have taken from them. I remember sitting on the swing in our garden with my book one day when my older cousin said to me, "Why are you reading that? Are you a lesbian?" At the time I was affronted. Lesbian and feminist, I huffed to myself, are not synonyms. Not really. Out loud I made the first of many denials. I was shocked. Now I look back and wonder what everyone else knew that I hadn't admitted. How else do you read a quiet, bookish teenager with hair down to her elbows that is tied up in a scarf, who insists on wearing an array of ancient dungarees?

Recently I went back to the *Feminist Fables*, borrowed from a friend. I am amazed at my young self. My total acceptance of these stories; I read them now and I am shocked. In her reworking of the *Wife of Bath's* tale, 'The Wicked Witch', Namjoshi introduces a "rather handsome young dyke" who goes to a witch for advice. The dyke complains that the woman she loves does not think that love between women is "the Real Thing". The witch gives her three options. 1) Become a man. 2) Get 500 people to tell the woman that lesbian love is "the Real Thing" and she will have to believe it. 3) "Forget other people and find out for yourself what you really feel."

What did these stories do to me? Did they make me who I am? Did they make it easier? They must have.

I have never been afraid of who I am or what I want.

I love people because of who they are. I desire them when my body tells me it's right.



As the child of immigrants I carry within me the longing for stability, normality, connection to land, the need for family. I chose not to reject these values but instead to rework them. I am no immigrant. My life has been a tight orbit of two dots on the map of Britain. I want to explore.



Naz & Humey go to see Jean - Genet

I want religion; quiet, personal and plural but there all the same.

I want family and partners and maybe not in the way I've been told to understand them.

I want community, inclusive and fluid.

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